

NAMBOOTHIRI AUTONOMY IN RURAL KERALA: CASE STUDY ON KOTHACHIRA

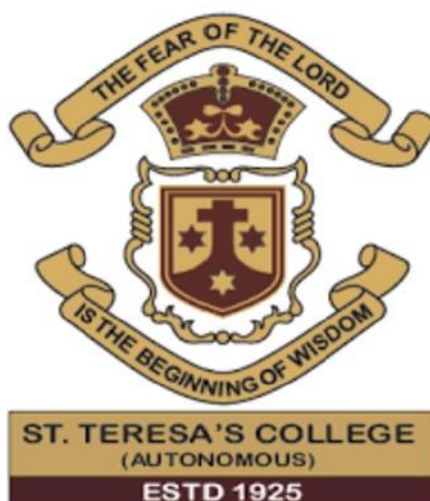
**Dissertation submitted to the
Post-Graduation Department of History, St. Teresa's College Ernakulam
(Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY**

By

K. N. ASWATHI

M.A. HISTORY (2021-2023)

REG. NO. SM21HIS005



**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
ST. TERESA'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)
ERNAKULAM
March 2023**

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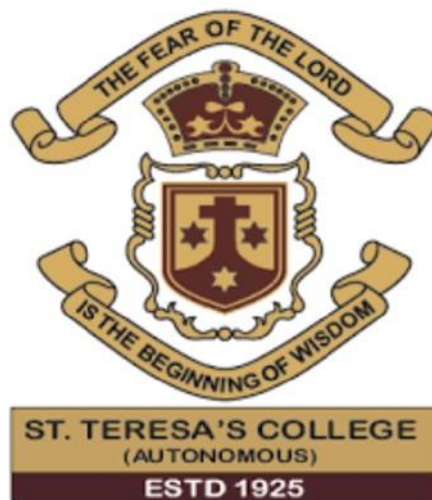
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**NAMBOOTHIRI AUTONOMY IN RURAL KERALA: CASE STUDY ON KOTHACHIRA** ” submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirements for M A Degree in History, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam is a bonafide work done by **K. N. ASWATHI** under my supervision and guidance. In addition, it is certified that this project or any part of this has not been previously submitted elsewhere to adjudge any degree, diploma or other title or acknowledgement.

Head of the Department

Supervising Teacher

Submitted to viva- voice Examination held on at the
Department of History, St. Teresa’s College, Ernakulam.

Name and signature of Examiners

- 1.
- 2.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation work entitled “**NAMBOOTHIRI AUTONOMY IN RURAL KERALA: CASE STUDY ON KOTHACHIRA**” is an original work done by me under the supervision and guidance of Mrs. Jacqueline Deepika, Lecturer of Department of History, St. Teresa’s College, Ernakulam and I have not submitted this project to any other universities for the award of any degree or diploma.

Place: Ernakulam

K N Aswathi

Date: St. Teresa’s College Ernakulam

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K N ASWATHI

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INTRODUCTION

Kothachira is a village in the central regions of Kerala. Located on the border of Thrissur and Palakkad districts, the village is also referred to as Kothara, presumably the evolution of Kothachira. It is connected by road to the nearest towns of Pattambi and Kunnankulam. Having a rich religious background, the village homes the Chirakkal Vishnu temple, Ayyappankaavu temple, Appathuvalappu Devi temple and others. There are government schools to the north and south of the village. The Namboodiri family here, belonging to the Vengattoor Mana, were the ones to whom most of the landed properties here belonged to, some of which was distributed to the families that now remain there. The tenants of these lands paid Pattom or tax to the land lords who belonged to the Mana. After each yield, the Kariasthans under them worked to collect it. Most of the time the farmers has to deliver the pattom in kind (agriculture produces) having to choose the highest quality out of the products.

Kothachira has been a center of traditional performing arts - especially Kathakali, Ottam Thullal and instruments like Chenda, Madhalam and others. Kalamandalam Gopi, one of Kathakali's all-time great actor-dancers, calls this village home. Kalamandalam Neelakantan Nambisan, who revolutionised the singing style for Kathakali in the second half of the 20th century, is also from this village. It is the birthplace of a master in elathalam, Sekharan Nair, and the Kathakali artiste Kalamandalam Balasubramanian. The late Kathakali scholar Krishna Varrier and the Kathakali musician Kalamandalam Raveendran were also from Kothachira. The Kothara Mana provided a venue for several art forms -- classical, ritual and folk. Among them is Ayyappan Thiyyattu, traditionally performed by a Thiyyadi Nambiar family from the nearby village of Perumpilavu.

As seen, the village had been a bustling arena for religious practices, agriculture, art forms, and of course the supremacy of the Namboodiri power, making it an apt choice to case study about temple villages in Palakkad.

OBJECTIVES:

- To trace the lineage and historical significance of the Namboodiri family and the Mana to this village.
- To trace the origin of the temples and the developments related to temple and non-religious activities.

- To trace the development of various art forms of this village and its present successor families.
- To understand the present conditions of the Namboodiri family, temples and infrastructure in the village.
- To understand the present day situation of the village and villagers.

METHODOLOGY:

This project is having, both, personal statements of people, as well as using published and unpublished works, photographs and so, as evidence. Hence it is a descriptive work with the usage of comprehensive understanding to reach to conclusions. It depends upon both primary and secondary resources. The results of the primary sources are corroborated with the information derived from the secondary sources.

The most important source of primary data of this project is the one-on-one interview with the various people belonging to the village. They include people who do govt jobs, artists, priestly jobs, private jobs etc.

Another main source is direct observation from the Mana to the temples to the lives of the people living here. Rich with culture their traditions, myths, stories, art forms, etc survive on the walls of these buildings as well as their own personal lives.

The secondary sources of the project included books, articles both news and academic, websites and other records.

ORGANIZATION OF STUDY:

Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: The History of Kothachira

Chapter III: Insights into the Cultural diversity in Kothachira

Chapter IV: Transitions in lifestyle of Kothachira

Chapter V: Conclusion

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF KOTHACHIRA

The history of Kerala, rather, the whole of India cannot be completed without detailing the Brahmin and the Brahmanic influence. The position and strength of the upper caste has undoubtedly shaped the historic time period of India and its various small units. A Brahmin is considered to be at the top of the caste system. However, it is not a system that prevailed prior to the Vedic age. The hierarchy in society up until that point was based on the occupation. This system meant that a group of people would handle the ecclesiastical jobs, some would be in charge of decision making and administration, while others sought to trade and services, however, many were to look after the agricultural sector and perform menial tasks. With the passage of time we see that one group begins to dominate the others. This eventually became what we understand as caste system. The Purushasukta of the Rig Veda refers to four social groups—Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The Brahmana had a high position in the Varna hierarchy as they were related with the performance of sacrifices and with knowledge, particularly the study and teaching of the Vedas.¹ The Varna system eventually turned into the Jati system.

The Brahmin is considered to be of Aryan blood. They were believed to have migrated to the North end of India, and spread towards the rest of the country with the passage of time. They asserted their dominance in all places they moved to and maintained power using their knowledge in the Vedas. This migration also happened towards the South of India in the later periods. They inevitably reached Kerala, which was rather isolated due to its geographic location. It is after their arrival we see significant political shifts here.

Kerala, a precious jewel along the western coast of the Indian subcontinent, has undoubtedly played an important role in the history of the country, and to an extent, the world. The historic age in Kerala becomes visible through the borderless history of the Sangam age. After the state saw the rise, refinement and further elaboration of the monarchical form of government in the Kingdom of the Cheras.² The main political units of the entire region however, were the Muventar, including the Cholas, Cheras and Pandeyas. The political system till that point in

¹ Singh, Upinder, A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India, Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd, 2008

² Veluthat, Kesavan, The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India, Orient Longman Ltd, New Delhi, 1993

the region of Kerala was clan based. It was organised under the leadership of clan heads. The biggest unit was the Kingdom of Cheras. This kingdom was based on the rule of the King. The power of the King depended on the accumulation of wealth. However, their decline seen after the 3rd century. The power structure undergoes a change after this period.

The history of Kerala during the 5th to 8th century is rather obscure and cannot be learnt accurately, but it is understood that the reestablishment of the Cheras happened by the 9th century CE.³ However the most important change in Kerala society during 3rd to 8th century was the arrival of the Brahmins. There are evidences for the coming of Brahmins to Kerala from the 3rd century itself. However it is only after the 8th century do we see a mass scale migration of Aryan Brahmins into Kerala. There are several opinions by several scholars and authors on the exact details of this migration. Some of the theories of a few scholars are explained ahead. The theories put forth are of scholars Kesavan Veluthat, P K S Raja, A Sreedhara Menon and of author Kanipayyur Shankaran Namboothiripad.

Kesavan Veluthat opines that prior to their arrival in Kerala, the Brahmins were known to have occupied present day Karnataka, evident from several inscriptions and literary sources. The Parasurama tradition believed to be the reason for the formation of the land of Kerala, seems to have its origin in Gujarat. The inscriptions of Chera Capital Mahodayapuram show the developments of Upagramas, which goes to show that the establishment of Brahmin settlements took place around 6th and 7th century. From the original sixty four settlements, thirty two of them were north of the river Permpula, and the rest in Kerala. Other than the original villages, others formed by the fusion of the elements of already existing ones, thus developing a network running the length and breadth of Kerala. They had superior feudal power over the land and is said to be a causative factor of the revival of the Chera kingdom.⁴ However, P K S Raja describes the Keralolpati in which Parasurama reclaims land from sea and then organised a Brahmanical theocratic government there. He opines these Brahmins divided the land into four and assigning the protection duty to a Rakshapurushan. But due to large distances between each administered land, the system did not last long. This was fixed at a meeting in Tirunavayi where it was decided to invite a ruler from outside for a span of twelve years. These Brahmins brought twenty one such rulers from neighbouring states. Another

³ Menon, A Sreedhara, A Survey of Kerala History, D C Books, Kottayam 1967, Edition 2017

⁴ Veluthat, Kesavan, Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies, Sandhya Publications, Calicut University, First Edition - January 1978

version within Keralolpati, as P K S Raja mentions, states that when one of the Perumals died, the Namboothiris decided to rule the land themselves. After this proved to be unsatisfactory, they approached Krishna Raya of Anagundi to send a ruler for twelve years. These are being used as evidences for stating the rising power of Brahmins in medieval Kerala society, proving the co-dependent relationships of kings and the upper castes.⁵

A Sreedhara Menon describes the “Aryanisation” of Kerala in his work ‘A survey of Kerala History’. He explains how the Brahmins who arrived by the 8th century were scholars and men of letters. They were easily able to impress local leaders, chieftains and rulers with their superior intelligence. They influenced the latter to conduct Yagas or sacrifices for their own health, prosperity and wellbeing. Having gotten moral support from the rulers, they aimed at winning the trust of the merchant class next, by showing them ways to the trading routes and commercial centres of North India. The two classes were made to believe their superiority over other occupation seeking people, with the former being named Kshatriyar and the latter being termed Vaisyars, making the protection of Brahmin communities imperative. This caused the rise of importance of Brahmins in Kerala society.⁶

Though not an academic scholar, Kanipayyur Shankaran Namboothiripad tries to explain his understanding of the arrival of the Brahmins in Kerala. According to him, the land between Gokarna and Kanyakumari was called Barghava Kshethram, where the main deity is Parasurama. He opines that Brahmins arrived in Kerala via the sea, after which, while traveling on foot through the risky habitats of Kerala, one person took initiative to lead the migrants. People from coastal places of Thapathi to Kanyakumari worship Parasuraman as this great man. From north, Brahmins must have settled in Bombay, Goa, Uduppi and Ponnani. Those settled in Ponnani spread south and north. The 32 gramams (villages) continued having either Sukapuram influence or Panniyoor influence. Ponnani is close to the joining point of Bharathpuzha with the Arabian Sea. Aryans could have also initially landed either in Kozhikode or Kodungaloor but the probability is low. Kerala tradition spread from Ponnani to the south till Kanyakumari and to the north till Chandragiri River.⁷

Throughout these theories, a few aspects remain the same, helping us draw a general picture of the process of migration to dominance of the Brahmins in Kerala. We understand that the

⁵ Raja, P K S, Medieval Kerala, The Nava-Kerala Co-op Publishing House LTD, Calicut, 1966,

⁶ Ibid. 3

⁷ Namboothirippad, Kannipayyur Shankaran, Aryanmaarude Koodiyettam Keralathil, 1965

Parasurama tradition is deeply associated with the Brahmin settlements. The tradition is used as a way to assert their dominance in the land that according to the tradition belongs to them. We also understand that the general time frame given to the mass migration of Brahmins is by the 8th century. These migrants were learned men who used their knowledge of the Vedas to establish the importance of religion, temple and ultimately caste in Kerala society. Because of this we see a shift from forest based lifestyle to temple based lifestyle is seen during this time with the arrival of the Brahmins. This is a major cultural change that remained unchanged for the next millennium. The growth of the temple as an institution is closely associated with the rise of the higher castes. Land grants to temples and Brahmins given by the ruling class guaranteed this high position in society. The Brahmins remained at 32 settlements, from North to South Kerala. These settlements grew in power interlacing the villages surrounding them, within itself. This gives us the picture of the Kerala society which was ruled by kings, kept in check by Brahmins and the temple. It is in this context that we try to understand the history of Kothachira.

The Namboothiri or Nambuthiri were the socio-spiritual aristocracy of Kerala, Brahmins of Kerala in that sense. The name itself has come about as a derivation from Nambu (sacred or trustworthy) and tiri (light).⁸ Another accepted derivation is from Nam (Veda) and Poorayithi (to complete), implying one who completes the Vedas.⁹ The Namboodiris of Kothachira are referred to as Vengattoor Manakkars, or Kothara Manakkar (must have developed from Kothachira Manakkar). A Mana or Illom is the traditional home of the Namboodiri. The houses of higher order Namboodiri is called a Mana.¹⁰

Kothachira is a small village along the borders of Thrissur and Palakkad. The village activities here are very closely associated with the Mana. The temples here also played an important role in the socio-cultural life of the people. The development of the village over the years has happened through the agriculture, temple activities and art forms. Following the system of Jenmi Sampradayam, the Kothachira Manakkar had several landed properties at the following locations:

⁸ Thurston, Edgar, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975

⁹ Namboothiri website contributors, 'About Namboothiris', Namboothiris website

<https://www.namboothiri.com/articles/identification.htm>

¹⁰ Panikkar, T K Gopal, Malabar and its folk, Asian Educational Services, Delhi/Madras, second edition, 1995

1. Kothachira
2. Chaliseri
3. Koduru
4. Muduthala
5. Kuzhalmantham
6. Thrissur

Other locations which would have been under their control would be Erumapetty and Cherur. However, they were not originally from Kothachira. The Kothara Manakkar have also the name Vengattoor Manakkar due to their ancestry belonging to a place named Vengad, presently in the Malappuram district. Vengad, near to Valanchery, was initially under the power of the ruler of Valluvanadu and was later captured by the Zamorin or Samudiri of Kozhikode. It is thought that the Kothara Manakar took to the name as they moved to Kothachira from Vengad presumably around five hundred years ago.

However, before understanding about this resettlement in detail, we have to lay the path in understanding their cultural historicity. For that we must look through their origins. Understandably the Vengattoor Manakkar belonged to a Brahmin settlement. The sections of Brahmin settlements in Kerala, however, were divided into groups according to their location in relation to rivers. The Kothara Manakkar belong to the Panniyoor settlement. The Panniyoor settlement has the Varahamurti temple at Panniyoor as its GramaKshetra. It is situated six miles to the west of Pattambi on the bank of river Perar in the Ottapalam Taluk. It has also yielded an inscription. The Viraraghava copper plates showcase the prominence of this village during the medieval age. The Panniyoor village were Vaishnavaites where as their rival village of Sukapuram were Shaivaites.¹¹

They proclaim themselves to belong to the Aadhyan Namboothiri lineage. The Aadhyans were the higher group in the class distinction amongst the Namboothiri, Aasyans were below them. The Aadhyans were never priests, they were beings above such functions.¹² They are referred to as Kothara Aadhyans or Vengattoor Aadhyans. As mentioned above, being that they belonged to Panniyoor, they worshipped the Varahamurti, an Avatara of Vishnu.

They followed the Rigvedic pattern, implying that they belonged to the Aabasthamba Gotra. The Gotra or Gothram is a name that demonstrates the family's traditional style of knowledge acquisition and expertise in ancient theories.¹³ They belonged to a lineage which had the 'Yaagadhikaram' or the right to conduct Yaagas.

¹¹ Ibid 4

¹² Ibid 8

¹³ Ibid 9

The term Othikan or Odhikyan refers to the title or position which was traditionally assigned to certain families among the Namboothiri community, who were authorised to perform or supervise the performance of certain rituals and to teach Vedam or "Othu". Every Namboothiri family has a designated Othikkan family. This family also functions in that capacity for a group of families. Such Othikkans will also have designated Othikkans. Othikkans come from "Picha" or a higher class of Namboothiris.¹⁴ The Odhikyan family for the Kothara Manakkar were the Moorkkanadu Manakkar. Over time this position shifted into the hands of the Mullenezhi Manakkar. Presently, however, this position is held by the Kizhakiniyath Manakkar.

The position of Vaidikan (Chief Consultant or one who manages the rituals) was handled by the Cherumukku Illakkar, then Kaimukku Illakkar and Pandal Illakkar.

As mentioned before, the Kothara Manakkar followed Rigvedic pattern. Rigvedic Namboothiris were divided as Kousheethakan and Aswalaayan. The reference books for the conduct of rituals for the latter group is the Pakazhiyan Chandangu. The Kothara Manakkar followed this system.¹⁵

The lineage of Namboothiri families has the system where the eldest male member of the family is the head of the family. In the situation where there are no more male heirs left, the option was to marry the daughter through which another male enters the family, or by adoption. The latter was less common.

The adoption system amongst the Namboothiris were of three kind, the Pattu kaiyyal dathu, Chanchamata dathu and Kutivazhicha dathu. The first and the second happen with the presence of the natural and adoptive parents. However, the third kind is less orthodox. It is done by a surviving widow to keep the lineage.¹⁶

Such a case of adoption is seen in the family of Kothara Manakkar. Centuries ago, the end of the generation was feared due to lack of male heirs. To avoid this, a male child, from the Thathanathu Mana which was within the Panniyoor village, was adopted.

¹⁴ Bhattathiripad, P Vinod, 'Othikkan' Namboothiris website, <https://www.namboothiri.com/articles/othikkan.htm>

¹⁵ Unpublished document, Sainath Menon

¹⁶ Ibid 8

The system of Pathupula, or ten days of grieving rituals post death is practised by the immediate and close enough families. Such a close relation exists to the Kothara Manakkar with Thathanath Mana and Kottur Mana.

The Aabasthampa Gotra (as mentioned before) families of the Panniyoor village were these three, viz, Kothara Manakkar, Thathanath Manakkar and Kottur Manakkar. The Chalishery Kondoor Mana and Varapilli Mana have merged with Kothara Mana over time.

The prominent first names of the Kothara Namboothiri family men were Vasudevan and Narayanan. However, the title given to the head of the family of Kothara Mana by the Samudiri was Thatha Narayanan.¹⁷ The word Datha Narayanan, or adopted Narayanan, slowly evolved over time into this present version is the theory believed by historians. However, the relation to the name of Thathanath Mana from where the lineage continued cannot be ignored as well. Thatha Narayanan, originally from Thathanath Mana, can also be another theory on the origin of this title given to the head of the family.

A similar situation happened at the Kottur Mana, where due to the lack of male heirs, a male child was adopted into their family, from the Thathanath Mana. This meant that this was the reason for the Pulabhendam from Kothara Mana to Kottur Mana and Thathanath Mana.

Such title names were commonly given to the prominent Namboothiri members who attended the Samudiris coronation or Arriyittuvazhcha. Now let us look at the relation between the Samudiri and this family. Samudiri or Zamorin was the king of Kozhikode. Originally he held the seat at the Nedyirippu Swarupam. After the capture of Polanadu, the ancestral home was abandoned and was transferred to Vikramapuram.¹⁸ This Kingdom was surrounded by Valluvanadu, Vettettunadu and Parappanadu, the history of their rivalry is famed. However, it was only a century of struggle after which the Zamorin became the Rakshapurushan of the Mamangam.

The way the Namboothiris played into this whole rivalry between kingdoms can be explained in relation with their duties to the king. There was a rivalry between the Panniyoor and Chowaram villages. The Chowaram village is hereby referred to as Sukapuram village. The Panniyoor Graamam (village) was spread on the western part of the Nila or Bharatapuzha

¹⁷ Personal interview of Sri Vasudevan Namboothiripad, fourth generation of Kothara Mana family age 82, taken on 18th Sept 2022

¹⁸ Ayyar, K V Krishnan, The Zamorins of Calicut (From the earliest times down to A D 1806), Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1938

River, and Sukapuram along the eastern part. Panniyoor used to be the most prominent village in Kerala, though it degenerated later.

The differences in stance between the various villages, were suppressed through various measures, like; the introduction of the great festival of Mamangam, the establishment of the Mahajana sabha (great assembly of the people), the division of Malayalam region into four kzhakams, and the appointment of Vaal-Nambis (another group) for each Kazhakam for three-year periods, elected by the respective people (Kazhakoottam). Payyannur, Panniyoor, Paravur and Chengannur were the four Kazhakams. The Vaal-Nambi of Panniyoor, the Kakkaat family of Vella Mana, did not deviate from righteousness, even while the other three were corrupt. Yet, Sukapuram initiated conflicts, developed between them and Panniyoor villages. The leaders of the mahajana sabha intervened and reduced it to the level of healthy competition. The Kaipancheri family of Maathur Mana was appointed as the leader in Panniyoor; and Aazhvaancheri Thampraakkal (Kulukallur Mana) in Sukapuram. They became the protectors of all the four Kazhakams. Every Brahmin Kerala hence owed their allegiance either to Sukapuram or to Panniyoor villages. They were even assigned differences in dress, food and other matters. Their competitive spirit, however, was encouraged to a healthy level. It was also decided that all Malayalees should be devotees of Varahamurti of Panniyoor. This idol was also assigned as the Paradevatha (main idol) of the entire Maha-Jana-Sabha. The Vaal-Nambi of Panniyoor was of course in the forefront to enact these regulations.¹⁹

Despite the attempts to avoid extreme rivalry, Sukapuram and Panniyoor villages fought again, and the independence of the Namboothiri authorities began to decline. The situation of the Kurmatsaram, a scholarly war between the two, become worsened after the chief of Panniyoor village aligned with the Samudiri and Sukapuram chief with the Valluvanad and Perumpadappu kings.²⁰ When the conflict with the scholastically superior Sukapuram became excessive, some of the Panniyoor scholars went elsewhere to pursue studies. And they even tried to bring their teacher and have him settle down here, quite against the dictates of the Varahamurti deity.

¹⁹ Thampuraan, Kodungalloor Kunjikkuttan, 'Panniyoor Sukapuram Conflict', Namboothiris website, <https://www.namboothiri.com/articles/panniyoor-sukapuram.htm>

²⁰ Maddy, 'Panniyoor Sukapuram conflict', Historic Alleys, <https://historicalalleys.blogspot.com/2022/09/the-panniyur-sukapuram-conflict.html>

The situation ended with the result that many migrated in groups to other villages. Those from Maathur Mana joined Perumanam village. Pazhoor went to Moozhikkulam, Muringoth to Vedanaat, Vella to different villages, and Chemmangaat, Kakkaat and Maravancheri to nearby Sukapuram. Only a handful of families like Vella and Thirumasseri preferred to stay, perhaps owing to their strong opposition to their rivals.

Meanwhile, the Samudiri of Kozhikode, helped by the Muslim traders, acquired the leadership in mamagam. He took over the leadership of the leftover families of Panniyoor, and lowered their status. The rival Sukapuram people were glad about this. Sukapuram's support of Samudiri that ensued was the recognition of Panniyoor koor or loyalty. Aazhvaancheri Thampraakkal of Sukapuram village, and Varikkumaancheri (Varikkaasseri) of Kalankandathur Mana were privileged people during the coronation of Samudiripad; Thekkiniyedath Kiraangat and Chittur Avanaavu, both of Peruvanam village, Poomulli and Kaipancheri Thampraakkal, both of Maathur Mana, all became supporters of the Samudiri; and no doubt, the Panniyoor leader, Kothara family was quite grateful to the Samudiri.²¹

From the time they lived in Vengad, the Kothara family had cordial relations with the Samudiri. However, the reason for their resettlement was also the Samudiri. Around five hundred years ago there was a case of disagreement between the Samudiri and a 'Sthani Pramani' an influential Nayar in the kingdom. Realising that the truth lies with the Sthani Pramani, the Vengattoor Manakkar stood their side in the argument. The Samudiri understandably was displeased by this. The Samudiri is believed to have questioned the head of the family that his subsistence is at one place while his koor or loyalty is to another.²² At the time the Samudiri had the right to execute the ones who opposed him. Seeing that their safety was now beginning to disappear, the then head of the family decided to move towards the Cochin border, along with his family, from the Samudiri ruled Vengad.

Taking possession of all their ancestral properties, they travelled along the shore of the Nila (Bharatapuzha) river. But, assuming they reached Cochin kingdom, they stopped at the borders of Valluvanadu and Cochin kingdoms. This location they stopped at was Kothachira, which was still under the region held by the Valluvanadu king. After analysing the landscape and its

²¹ Ibid 19

²² Personal interview of Sri Narayanan Namboothiripad, fourth generation of the Kothara Mana family, age 78, taken on 18th Sept 2022

surroundings, they took it to be apt for their settlement. The people in this village accepted their arrival as well. The Cochin kingdom border was merely a kilometre away from there.²³ However this friction between the Samudiri and the Vengattoor family did not last long. The Vengattoor head of the family received special invitation to attend the coronation of the king. They were also special invitees to the coronation of the KakattuKarnavarpadu of the Talapilli kingdom. The Arriyittuvazhcha was the formal inauguration of the king's reign, done with the blessings of the Brahmins, conferred with the customary way of throwing rice on the head. This is the central feature of the ceremony, also giving it the name.

At first this act was done by Kothachira Adhyan and the Rajah of Bettet, the former one representing the Brahmins of the Panniyoor koor, to which the Zamorin belonged, and the other the Kshatriyas of Kerala, both superior to others. The Bettet dynasty died out in 1793 CE. At one time, the Kothachira Adhyan found himself unable to take part in an Ariyittuvazhcha on account of pollution. So he employed his sister's son, the Pumulli Namboothiri, to officiate in his absence, himself supervising the ceremony while standing on the floor below. This became the practice ever since, and Kotachira lost his ancient right. It is not known when Varikkumancheri Namboothiri, and Kinangat Namboothiri, both belonging to the Sukapuram village, came to be invited to this event. In all probability Varikkumancheri was one of those who assisted the Samudiri to perform Hiranyagarbham. Kinangat was a partisan of Perumpadappu or Cochin kingdom, and probably was given this privilege for changing sides.

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The invitation to this event is given a week prior and around 6-8 men leave the village to do the customary act of pouring rice on the head of the king. There they were received with warm welcome and a house was given to them to stay in for the duration of their trip. Before they leave, they meet the Samudiri and it is here that they receive a Chagalas, which was a kind of woven blanket which has a distinct red color, as Onapadav or gift of cloth for onam. Paavi mundu, another kind of cloth, is also given to them by the king. According to the family's tradition they only accepted Onapadav from the Samudiri and their matrilineal home.²⁵

²³ Ibid 15

²⁴ Ibid 18

²⁵ Ibid 17

The family also received a monetary aid given to them by the Zamorin. It was called 'Maalyaham'.²⁶ This was continued till around 50-60 years ago, after which this right was lost. The neighbouring Mana, Poomulli, also received this aid. They received around 16 panams. The decision on how much the amount should be was decided on the base of the expenditure incurred by the family. When asked by the Samudiri, Kothara Manakkar stated it to be 3 panams, while the Poomulli family stated it to be 16. The value for the aid was set at 3 panam, which was given in bulk for a span 3-4 years. However, after a while the money stopped coming in after the death of the head of the family of the third generation. Inquiry about this was made, however, due to lack of written documents on the last time this aid was collected, the Samudiri's family had to remove the rights held by the family to get the aid.²⁷

Another important position of the Kothara family was during the Mamangam festival. The Mamangam was a national festival held every twelve years on the banks of Bharatapuzha, where all of Kerala was expected to be represented. It lasted for 29 days. The details of the ceremonies do not vary from one Mamangam to another. On the first twenty five days there would be processions that resembles a Roman triumph in its imposing grandeur, each day surpassing its predecessor in pomp and display. But all the while the Samudiri's person was guarded with strict vigilance especially on the last seven days of the procession. The last four days were marked by fireworks and mock fights between ships arranged. On the last day of the festival the Samudiri used to come in procession, ascend the manittara, a wooden scaffold erected on a bull facing the deity in the Tirunavayi temple. He stands there with a drawn sword. The warriors in this battle were called Chavers because either we were to be successful in shaming the Samudiri or die in attempt of it.²⁸

After the Samudiri captured the presidency of the Mamangam festival from the king of Valluvanadu, the cultural and commercial marketing festival of Mamangam became famed for its battles between the Chaver soldiers of the Valluvanadu king and soldiers of the Samudiri. The winners of the battle were deemed with high respect and pride.

The soldiers of the Samudiri were ordered to proudly announce the number and names of the martyrs of the Chaver group, on every single day of the Mamangam, at the Padipura of the Kothara Mana. What is meant by a Padipura would be understood later in the course of this

²⁶ Ibid 22

²⁷ Ibid 17

²⁸ Ibid 5

study. The head of the family of the Kothara Mana had to note down the details of the announcement.

It is said that while proclaiming the names, the soldiers of the Samudiri were known to do Aarpuvili, a practice where the subject matter is loudly announced in a joyous tone. This tradition hurt the sentiments of the people of Valluvanadu, while giving joy to the people supporting the Samudiri. This tradition was called ‘Kotharakkalvilichuparayuga’.²⁹

Related to this tradition, several phrases and proverbs have been used. The context here would be that the tradition was shameful for the ones who lost in the battles. These lines showcase the depth of the said shame. These lines were found in literature and several historical books. Some of these lines are explained below:

“Chathelum mele aanu Kotharakkale”

This line implies that the speaker feels more hurt from the tradition than from actual death.

“Chathudathinilla vishadam

Kothara padikal chennu vilikyuga paaradanddam”

This line explains that the speaker does not mind death as a punishment, he is not sad about it, however, the announcement was a harsh punishment to the speaker.

“Kollunathilum mele Kotharakkale aarpu”

This line explains the misery of the speaker who says that having to hear the Aarpu at the Kothara Mana is clearly above the situation of being murdered.

It is after reading these lines, which are preserved in records, do we get a clear picture of the position of importance one can imagine having been part of Kothara Mana at one point of time. Their importance hence cannot be side-lined.³⁰

Another important aspect to the history of the Kothara Mana was the elephants it maintained. During its prime, the Kothara Mana owned several elephants. These elephants were used for the temple activities and were also lent to other areas. At one time there were at least 6-7 elephants maintained just by this family. These elephants were maintained within the area of the Mana. The elephants were maintained by the family until recently, in 2010, when the last elephant was sold from the custody of the Namboothiri family.³¹

²⁹ Ibid 15

³⁰ Ibid 15

³¹ Ibid 17, Ibid 22

Some of the names of the most important elephants that were maintained by the family are stated ahead: Kothara Balakrishnan, Kothara Kuttikrishnan, Kothara Chandrashekar, Kothara Padmanabhan, Kothara Vallyachandrashekar, Kothara Ramachandran and Kothara Narayanankutty. A female elephant was also once maintained by them going by the name Kumari.

Elephants were used for the daily temple activities, until one day an elephant in rage ran astray within the temple walls, destroyed the Kodimaram (religious pillar in front of a temple), removed an idol from its main location, rammed into the surrounding structures of the temple and destroyed walls. It is after this incident that the usage of elephants in daily temple activities was stopped. The kodimaram was then replaced around 58 years ago. This maintenance of elephants can also be understood to be a sign of their luxurious lifestyle.

The Kothara Mana was affluent and had a lot of wealth to carry forth the activities of the village and its own activities. Many of the activities of the village were connected in and around the Mana and the temple it maintained.

Over the years though it's lost its charm it once held with pride, the Mana and its structures are in ruins. The temple, Chirakkal Vishnu Mahadeva kshetram, was also having grand activities due to its relation to the Namboothiris. The temple however also lost its charm, especially the Kolam or pond. Activities related to the temple will be discussed in detail in pages ahead.

The income for such luxurious activities would also have been great in number. The main source of income was Paattom or tax on the agricultural lands. This Paattom was collected as kind and not as cash. This tax came from all over the areas they controlled, the areas under them have been mentioned before. It is estimated that around 50,000-60,000 Paras (a unit measured using the vessel called para) of Nelli or rice grains were received by this family as tax.³² The tax was received on the basis of the decided amount per tax payer. It was given as a per month system. The actual tax collection was done by the Karyasthan or family managers.³³

The Vengattoor family when they had initially arrived at Kothachira, they had made a small settling house, opposite to the Chirakkal Vishnu temple. It is from here that the Mana as seen today was constructed. This structure was initially part of the four pathayapuram Pathayams were huge wooden boxes which were used quite similarly to the modern equivalent of barrels.

³² Ibid 15

³³ Ibid 17

A Pathayapura would hence imply a storage unit for many such Pathayams. The Pathayapuras of Kothara Mana were considerably large and were used to store the thousands of paras of nellu or rice. There were two storied Pathayapuras used to keep nellu, vaikol (hay and straw) and other agricultural products. Among the four, one of them was called Mannukatta, and it is here that they initially lived when they migrated from Vengad. It is while living here that the Kothara Mana ancestors overlooked the construction of the Mana, including the Ettukettu structure.

The approximate known period of the construction of the present day Mana is around 200-250 years old. The construction must have been done by the workers, engineers, architects within the Kothara village. The wood used for the construction was brought from the forest under the land owned by the Manakkar. The wood type was teak primarily. This wood was then cut and polished by hands by the workers.³⁴

The people of this village had a lifestyle centred on the Mana and the temple. There were several activities done by the Kothara family that was aimed at helping the poor and the needy. One such activity was the 'Kanji parcha'. This was, as the name suggests, an activity done in order to give supper to the poor. The item of food given was Kanji or rice porridge, a staple food amongst the people of in general Kerala.

Amongst the Brahmins of Kerala, the Namboothiris the system of inheritance is rather unique. Following the Makkatayam system, where the male dominance is necessary to continue the lineage. In this system, only the eldest son is allowed to marry within the caste, the rest are not to marry. All the property goes to the hands of the eldest who becomes the head of the family. Should the eldest Namboothiri die, the next marries and so on. Any self-acquired land outside of the lands of the Taravadu, which is the property acquired by the junior members, through his own efforts, lapses into the Taravadu at the time of his death, unless it was disposed of during his time. This systems helps keep the properties of the family within itself and become ever more affluent over time.³⁵

This is the context from which we understand the expansion of the land owned by the Kothara Manakkar. The land owned by the family increased under the times of two heads of the family. They brought to the Mana the riches and affluence by bringing more land under their control.

³⁴ Ibid 17

³⁵ Ibid 8

They were from the 3rd generation of the family. They were Sri. V M Narayanan Namboothiripad and his younger brother, Sri. Subramanian Namboothiripad. As we see the younger brother's self-acquired land lapsed into the properties of the Taravadu.

However, to understand who these brothers were, we need to understand the Thaavazhis or generations of the Kothara Manakkar. The generations are as explained below. It has been explained by the present 4th generation member, Sri Narayanan Namboothiripad.

The first generation comes under the patronage of the great grandfather of Sri Narayanan Namboothiripad. It is under this person we see the construction of the current Kothara Mana. He had two younger sisters and a younger brother. His sisters were married off to Poomaramkandathu Mana and Mangoth Mana. The names of these people have not been known.³⁶

The second generation starts with the grandfather, Sri Narayanan Namboothiripad, who became the head of the family and took to the title of Thatha Narayanan. He was married to Sridevi Antherjanam, from Pozhathil Mana. The women of Namboothiri families were called Antherjanams. These women were precluded from being seen by anyone. They were to carry umbrellas and cover their body, including their heads with clothes. They were escorted by women.³⁷

His brother was Sreedaran Namboothiripad, who had a Sambandham to a Nayar family in Valarkkad. Sambandham was a system where the younger siblings were to only have non marital relations with Nayar women. The children born to such a situation was looked after by the woman's family. This also meant a large number of Namboothiri women remained unwed.³⁸ He had a keen interest in the arts. Another brother was Neelakantan Namboothiripad, who had Sambandham to a family in Korattykara.

After the time of the eldest, the title of Thatha Narayanan went to Subramanian Namboothiripad, his wife was Chorath Variyath Laxmi Varasyar. Another brother was Krishnan Namboothiripad, who married from the Thrissur Kezhakke Kaammath Marath. His sisters, Sridevi was married to Parrol Mana and another to Cheraya Illom.

³⁶ Unpublished document, Sri Narayanan Namboothiripad, Fourth generation, age 78

³⁷ Ibid 10

³⁸ Ram, M M Anand, Influx (Crete to Kerala), First Edition, Keerthi Publishing House Pvt Ltd., Coimbatore, 1999

The third generation begins with Sri Narayanan Namboothiripad's father's elder brother, and he bore the same name mentioned here. His wife Nangaiyya Antherjanam from Kunnakyattu Mana. His sisters Kalyanikuttyamma was married off to a family in Amnatkana.

The father of the present fourth generation, Sri Vasudevan Namboothiripad, was married to Sridevi Antherjanam from Kumaramplavu Mana. His brother Govindan Namboothiripad and wife Chorath Varyath Kunjikutty Varasyar were next.

Another one of his brothers, Neelakantan Namboothiripad, had died young. Krishnan Namboothiripad however, another sibling in the lineage, married P K Sharathaambal from Trippunithara.

He had four sisters as well who were all married off to the following families; Tavarinur Mana, Kunnakyattu Mana, Nambathu Mana, Kumaranplavu Mana. Two sisters died young as well.

The affluence of the family can better be understood through the very large Maalikas that were constructed to house guests of the family. These Maalikas were marvellous huge structures. The Kothara Mana had enough wealth to construct several such Maalikas.

One of the Maalikas was right next to the Chirakkal Maha Vishnu temple. Another was present to directly opposite to the other one. Another Maalika was constructed a big further from the location of the Mana.

A very interesting thing about these structures were that all of them were two-storied or more. This just goes to show the immense amounts of wealth present with the previous generation in this family. The architecture and other details will be discussed in pages ahead.

The temple and Namboothiri caste in general in Kerala were intertwined deeply. One would not have risen without the other. The temple village of Kothachira had its activities closely interlinked with the Mana and the temple.

As it is obvious, temples and the Namboothiri families are closely related. The Kothara Manakkar belonging to the Paniyoor village, worshipped Vishnu. Which is why their main patronage in Kothachira went to the Chirakkal Maha Vishnu Kshetram. This temple is believed to be much older to the time frame of arrival of this family in Kothachira. The house which was initially lived in by the family that came from Vengad, was directly opposite and very close to the temple. That's how they took over the temple rights.

Another temple close to the actual Mana, is of the Bhagavathi. A history associated with this temple, the Karuvarapuram temple, is that the second generation head of the family practised

the Pooja and prayers of this temple. A step-well that functioned as a makeshift pond called 'Kokarni' existed near to this temple. Due to old age, he was not able continue this, due to which the temple was moved.³⁹

Two other temples exist within the village, they are the Ayyappan kavu at south Kothachira, and the Appathuvalappu Devi temple. However, these are newer to the village than the Vishnu temple. The Ayyappan Kavu temple was initially handled by another Namboothiri family. However, as the Kothara Manakkar moved in, the rights to do temple activities were handed over.

The paradevatha of the Kothara family is Mulyamparampath Bhagavathi, the idol in the temple near to the Kothara village, at Chalisheri, an area under the landed property belonging to Vengattoor Mana.⁴⁰

The systems of the temple in Kothachira were handled by the Namboothiris. The system at the Karuvarapuram temple, a Bhagavathi idol temple, was to have two worships every day. They worshipped once in the morning and another in the evening.

The other temple had the Chirakkal Maha Vishnu idol. It was situated merely one hundred meters away from the Mana. Here too the similar systems of twice a day worships existed, morning and evening. The temple though now has several idols, the original idol is the oldest. The other idols were added on later. There are two Ayyapan idols at this temple, one of which was brought from Malappuram.

At this temple, in the month of April (Medam), starting on the day of Vishu, a grand eight day long festival happens. The customary tradition of Aarattu takes place during these days at this temple. The path between the Chirakkal Vishnu temple and the Kothara Mana replicates the path found in front of the Peruvanam temple at Thrissur.

The temples also would have a temple pond close by allowing for baths and other religious activities. The Ambala Kulam was hence also an important part of the structure of a temple. The Ambala Kulam for the Chirakkal Vishnu temple was very huge. It is believed that it had not dried up in over 100 years. An addition done to the kulam was the construction of a bathing hall. The whole pond was divided into sections, and a two storied structure was built for the easier usage by the women and men of the Namboothiri family. The third generation members

³⁹ Ibid 17

⁴⁰ Ibid 15

of the Namboothiri family had not had it in their memory a situation where the pond was dried up. However, three years ago, in 2019, it did reach a point of near drought like situation. This Kulam was used by all the people in the village, for several purposes. It was hence also a cultural important place in the village.

The Kothara family had the right of Oorayma at several temples. The right of Oorayma was the right to conduct certain temple worship activities. The temples they had Ooraymas were as follows; Mulayamparambath Bhagavathi temple, Kodungalloor AyyappanKavu temple, Kothamangalam Vishnu Shiva temple and finally Koddur Ayyappan temple.

Some traditional habits and customs of the Namboothiris are unique to them. They were known to not wear any clothes made of silk. Neither genders wore them. They wore footwear made of wood, referred to as Methiyadi. They did not wear any other kind. The Namboothiri women had two forms of dressing styles, Okkum Koluttum vachchutukkuka and ngoringutukkuka. Completely white clothes were worn. The food habits of the Brahmins were also of a particular kind. Liquor and flesh was strictly prohibited for them. The main food items were rice and curry. ⁴¹

There existed exactly this system in the Kothara Mana. White clothes were worn by all. Their hair was tied in a particular way. The women of this family worn the Ngoringutukkuka style of clothing. This was a two piece type of clothing. The men wore a vesti mundu below their waist. They called it Thattudukkuka, which was a dressing pattern used to be worn while going to the temple.

The food habits of this family is also rather interesting. Even though there was lavishly available grains in the granary, the food habits was not following up to this level. They did not consume breakfast. Instead at 10-10:30, a brunch is served.

For children, a dish made of broken rice and ghee was given. And for the brunch, mostly it was rice and a dish called, Moloshyam. This was a stew like dish made with a summer vegetable like pumpkins and green chilies. Other times the accompaniment for rice was a dish that was resembling sambar. The level of effort to make this, however, was not as strenuous.

As a side dish, a mezhukkuparatti is served. Mezhukku literally means grease or oil, and paratti or puratti means to rub off, implying that this dish was made by cooking the vegetable in an oil. Most of the time this was made of Chakka or Jackfruit. This was a season fruit which was

⁴¹ Ibid 8

locally available plentifully. If that was not available, other available produce, like Kaaya or unripe banana was used to make this.

Another refreshing drink was Sambhaaram, which was made from churned curd. It is loose in consistency, pale bleak white and mostly watery. Mostly ginger, green chilies and curry leaves and salt are added to it to enhance the flavour. It is served cold as a dish during meals or as drinks during the hot days.

At night the leftovers from the other meals during the day was eaten again. However, during the day of Ekadashi, rice is not consumed at night. Round balls made of rice flour, called Pidi is however an accepted food item.⁴²

Hence we see that there existed a very significant and rich history behind the Kothara Mana and its family. Even prior to their arrival at Kothachira, we see that their position in the Malabar society was very deep. They had a very close connection to the Samudiri, especially during the event of the coronation or Arriyittuvazhcha. They also had a very important position during the Mamangam festival, where they heard the announcement of the results at their doorsteps. Culturally as well, they had a rich background. Rigvedic traditions, right to perform Yaagams, their Adhyan lineage, belonging to Abasthamba gotram were all their attributes which made their position so unique.

After their arrival, their importance grew in connection with the village. We can see that the developments after the arrival of the Namboothiris changed the face of the entire region. They acquired more land onto their rights. They maintained relations with other Manas and its people, namely Poomuli Mana, Thathanath Mana and Kottur Mana. They brought in the temple systems and rigidity. They constructed several structures including temple walls, grainaries, buildings used to live, the bathing halls in front of the Kulam, and more.

A lot of cultural aspects changed as well. There were evidently people of other castes present in the village. They had their own ways and they also accepted the influence of the Brahmanic tradition, seen throughout the various groups of the village. The other castes who had temple related activities, agrarian activities etc. also existed in this village. Festivals traditions, customs practices were shared amongst the people well. The activities of the temple is also a point of interest as Kothara was infact a temple village. The architecture of the structures, that already existed and were later constructed, are also worth understanding. Other than this, plenty

⁴² Ibid 15

of art forms also had developed in the village, some with and others without the patronage of the Namboothiri family. This important as it raised the status of the whole village to not just historic, but cultural significance as well. These will be the aspects understood through the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

INSIGHTS INTO CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF KOTHACHIRA

The village of Kothachira might be geographically small, but its cultural heritage is one that needs commending. The origin of the actual name “*Kothachira*” is unclear in its history. One can assume from the term ‘Chira’ which means a pond or Kulam, that the name implies the indication that this region does not have a scarcity of ponds. Another way this term comes to be used might be based on the tradition that while bringing the essence of Kodungallur Amma (a female goddess) this way, the tired carrier set his umbrella or Kuda on the ground and it stayed there without moving. Hence the name could come from Kudaarachur, then to Kudachur, then to Kudachira then to Kuthachira and finally as Kothachira.⁴³

Kothachira, or Kothara, is a small village in present day borders of Palakkad and Thrissur. It belongs to the district of Palakkad. It is identified to be a part of central Kerala in its present day context. This location signifies its relation to the Northern region of Kerala, much more than to its Southern counterparts. Earlier Kerala was divided as three socio-political zones namely Malabar at the Northern most end, Cochin to its centre and Travancore to its South. With the present day location in consideration, along with the information assessed in the previous chapter, one can easily identify that the culture of Kothachira must have been bearing resemblances to those in Malabar, though it fell to the borders of two zones.

The cultural influence of the Namboothiri family from the time of the Samudiri or Zamorin is one that can still be seen here. The other castes in Kothachira adopted to the new system as well. The previous chapter explored the historical aspects with regard to the temple and its origin, the Namboothiri family at Kothachira and their histories, and so on. However the village life in Kothachira is so much more than just its historicity. They also consists of its cultural and religious systems. Hence there are a few aspects which need be understood about the culture of this village, such as the customs and practices unique to this region, architectural marvels, beautiful art forms and the position that the temples held in this society. Let’s understand them in detail and delve into the complete picture of village life here.

2.1 Castes

The caste hierarchy in Kerala essentially followed the pattern of the Jati system, dividing it as four Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. In Kothachira we see that there existed

⁴³ ‘Kotharapazhama’, Jubilee’95, Arunodaya Vayanashaala, 1995, page number 19

several castes which follow this pattern of power variation within the society. In the region we are able to identify castes like Namboothiri Brahmins, Ambalavasis like Nambeesan, Nairs, Ezhavas, Manans, Parayans, Paanan, Thattan, Molayan, etc. However, this is not to assume only people belonging to Hindu religion reside here. Christians and Muslims coexist here.

The general locales for each castes depends upon their familial land holdings, which in turn was dependent on the land allocation according to caste, which was done in the earlier days. The castes were spread throughout the village, according to their position in the hierarchy. The east end of the village sees the localities of Asharis and Molayanmars. There are residences of the Ezhava caste near to the Subramanian temple in the village. The castes like Namboothiri, Nambeesan and Nairs held their land in the central parts of Kothachira. Other castes like Thattan and Manan have their places near other temples. It should also be acknowledged that all through this the castes like Paanan and Parayan are seen to have their homes near to temples that is maintained by themselves.⁴⁴

The proximity of the other religions in the region is a prime example of peaceful coexistence of diversity. There is a 2.5 kilometre region in the village which sees a Muslim Mosque and several temples scattered near it. The people have lived there in peace and have had no troubles from their differences. There is colony for the Muslims to the northwest of the village. The number of Christians are very less here, limited to only a few families. These families had migrated to Kothachira from a region called Chalisherry.⁴⁵

The caste of Namboothiris has already been detailed in the previous chapter. Similar in many customs are the Ambalavasi caste groups, prominently, the Nambeesans. They are also addressed as Nambiyassans, Nampisans, and Nambiars etc. They have been seen following the Kulathozil (or the occupation followed by a particular caste) of garland-making for temples.⁴⁶ The Nambeesans of Kothachira were close to the Namboothiri family and the Mana. This could be due to the cultural similarity as well as proximity of their home to the Mana. This caste also had their own section in the Kulam divisions.

Nairs or Nayars are seen to be holding higher position in the Kothachira society. There were higher and lower Nairs in this village. The post of Karyasthan to the Namboothiri family was

⁴⁴ Personal interview of Mohanan, present temple staff, age 52, taken on 13th Nov 2022

⁴⁵ Personal interview of Narayanan, present staff, age 47, taken on 13th Nov 2022

⁴⁶ Ibid 8

held by Nair caste in Kothachira. They were also having landholdings in the central areas of the village.

Ezhava is a caste that held backward position in Kerala society. Designated to having the status of Untouchable, they were still the highest among the 'excluded castes'. Among them were woodcutters, boatmen, fishermen, merchants, schoolteachers, and ayurvedic practitioners.⁴⁷ However, they had lower position in the hierarchy in Kothachira. It is noteworthy to detail a very affluent Ezhava family hailing from the village, Kodavan Parambu.

Paanan and Parayas are Dalit communities of Kerala. They have their temples within the village. The Paanan Paattu is a very famous folk art practiced by the Paanan caste which is also performed in Kothachira. The Paraya caste mostly dealt with agriculture.

Manan caste is included in the scheduled caste groups in Kerala by the government. They mostly held occupations related to agriculture. They too have had folk arts related to temple activities in Kothachira.

Thattans and Asharis are caste belonging to the Other Backward Classes list assessed by the state government. They belong to the Vishwakarma group. They were having land near temples in this village.

The Mulayan community have a ritual called as Chavittu kali associated with the Ayyappan temple. The belief is associated with Kodungalluramma Sangalpam. The ritual is from 8 to 11 p.m. at night.⁴⁸

The sustenance of a village would depend on the socio-cultural interactions between people belonging to all divisions, holding various occupations and having different economic backgrounds. In Kothachira we observe such a intermixing of various castes. There was a close knit interaction between Namboothiris, Nairs and Ambalavasis here. However, other unjust practices such as Unapproachability and caste rigidity was also present in the village.

2.2 Customs and traditions

Activities in the village regarding the temple functions, festivals, and other practices are most certainly one that needs to be understood in depth. The general functioning of a village in Kerala can be connected to a temple, and Kothachira is no exception. Hence to analysis the age

⁴⁷ K K, Anish, Conceptions of Community, Nation and Politics: The Ezhavas of South Malabar, India and their Quest for Equality, CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion, Vol. 3, 2022

⁴⁸ Personal interview of Baalan and Sajeew, residents of the village, taken on 28th Dec 2022

old customs and practices of this small village we must look at the temple activities, its various traditions and festivals that happen throughout the village.

Temple activities: There are several temples in the village but the two prominent ones we shall look at are the Chirakkal Mahavishnu temple and the Ayyappankaavu temple. These two temples are hereby taken to be examples on the basis of which the functioning of other temples can be assumed. The Vishnu temple falls right ahead of Mana, only a few hundred meters in a straight walking path from the vicinity of the Namboothiris. This is because the Vishnu temple is one which was directly under the Namboothiri Brahmins. The temple is centuries old and continues to hold all its daily activities. The temple starts functioning early in the morning. However, it is not open to devotees until later in the day. The activities begin at 5 a.m. when it is opened to perform daily rituals or Pooja kriyas. At 6 a.m. the first Pooja for the day is performed. And at 8:30 a.m. another ritual is performed called Ushapooja. During this the temple is open to devotees but closes by around 9 a.m. for the rituals like Ganapathi Homam, Pushpanjali etc. After its closure, it is reopened only at 5:30 p.m. after which the Deeparadhana or closing rituals are conducted. The temple closes completely by 7 p.m.⁴⁹

During the Mandala Kaalam which is observed in the month of Vrishchikam, or the month attributed to the god Ayyappan, 41 days of temple activities related to it needs to be conducted. The rituals of Niramala is carried out during this time along with Chuttuvilakku. It is done on an auspicious day, when all the oil lamps in the Velakku Madathara are lit up, making a beautiful sight for the devotees. Prior to the gradual deterioration of the temple related functions, there used to be the conduct of Vaaram. It involves a kind of obeisance or Upaasana, through recitation of the Vedam, done by the learned Namboothiris who are seen seated on the dais Mugha Mandapa. In Namboothiri vocabulary, it is also referred to as "Vaaramirikkal". It is usually conducted at night, followed by dinner provided within the temple.⁵⁰ On the day of Magarath Mageeram, or Prethishta Dinam, the idol is presented. For the Ulsavam or the festival associated with a particular temple, there is a function referred to as Kodikettam which is the hoisting of the flag on the Kodimaram. In its yesteryears the temple also saw a ritual called Aarattu. There is also the celebration of Navaratri, nine days of activities. Some unique rituals

⁴⁹ Ibid 44

⁵⁰ Namboothirippad, Kanipayoor Shankaran, 'Vaaram, Thrisandha, Othoottu' and 'Panchasandha', Namboothiri website, <https://www.namboothiri.com/articles/vaaram.htm>

here are the Avilkozhachu Nedyam, or offering of a mixture of flatten riceflakes and Ottapa Nedyam, a sweet variety of commonly eaten dosa, which is given to Lord Ganapati.⁵¹

The Puram of the Ayyappankaavu temple is also interesting. It starts in the morning from the doorstep of the Mana with the idol, performances of the Melam (instruments), and happens till the evening. Many local artforms are performed here, which would be delved into in the later parts of this chapter.

Customs of various castes: Religious festivals or activities gave opportunities for representatives of the different castes to participate in a manner appropriate to their rank in the system, and was commonly seen as a way as to express the distinctive occupations or cultural forms of the participants.⁵² This was very true in the case of temples in Kothachira. In the Ayyappankaavu temple, there existed several folk art performed by certain castes.

The Aaramkalam or Kalam Paatu refers to a song singing tradition in the temple. It is followed by traditional rituals. It is done for 21 days, done by different groups on each day. The first few days are dedicated by Uralan or owner (presumably of land), the Manakar, then the Mannan castes and so on. The rest are performed as Vashipaadu or offering. Previously it was performed by the members of the caste in the village themselves, however, nowadays it is arranged by them but executed by those who know the songs, but might not belong to the village.

Another song singing tradition followed here is the Pagaltu Paatu. It is done opposite to the temple, underneath a temporary shed like structure with the roof made of a particular grass. This grass is to be provided by the family of Kolavan Maathuparambil.

This assigning of certain tasks to a group is called Avakaasham in Kothachira. It is also used as the word to ascribe certain rights to obtain materials in return for said tasks to each of the castes in the region. This term holds grave importance in understanding the caste system of this village.

During this tradition, the temple activities continues on as usual. At 7 am, the Mannan community is to perform the Thottam Paatu. After this a sacrificial ceremony called Pathinettam Karmam is performed, which is the Bali (sacrifice) of a chicken. After this the Kodi erakam (lowering of flag) happens. For this activity the Uralan must be present. The Uralan is associated with the Koman Shankarath family. They belong to the Nair caste. They

⁵¹ Ibid 45

⁵² Miller, Eric J, Caste and Territory in Malabar, American Anthropologist, 1954

have to give permission for this particular function. The Bali is performed in three triangular designs, called Dhandh Nerkuga. The sacrifice is then kept at Karivarapetta.

Another ritual is the Thiyyat. This is performed by Thiyyadi Nambiars on the last day of Mandala Kaalam or 41 days attributed to Lord Ayyappan. They are a subgroup of the Nambeesans caste who have their Tharavadu or ancestral home in Perumpilavu, a village nearby. The members of this caste visit the temple especially for this performance. This is still continued here. They have the Avakaasham for this ritual and receive three Kodas or umbrellas as Avakaasham given to them on the same day.

The ritual is performed to please Lord Ayyappan, hence is an important ritual to an Ayyappan temple. It performed with the aim of removing a dark period in the astrological malediction of Malayalee belief called as Shenidosham, for blessing with education opportunities, child bearing and to attain goals in the hearts of devotees. The ritual requires a Kalam or a grid design with religious images drawn on the floor with natural colors. The colors, namely, red yellow black white and green, are made of mixing turmeric and slaked lime, turmeric, ground ash or ummikari, rice powder or Aripodi and dried and crushed leaves of plants Vaaga and Manjaadi, respectively. Around six to seven forms of Ayyappa can be drawn, such as one holding a bow and arrow, one riding a tiger, one riding a horse, as Prabhasathyagan, along with Prabhamandalam etc. Then the essence of the God is brought onto the pedestal in front of the Kalam, called as Peedham, by the belief if Aavaham. This is followed by a Pooja. After this a song praising Ayyappan is sang, which is called Thottam Cholal then Kizhi Ozhichil. It also includes the tale of Ayyapa. This tale is then explained as a dance using Mudras or gestures, called as Koothu. Then the person performing the whole ritual moves thrice around the temple's main pathway and performs ritualistic moves to each of the instrument players. After this the belief is that a pleased Ayyappan, presents himself as Komaram and dances around the Kalam, called as Kalapradakshinam, and rubs out the image as a way of accepting the Vazhipaadu or offering. The representation of Ayyappa done by the Thiyyadi Nambiar then laughs and gives orders or Kalpanas to the devotees present. He then distributes the Pradsadham or blessed offering to the devotees which includes the colours that were rubbed off in the Kalam. The Prasadham is giving in the order of first to the lead and other priest along with the members who work in the temple, then to the members of the high castes, then to the Nairs and then to everyone else presents. It is interesting to note in recent times all the activities related to the ritual, from making of the natural colours to the drawing of the grid, to the

performing of the song and dance to the performing of rituals, is done by a single person making the need for expertise in all the matters crucial.⁵³

Another ritual is Ayyappante Vela. It is also referred to as Kathiru Vela. It is performed by the Scheduled Caste groups, belonging to the Paraya community. The Paraya families in the village who were originally from here but now reside at Akhinalam, a nearby village, perform it. They were moved due to the influence of the Manakkar.⁵⁴ This community along with other members who have the Avakaasham for such rituals have a Sthanam or position in the temple, they are given their own importance and are honoured for it.⁵⁵

On this day, the castes like Nairs offer Elaneer or tender coconut inside the temple. An important thing to consider is that castes deemed to belong to the lower group are not allowed inside the temple, they could only view from outside. The Erinji Tara mentioned before is meant for the use of Ezhava women, to see the Purams or other events related to the temple. Due to their restrictions to enter the temple the people in the lower castes used to stand on the other side of the wall where the offerings of coconut was being done, in hopes of receiving one on accident.

For this ritual, a week prior to it, four families belonging to four different locations within the village; Kunnath Purakkal, Chettuketti, Kuriparambu and Agilanthu Parayan, they come as Para, on days important for Ayyappan. They perform Vela Para Edukuga, at different homes, though that practice is not followed anymore. In the prime of this ritual, the collection is taken on a huge vessel called Teru. They may do this on their own accord. On the day of the Vela the four families unite here. For the end of the ceremony they perform the Manjapathikkal. The acts of Poothams (a ritualistic artform) go around the temple thrice to conclude the ceremony. Besides all this the ritual of Uthyasthamana Pooja is also on 18 days as 18 different poojas.

As mentioned before the Bhagavathi temple is also near to the Ayyappan temple. Some of the rituals associated with this temple include the Valiya Kuruthi and Desha Kuruthi. It is done by three Velichappads. It is important to note the temple closes for seven days during this time. During this time, between a unit of time measurement called Yaamam (a period of 27 hours), a ritualistic food offering to the god is given. Another important ritual associated with this temple is called Madhu Konduvaral. It is a ritual performed by Ezhava caste women from three

⁵³ Personal interview of Kesavan, a Thiyyadi Nambiar member performing the ritual of Thiyyattu, taken on 28th Dec 2022

⁵⁴ Personal interview of Subramanian, a Paraya member in the ritual of Thottam Chollal, taken on 28th Dec 2022

⁵⁵ Ibid 48

different families. The ritual begins with poojas being done at their homes, after which they bring alcohol or Madhu to the temple. For the Puram here, there is also a tradition by the name Chavittu Kali, as well as aforementioned Pagal Paatu.⁵⁶

Other festivals and events: The temple festivities were prominently seen during the time of Puram. There were also common celebrations. The activities of the village were not limited to the vicinity of temples. Homes of people also saw joyous events. The main ones were the festival of Onam, observing of the Thiruvathira day, Puram, Vishu and others.

Onam: The festival is considered to be a harvest festival across Kerala. The belief is that it marks the return of the King Mahabali, who emerges from his fate to be pushed down to Hell, once every year to visit his subjects in Kerala on Earth. It is enjoyed with a feast, new clothes and merry celebrations.

In Kothachira, the celebrations for Onam begin from the Malayalam day of Atham. It is welcomed with floral arrangements called Pookalam, on the ground, laden with cakes of cow dung. It is continued till the day of Thiruvonam. An important ritual observed here is Sribhoti Vekyuga. It is a ritual done in appraisal of Goddess Bhagavathi. This ritual is practiced by all Hindus of the village. It is done in the month of Karkidagam throughout which, at the end of the day a flower called Deshapusham is offered as Nedyam.

In the month of Chingam from the day of Atham, the members of the house arrange for the placement of Onathappan. It is a triangular cone with a flat base made of clay, which is adorned with flowers and a paste made of rice powder. From the Puradam day till Chadayam, the number of these Onathappans are increased till 16 is reached. After 16 is achieved the same figures are used for the rest of days in the rituals. During this time a dish named Ada, made of grated coconut, jaggery, and rice powder paste and steamed banana called as Pazhamnurukku is offered as Nedyam. Important flowers and leaves like Deshapusham, Thumbapoo flower its leaves etc are used.

On the day of Onam, the families enjoy a feast on a banana leaf, and giving of new clothes or Onapudava to family members. It is after this they gather at the Mana. There in the Nadumuttam (explained later) the womenfolk dance the ritualistic dance called Thiruvathira, while the women of the Namboothiri caste sing the songs. There would be swings hung for

⁵⁶ Personal interview of Vasudevan Odathu, retired government official of village, age 66, taken on 13th Nov 2022

children to enjoy. There are Avakaashams for certain groups to arrange the Pookalam and Onathappan in the Mana home.

There is a particular song sang during Onam in Kothachira which is worth mentioning. It goes something like:

*“Thekkekara Vadakkekara kannanthali muttathoru thumba mulache,
Thumbakond oru amba oru thoni chamanje,
Thoni thalakilloru aalu mulache,
Aalinte pothil oru unni piranne,
Unnikyu kottanum paadanum thudiyum thudikolum, parayum parakolum kondu,
Koodepiranna poove polipoove”*

Which roughly translates as an exclamatory description of a flowering plant called Thumba growing on the bank of a waterbody. After forming a boat using said plant, a huge tree called Aalu is said to start growing on the bow of the boat. A child is then described to have been born within the holes of the big tree trunk. The song then explains that the flowers which is seen growing during the harvest seasons are asked to bring instruments and other goods for the child to sing and entertain himself. The song is an example on the fun nature of the Onam celebration here in the village, hence deserves to be detailed as so.⁵⁷

Thiruvathira: This is a celebration meant for women done by women. It is observed for the good luck in marriage for newlyweds and the betterment of the children of those women who have them. It was a grand activity for the womenfolk in Kothachira. It was practiced by all women of all castes in the village.

The actual tradition begins several days prior to the actual Thiruvathira day, around 7 days in total. During these days the women gather at the Kulam as early as 4 a.m. There are different sections in the Kulam called as Kadavu, where women belonging to the particular caste the bay is assigned to, stand and partake in the event. They perform a ritual called Thudichu Paaduga. The singing is done by the women in the higher castes, after which women on the other bays repeat while being in the water. They do this for almost 30-45 minutes. After this, the women join together at the Kulapera, bathing hall, and put on makeup accessories like Pottu (decorative

⁵⁷ Telephonic interview of Subhadra Brahmaniyamma, resident of the village, age 66, taken on 26th Dec 2022

dot on forehead), Chaandu (sandalwood), Kumkumam (red powder), Kanmashi (char mixed with grease used as makeup for the eye) and Varakuri (a thin line applied using stiff centre of coconut leaves). They also adorn Deshapusham on their hair. After placing a ritualistic lamp called Nilavelakku in the middle women dance in circles around it, a dance form called Thiruvathira.

On Thiruvathira eve, they take up a fast called Mageera Nombu. They wear a flower called Paathirapoo and celebrate it at night. They observe the night without sleeping, during which a traditional art form called Poothan (Sivaganam or of Lord Siva) comes as Chozhi. The next day, on Thiruvathira day, the women have to avoid consuming rice products. They prepare Gothambari Choru (broken wheat which is steamed), Puzhukku (a stew like dish made of several root vegetables like yams, and other normal seasonal vegetables), and Kuuvva Payasam (a sweet dish made of arrowroot). Another important ritual is the consumption of 101 betel leaves by the women. It is a very important aspect of the observation of this day, done by women who are married. They also consume Elaneer (tender coconut) which had been given as Nedyam or offering. They break their fast by consuming the offering food given to Lord Siva.⁵⁸

Puram: Puram is the annual festival of the temples. Before the gradual decline of the prominence of the Namboothiri family, the Puram at Chirakkal Vishnu temple was in complete grandeur. The festival is announced via the hoisting of a flag on the Kodimaram, a tower. There are special rituals and activities in the temple, conducted in relation with the Puram. The Puram had art forms like Pootham, Kaavadi Aattam, Shinkari Melam, Tara, Theyyam, and also the fireworks or Vedikettu. There is also a ritual called Rathri Ezhunellipu or presenting of idol at night. An important aspect of the Puram activities is the Para Iduppu. It is done at every home. A para is a vessel used as a unit of measurement. The offerings are usually Nellu (rice grain), Avil (flattened rice flakes) or Malar (unhusked paddy grain). It is often given in units like Orupara (one unit), Ainpara (5 units) or Pathupara (10 units).

Vishu: Vishu is considered to be the new year of the Malayalam calendar. It is also an important celebration of the village. It is celebrated with the conduct of rituals like New Year sight early in the morning of idols of god, Konnapoo (a vibrant yellow flower which grows only during

⁵⁸ Personal interview of Prameela Narayanan, former resident of the village, age 55, taken on 26th Dec 2022

this time), vegetables and fruits, money and gold, all decorated around oil lamps, distribution of money to younger members of the family, and a lavish feast.

Birthdays of the Namboothiri family: Another important celebration is the Pirannal or birthdays of the members of Namboothiri family at the Mana. They celebrate it in accordance to the dates on the Malayalam calendar. They invite the whole village for the celebration by arranging a feast for all. It had been given to the guests according to their castes, with the Brahmins first, then Ambalavasis, then Nairs and so on. The invitation would not need be directly from the family, coming to various groups by hearsay. It is given to all irrespective of differences, all would be welcomed.

Hence we see that there were various customary, ritualistic and celebratory practices and traditions in the village. It is important to note that the people still continue to perform their ascribed tasks which are associated with the temples, due to respect, faith and fear to the gods. It is also important to understand that even if certain details of the customs might have changed overtime, the basic idea of the lot remained the same for several decades, even centuries. This means that the village remains a keyhole into the past, giving view into how the situation of a typical Kerala village in the medieval times would have been.

2.3 Artforms

The culture of a locality is never completely understood without understanding the artforms that prevail there. These are not merely dances or songs, it is present in the everyday lives of the people living there. Kothachira is famous predominately for its rich heritage in folk arts. This section of the chapter aims to uncover the position of Kothachira in the history of cultural forms.

Kathakali: Kathakali is essentially a drama played out with the events described via songs. The origin of this artform is ascribed to the writings of a king of yesteryear Kottayam. The Kottayamthampuran wrote four Aattakathas or dramas to play out the tales of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu. This was called Ramanattam, which later on became Kathakali. Another artform closely associated with this is Krishnanattam, telling tales of Lord Krishna.⁵⁹

Kathakali cannot be performed without the other acts in the performative sequence. Prior to the beginning of a Kathakali performance, a musical announcement of sorts is performed around the area, referred to as Keli. It is followed by acts of Thodayam (initiation of small boys

⁵⁹ Ibid 10

into the mysteries of the act), Vandana Slogam (song in praise of god), and then Purapad (introduction of the main character).

The gaps in between scenes are filled by Melapadam (instruments). The Veshams or characters are mainly seen as Pacha, Kathi, and Thaadi, (green, black and white respectively) Kari, Minukku and female characters. Expressions are given prime importance in the performance of Kathakali.

In Kothachira there have been several prominent personalities in the field. They are twin brothers Shankaran and Narayanan Nambeesan, Kalamandalam Gopi Ashan, Kalamandalam Balasubramanian.

The twin brothers learnt Kathakali under the performative group called Vengele Kaliyogam. This group included Vadakara Vishnu Nambeesan, Sivapalan Maashu, Kochukupan Nair Ashan, Swani Kanan Marar etc. They played the roles of Kushala Kumarans of Kathakali, essentially implying they played dual or twin roles. Shankaran Nambeesan died quite young, and unexpectedly. Due to the sudden death of Shankaran Nambeesan, his brother Narayanan decided to break away from the art as he could not continue without his brother playing the dual roles with him.

After their time we see the coming of Kalamandalam Gopi Ashan into the art. He was born in Kothachira and took to performing arts here. At the young age of 8, he learned the art of Thullal (another dance form) from Parameswaran Nambeesan, who, belonging to the village, was an expert at the art. He stayed there and learnt the art, receiving a Gurukula form of education. Leaving that artform, he began his training in Kathakali. He then joined Kerala Kalamandalam at the age of 13. Kerala Kalamandalam is a pioneer institute for performative folk and local arts. Established in 1930, it was initially a college which was later on given University status. He moved away from Kothachira due to this, and has lived in Mundur (Thrissur district) for three decades now. After rigorous training for 7 years at Kalamandalam, he taught at this institute for many years. He has been the most prominent face in the art form, acclaimed internationally as well. He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India. ⁶⁰

It is also important to detail the role of Kerala Kalamandalam Balasubramanian Ashan. He was born in Kothachira, much after the time of his predecessors in the art. His direction to Kathakali came from his father, both his parents wanted him to perform. His first introduction to the art

⁶⁰ Personal interview with Kalamandalam Gopi Ashan, age 85, taken on 13th Nov 2022

form was when he was only 8 years old, as he performed in an event at the Mana. He then joined Kalamandalam at the age of 13 where he learnt the art and further went on to teach there.

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Kathakali Paatu: In the art form as much importance is given to the dance, the same is to be given to the singing or Paatu. Kothachira is the village from where the famous singer Neelakantan Nambeesan hailed from. The Paatu is the song which tells the tale of the act which is being performed. They are supported by instruments like Elathalam and Chenda (a smaller version of Cymbals and drums respectively) Neelakantan Nambeesan was taught the artform by his older sisters. He went onto teaching the art at Kalamandalam. The present day Paatu singers all have learnt the art because of his legacy. His students who then went on to have students are the present day distinguished singers of the art. He died in 1985 after a successful career. His legacy is still honoured in Guruvayoor temple, observed as Kujeladinam, on 21st December, in his memory.

His family has been an important part of arts in Kothachira. He has five siblings all of whom are artists as well. His sisters were singers, and his younger brother was Parameswaran Nambeesan who was a Thullal artist, and the twin brothers Shankaran and Narayanan Nambeesan who were in the Kathakali field.

Madhalam: Among the most known names in the art of playing Madhalam is Kalamandalam Kuttynarayanan Ashan. Madhalam is a drum instrument played by hands, for Kathakali, Keli, and Thullal etc. There are mainly three types of Madhalams, namely Shudha Madhalam, Topi Madhalam and Veera Madhalam.⁶² His inspiration for the art came from Rama Warriar, a famous artist in Kothachira. His first step into the art came when the prominent people of the region decided that the Peringode School (where he was studying) has to have a competition for Panchavadyam (the musical fusion of five instruments Madhalam, Elathalam, Timila, Kombu and Idakkya). He began with the instrument Timila under the training of Valapal Chandra Marar. During his youth, the performance of Madhalam and Chenda was only limited to those belonging to higher castes in the temples. That is how he began his journey into Madhalam under Kulamangalath Narayanan Nair Ashan. He participated in the Kerala Youth festival where he won in the category of this art. The students who received first position earned a prize of being able to attend a summer vacation course in Kalamandalam, which he attended.

⁶¹ Personal interview with Kalamandalam Balasubramanian Ashan, age 67, taken on 13th Nov 2022

⁶² Personal interview of Kalamandalam Kuttynarayanan Ashan, age 58, taken on 13th Nov 2022

He also initially had interest in the art of Kombu (wind instrument). He attended Kalamandalam after his 10th grade. He studied for several years there, and was able to participate in many events under Appuni Nair.

Along with all this, it is vital to mention that among all the Principals of Kalamandalam, three of them hail from Kothachira. Kalamandalam Neelakantan Nambeesan, Kalamandalam Gopi Ashan and Kalamandalam Balasubramanian have all served as the Principal of this prestigious institution, making their small village very proud.

Other art forms: There were other art forms practiced in the village. For the instruments like Thakilu, which is a drum played while seated using fingers, there was an artist named Shankaran Nair. For Thullal, which was a dance form where the dancer uses witty lines to tell tales, there were artists like Kuttikrishnan Warriar, Parameswaran Nambeesan and others. For Timala, a small drum played with hands while placed on the side, there were artists like Kattamparamb Krishnankutty Marar, and Nelluvay Kuttan Marar gave fame to Kothachira. For Elathalam Vadakath Narayanan Nair was popular. For Kombu and Kuzhal, both being wind instruments, Palishery Nairs and Vengattu Narayanan Nair were respectively popular. There were artists for all forms art in Kothachira, for Melam (orchestra of instruments), Nadaswaram and dances as well. There was also the dance forms that belonged to the castes, like the Thiyyatu, Theyyam, Tara, Poothan etc. The womenfolk performed arts like Kaikotti Kali, and Nair women had the art form of Kinnam Kali.⁶³

Apart the visual arts, there were also the making of Chamayams. The Chamayams were decorations for the elephant's trunk. These décor clothes were made by hand. Earlier, there were only three main centres of production of these in Malabar region for this art form, one of which was in Kothachira. These were carried on the heads of the Nair men for long distances. They carried these decorations to wherever there was Purams around. The need for said Chamayams came from the presence of elephants in the village. To maintain them at the Mana, there were several skilled elephant tamers or Anapappans in this locality as well. They were acclaimed for their taming skills.

⁶³ Ibid 61

2.4 Architecture

Certain details must be acknowledged, those that one must be aware of while understanding architectural features of Kothachira, regarding the Mana, to the temple, to other structures like houses or public facilities.

Vaasthu Vidya (Thachu Shashtram) is considered to be Vedic architecture, not as a religious term, rather is associated with the science of understanding of nature. It is believed to be a mixture of science, astrology and astronomy. It aims to utilise the influence of the sun, moon and heat, earth's atmosphere, wind direction and other natural phenomenon along with the beliefs in astrology, to plan the design and construction of structures.⁶⁴

Naalukettu is a term used for a pattern of architecture, with four sets of room-complex, each set facing east, west, north or south. The homes of richer more affluent Namboothiris had Ettukettus, Pandranttu kettus and even Pathinaarukettus (each of them corresponding to numbers eight, twelve and sixteen). Illams invariably had more than one open well and a bathing pond, called Kulams. They also had Pathaayapuram (granaries or utility rooms) and Maalikas (rooms for guests).

Besides these we also need to understand the terms related to temples, terms like Srikovil or the sanctum sanctorum of religious idols, Pradakshinavari or the pathway tracing the structure of the temple, Chuttambalam having other rooms within it, Balikallu or a single rock quadrangle cut into the front of the temple, Kulams or tanks for religious bathing etc.

With these in mind it is easy to understand the architecture of the Mana, the various temples (Ayyappankaavu temple, Chirakkal Vishnu temple) and other structures of Kothachira.

Mana: Namboothiri homes are variously called Illam, Mana, or Madhom, with unclear distinction between them.⁶⁵ The main structure of the Kothachira Mana surrounds an Ettukettu. Ettukettus, as explained before, is a common feature of Namboothiri homes. Kothara Mana also has a Nadumuttom or inner courtyard. If this structure is added to the already present Ettukettu we would have to consider this Mana to be Pandrandukettu (based on twelve). The Mana is surrounded by greenery and has three floors in its structure. The Vaastu Vidya here can be considered to be a fine accomplishment of the Vidyakar. The Purathalam or frontal raised

⁶⁴ Vaastu Shashtra Encyclopedia contributors, 'Vaastu Vidya', Vaastu Shashtra, <https://www.vaastu-shastra.com/vastu-vidya.html>

⁶⁵ Nambudiripad, V N M, Some Namboothiri Illams, Namboothiris website, <https://www.namboothiri.com/articles/some-namboothiri-illams.htm>

area or external construct has Krishna figures sculpted onto the Mangalapalaga or the wooden structure here. The Mullathara, or rock cut structure for placing holy plants in a raised area, is seen in the Nadumuttom. Natural colours have been used to paint the Thatile Garudhan on the Mangalapalaga. The beams of the Mana are spiralled and each spiralled within the spirals, called as Piriyan Valagal. The Thekkini or South facing room has several pillars. Along with this a kitchen, Oottupura (dining hall), Agrashala, Kettus, 2 smaller Nadumuttoms, Talangal, 12 other rooms exist in this lavish Mana. The Northwest side of the property is raised and is referred to as Mukkumaliga, which is 4 stories high. The Thekkini Thara or floor is made of Vettukallu or red stone. There are 2 Padipuras facing south and west, with the southern one having similar features of those of a Maaliga. There used to be a Nadagashaala in front of the Mana, which can be imagined in its absence to have the same structure as that of the Kuthambalam in Kerala Kalamandalam. The idea of a Kuthambalam will be explained later. This Nadagashaala saw performances of Kathakali, Krishnanattam, along with the instruments. The artists of the Melam leave the Nadagashaala towards other places, while continuing their performance. This structure was demolished in 1991. Within the Mana there are several rooms which have religious importance. The Vadakinni or the North facing room have Rektheshwara Manikantanmar or idols which had daily evening rituals. There exists a Ganapati for the women folk to worship on special occasions in the Mana as well. Besides all these, the beautiful architecture here also includes large doors, spacious verandas, windows etc, all of which has now seen the historic importance in itself.

Outside the Mana, we see a temple to the right of the main building. This temple is private, meant for the people of the Namboothiri family. Between the Mana and this temple used to be a water body referred to as Kokarni. A Kokarni can be compared to a well. It appears to be a round chamber into the ground, with steps towards the area with water. It is neither a well nor a pond or Kulam. This is because it is not as deep to be considered a well, and much wider than the usual mouth of a well. But would have had as much of an expanse to be considered a pond either. The Kokarni in Kothara Mana was certainly a unique feature. It is a manmade structure with the steps made of rocks brought from elsewhere. It had several steps to reach the water, which was used for bathing and other activities. However its usage was limited to the members of the Namboothiri family at the Mana. The Kokarni got dark as one gets towards end of the stepwell, due to its depth. However, this structure does not exist anymore, as it was covered back up during the structural changes in recent times at the Mana.

Temple: The general architecture of a temple in Kerala needs to be understood in order to understand the structure of the temples in this village. According to H Sarkar, the temples in Kerala belong to three phases, Early Middle and Later. The main structures in these phases vary in the shape it follows. In the Early phase, there were four shapes namely square, rectangular, circular and apsidal. In the Middle phase, the elliptical shape comes into appearance. An inscription dating to 11th century, found at a Krishna temple believed to be constructed during the time of Kulashekara Alvar during the Ninth century, indubitably establishes the existence of an organized system of temple administration under the “assembly incharge of temple” or Tali.⁶⁶ This helps set the time period of organization of the temple to the ages of 8-11th centuries. It can hence be assumed that temples began to be constructed more after this time period.

The temple has five walled in areas, the sanctum sanctorum, the surrounding rooms, the wall pertaining the oil lamps, the outer walking paths and the main wall. There would be other idols placed around the Srikovil, in other holy rooms. There are areas within the second wall in used for many purposes, in rooms like the kitchen, wells, lobbies, platforms etc. The following description details the architecture found at the Chirakkal Vishnu temple.

The Srikovil is present in a circular shape, having the main Prathishta or idol as Vishnu. There are sculptures all throughout the circumference of the walls of the Srikovil, depicting various gods, all beautifully painted. There is a chute to drain water used in the rituals inside the Srikovil, made of carved stone, called Oovu. Around the Srikovil there is a passage way for the ritualistic rounds around the main idol. Carved into the floor are several Balipithas⁶⁷ which are laid down in all four cardinal directions. There is a well here as well. Directly in front of the Srikovil is the Mugha Mandapam. It is essentially a raised pillared platform used initially for the purpose of chanting of prayers or hymns by the Brahmins. The area beyond this is called a Chuttambalam, which is essentially a corridor having several rooms used for the related activities of the temple. They include the Tidapalli or the kitchen where the rice and ritualistic sweet offerings called Payasam is made. Other rooms here include the Mulayara where nine auspicious grains are kept to germinate, the idol rooms for Ganapati and the general corridors near the entrance meant for prayers. Right outside the main entrance is the Velakku Madathara, which is the third section of the temple. Here oil lamps run completely throughout the square

⁶⁶ Sarkar, H, An Architectural Survey of Temples in Kerala, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1978

⁶⁷ U and Pawar, Nisar and Dharmaraj, A Study on Architecture of Kerala Temples, Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education, 2017

walls. It is lit fully on special occasions. Also directly in front of the temple is the Balikallu and the Kodimaram. The Balikallu is a rockcut quadrangle which is next to a tower which is used to raise a flag on special occasions. The Balikallu is considered to be one of the most detail oriented structures within a temple. It would depict all aspects of the Srikovil on itself, from the four sided-doors of the Srikovil to the Padmam (a representation of a lotus flower on the top). The surface of a Balikallu is the same in all aspects as the structure inside the Srikovil where the actual idol is placed for worship. The Balikallu or Valiyabalikallu is said to embody all of the five elements or Panchabhoothams. Other than that there are two other idols in this temple, past the oil lamp wall. One is of Ayyappan, an idol brought from elsewhere. It is placed to the right from the direction of the main entrance. The other is of Shiva which is in another subsection within the temple. A peculiarity of it is that the well is placed directly in front of the idol room, as the belief is that the Shiva present here is one of bad temperament, and if angered the essence of the Lord Shiva would directly enter a cool well reducing the anger. There are rooms in the areas within the last wall, such as Oottupura. A small area between the main entrance and the other rooms was used as a place to perform art forms, referred to as Koothambalams. The main entrance is grand having several huge wooden pillars. Ahead of this entrance is the Kulam.⁶⁸ The Kulam is a vital part of not just the temple activities but also others.

The Ayyappan temple is different from the Vishnu temple with respects to the shape of the Srikovil. This temple has a square/rectangular Srikovil structure as compared to the Circular one seen at the Vishnu temple. Another aspect is the lack of Mughamandapam in front of the Srikovil. This temple also has a wider pathway around the temple, in comparison to the Vishnu temple. There is a structure within the compound outside the main temple which is used to collect orders from devotees for the conduct of Poojas.

An interesting fact about the Ayyappan idol here is that he is present along with his female partner and child, which is a rare sight in Kerala temples. This is the reason why marriage ceremonies can take place within the temple, which is usually not a practice in Ayyappan temples. The idol is believed to have been brought from Korattykaavu temple.⁶⁹

It is vital to note that the Ayyappankaavu temple is adjacent to another temple. Right beside it exists the Bhagavathi temple. Ahead of each temple is a structure called Erinji Tara, or a raised

⁶⁸ Personal interview of Sreekrishnan, present temple staff, age 47, taken on 18th Sept 2022

⁶⁹ Personal Interview of Unnikrishanan, Velichappaadu Kothachira, taken on 28th Dec 2022

platform around a tree, used by a particular section. This will be discussed ahead. The temples have similar features, however it has been well maintained and recently renovated.

Other structures: There are also a few other constructs in the village that need to be addressed. The main among these would be the Kulapera. It is a bathing hall adjacent to the Kulam. It was constructed under the Namboothiri family here. The structure, though presently demolished, was a marvel. It had sections divided for men and women. It had several floors within it. The banks of the Kulam was also divided with walls for the division of usage based on caste, called as Kadavu. An interesting aspect about such Kadavus was that there was one bay given specifically for the use of bathing elephants. It was referred to as Aanakadavu. The houses of other folk in Kerala follow the pattern of houses seen in the Northern side of Kerala. It has tiled roofs, red stone bricks, and depending on the affluence of the family, has multiple floors. The Maaligas, or guest houses which were detailed upon in the previous chapter also explains the architecture of Kothachira. The artisans, carpenters, labour, materials like wood, stone etc must have been procured from within the region, due to its striking similarities across all structures.

2.5 Position of the temple

The rise of temple as an important institution in Kerala, has undoubtedly been as a result of the political growth of the Brahmins in Kerala. It had been the centre of not merely the religious life of a village, but was rather a socio-cultural and politically important institution, during Medieval Kerala. It was vital in the economic activities of the region, as well as other aspects such as education, administration, employment etc. A typical village in Kerala could be seen developing around a temple in Medieval Kerala, Kothachira could be considered a village which encased this. Temple as we see has held an important position in the village. The two major temples which had been undertaken in this work, Chirakkal Vishnu temple and Ayyappankaavu have had its own importance in the locality. These temples have had its own contribution in the socio-cultural developments in the village.

The Chirakkal Vishnu Temple had been the temple under the direct control of the Namboothiris. They were having the position and strength in the village while having the power to oversee activities of the temple as well as the other temples under them. They had been the ones to construct several structures for the temple as well as others, such as the main wall at the temple and its grand entrance, the additional idol temples for the Lords Ayyappan and Siva, the Kulapera and so for the former, and the Manas, Maalikas, Pathayapuram, Oottupuram and others for the latter. Their affluence funded the activities of the temple, prior to the decline of

their political power in the region post-independence. The funding was used for the payment of salaries of various staff (in kind and cash), for the conduct of grand festivals such as the Puram, the daily activities of the temple etc.

The Ayyappankaavu temple on the other hand was crucial in being a uniting point of various castes. While even the area around the Chirakkal temple was off limits to people of the lower castes, this temple was a place of representation for everyone. The temple was a medium of interaction of the various groups in the society. The temple paved way for the people to demonstrate their occupations and position within the village, through their input in temple festivities. The temple was a place of social gathering and was necessary in the socio-political development of this village.

Both these temples were important in the cultural development of the people. The festivals not only gave an opportunity for the locals to express their artistic skill, but also gave chance for arts outside the village to penetrate into the cultural palette of the people. It held various performances on its ground, open for all to see, for activities like Baale (play), Melam, Kaavadi Aattam, Chakiyaar Kuthu, Kathakali etc.

Besides all this, the people there today continue to perform (directly or indirectly), the duties or Avakaashams of their predecessors. They do these out of respect for the ritual, faith and fear in the gods that their ancestors prayed to. The temple continues to exert importance in today's time. This is evident from the fact that the responsibility of overseeing the functions of the temple has been taken over by the common people of the village. They aim to preserve the cultural heritage of these temples. They continue to have faith and belief in the activities of the temple as one would have in the medieval times, however, without the divisions and social inequalities from before. Some in the village continue to perform their Kulathozil or jobs of their caste, to this day. All this implies the principal role the temple has played in the development of Kothachira village.

2.6 Agriculture

Agriculture is the major primary activity of Kerala. It is the largest district in Kerala and is more or less agrarian in nature. The district produces almost all types of food crops and cash crops and is considered to be the top producer in the state. A lot of the areas in midland Palakkad are more or less plain or flat, which is essentially very fertile and good for cultivation. Due to this, the district is known as the 'Granary of Kerala'. The major crops cultivated in this

district are paddy, coconut, tapioca, fruits, spices, vegetables etc. Majority of the people in this district are engaged in agriculture and its allied sector.⁷⁰

Due to its location in Palakkad, agriculture was another major occupation for the other groups in Kothachira. It played an important role in the economy of the region. The most grown crop was paddy, referred to as Nellukrishi. The produce was then given as Pattom to the Uralar and the Namboothiris at the Mana, which was collected via trusted managers of the land owners, referred to as Karyasthan. The harvests were thrashed and cleaned. An important attribute of this was that the higher castes who could use the Kulam at all times, were not allowed to use the facility when a harvest was being done nearby. This indicates the untouchability and unapproachability practiced in the village.

2.7 Other events in history

The history of Kothachira is linked to other events in the history of Malabar region. The social climate during the early twentieth century in Malabar was one of religious and territorial rivalries. The Mappila Rebellion of 1921 had been a major retaliation to not just the injustice from the hands of British. In fact it was mainly directed as a response to the tenurial practices of Malabar, under the powers of higher caste Hindu men.

The Muslims of Malabar, termed as Mappilas, accounted as the majority of the peasant class in the medieval times in Malabar. However, they had some relief during the invasions of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. But after the revival of the older tenurial systems at the hands of the British, they grew restless. The Mappila Outrages were deemed as religious fanaticism. However, the rebellion had been due to the long standing issues as well as the introduction of political movements like Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement.⁷¹

The history with Kothachira regarding this is that a Mappila soldier in the Rebellion had come all the way to Peringode, a nearby village. He confronted the head of the Poomulli Mana there, referred to as Aaram Thampuran, a monetary demand of a thousand rupees. The Aaram Thampuran explained that at present only half of that amount was available. Rejecting this, the Mappila allegedly threatened the Thampuran. It was believed he also had intentions of approaching the Kothara Mana as well.

⁷⁰ G S and Saravanan and, Shaji, Lekshmi and E and P K, Cropping Pattern of Palakkad District, Kerala, India, Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research, 2018, Vol. 5, Thiruvanthapuram

⁷¹ Nair, C Gopalan, The Moplah Rebellion, 1921, The Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1923

Upon discovering this an elder male family member of the Mana, found out that the Mappila had been informed of the presence of elephants at the entrance of the Mana. Calculating that the elephants were being used as a protection detail, and if approached would be rather detrimental to them, they decided not to move ahead with their plan of coming to Kothara Mana with the same demand.⁷²

This instance ties the history of Kothara with the general history of Malabar during the twentieth century as well. It also goes to show that the elephants at the Mana had a great role in the history here. It is also said that the whole village of Kothara has been a community very involved with these large creatures. It could be because of their presence in the village for a long period of time, which gave rise to several skilled elephant tamers. The statement goes that “*Kotharakarku aane pedi illa*” meaning that the people of Kothachira do not fear elephants.⁷³

As we see the village of Kothachira has been an exemplary sample in understanding not merely the historical developments but also the cultural evolution of not just the region, but to an extent of the whole state of Kerala as well. The village can be taken as a way to get in-depth vision into how a typical community in a temple oriented village would have been during the zenith of Later Medieval Kerala. It would give insights into the systems of power as it would have been before the arrival of the British governments. The village also offers an array of culturally rich heritage. The various art forms, traditions and systems in place would be beneficial in understanding the root level life of people in Kerala. One would come across various aspects that are chief in such a society like the temple, its activities, the general events in the village as well as the contributions the village makes in enriching the culture of the state as a whole.

Though there has been an understanding on the situation of the village as it had been previously, the present day situation remains a topic to be discussed. The following chapter aims to delve into this very matter. It provide some grasp into the current situation in the area regarding facilities like schools, hospitals, electricity, transport and other amenities. It would deal with the present day situation of the Namboothiri family, the other castes and their position with respect to employment, accessibility to the various fields of life, religious stand points and so on. It would also help understand the decline of the temple, the loss of land due to governmental activities and other newer cultural systems.

⁷² Ibid 17

⁷³ Ibid 61

CHAPTER III

TRANSITION OF LIFESTYLE IN KOTHACHIRA

Kothachira, known as Kothara, is called as a cultural hub in the nearby regions. As the previous chapters have explained, the village of Kothachira is situated in central Kerala, at the borders of Thrissur and Palakkad. The village is located at 10.7239° N and 76.1189° E coordinates, and is seen to have a tropical climate due to the extensive vegetative cover. The region is at 12 meters elevation from sea level. The village is connected by road to the towns of Kunnankulam (situated in Thrissur) and Pattambi (situated in Palakkad). The village is also near the borders of Malappuram, this would explain the reason for the arrival of the Namboothiri family to this location.

The village of Kothachira has seen several changes over the many years. It has undergone differences with respect to its political systems, agrarian practices, social infrastructures, cultural activities and so on. These changes were made possible from the various authorities that have existed in its arena. The people of Kothachira have been seen to adapt to all the situations that have come its way, with grace and pride. The people remain loyal to the village even as they move out due to circumstances, showing their bond to this village.

The changes of political powers in Kerala, and India as a whole, has most definitely affected the political aspects of the village of Kothachira. The power structure here until the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956, was on the basis of caste divisions. The highest castes remained in power and they run the social, political and religious institutions of the village. This power order had remained for many centuries before the Indian freedom struggle paved way for a secular sovereign state. This change enforced abolishment of caste based as well royal power structures within the parameters of the country, including the Namboothiri family here.

This change had in turn changed the various other aspects of societal development here. This chapter deals with the land reclamation in post-independence era, current position and situation of the Namboothiri family and the Mana, changes in the temple activities, the present day caste systems, various new infrastructures that have been introduced into society, and so on. Let's delve into these in detail.

3. 1 Land reclamation

The post-independence Kerala saw its first elections in year 1957. The laws were still being formed in all states and Kerala was no different. Communist government in Kerala, led by EMS

Namboodiripad had come into power on April 5, 1957. This government took many pioneering steps to further people's interests through its policies in agriculture, industry, education, public health, public distribution system, social security measures, decentralisation of power, police policy, administrative reform etc. The people of Kerala had a big hand in the formation and execution of these policies. These policies of the Communist government unleashed a process that brought about a shift in the balance of class forces in the state in favour of vast sections of the poor. Their most important contribution was in the sphere of agrarian reforms. According to the Agrarian Policy Statement, an ordinance was passed on April 11th (just six days after forming the government) prohibiting all evictions of tenants, sub-tenants and occupants of homestead land on any ground including failure to pay rent. It was also able to prevent landlords and others from resorting to illegal practices such as transfer of ownership. The new legislation defined 'tenant' to include not only tenants but sub-tenants and every authorised or unauthorised occupant of a small patch of land on which a hut had been built. All such tenants were given fixity of tenure and could not be evicted under no circumstance. The land that was illegally taken from some tenants was also restored. The rent to be paid by them was substantially reduced. They could now pay the fair rent fixed as per the provisions of the legislation. They would also be able to purchase the proprietary rights of the land they cultivated, by paying a comparatively lesser amount which was calculated on the basis of fair rent. Due to density of population and the shortage of land, the Agrarian Relations Act provided for a low ceiling of land and made provisions for distribution of ceiling surplus land to the landless and poor peasants through the involvement of popular committees. Another important provision was that representatives would be involved in the proper implementation of these. Committees of the Communist Party, Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Workers Union at all levels from the state to the village level were engaged in the process of consultation, conflict resolution and reconciliation for framing the provisions of the law. The wide success of this policy was because of genuinely collective and participative effort.⁷⁴

This policy affected the Namboothiri family in Kothachira as well. There was land reclamation from their hands to the farmers they once taxed. The estimates of how much land was lost from their hands is around 125 hectares.⁷⁵ The land that was taken were croplands in the village area. In some of the land that was taken, there has been plantations of Acacia trees. This policy had

⁷⁴ Pillai, S Ramachandran, 'EMS Namboodiripad and the Communist Government of Kerala', The Marxist, <https://www.cpim.org/marxist/200902-ems-srp.pdf>

⁷⁵ Ibid 56

brought the financial trouble to this family. The previously luxurious lifestyle could not be followed through now. This caused the temple activities in the Chirakkal Vishnu temple to drastically fall. They stopped maintaining elephants as much as before too due to lack of funding. Many of the structures they constructed like the Padipuram, Pathayapuram, Maaligas, Kulapera at the Kulam, and to an extent the main building of the Mana itself has been demolished to the lack of maintenance. Their decline in power in the village could hence directly be associated with the land that they lost, along with the change in power hierarchies based on caste. This policy hence played an important role in the history of the village.

3.2 Present situation of the Namboothiri family

As we can see, they have faced a significant change of lifestyle in the last century. They were at one point the highest group in the village, having religious, political, administrative duties which was delegated to respective castes, as they remained in power. However, the scenario changed vastly after the governmental policies which ensured equality to all irrespective of caste, creed, religion, sex, age, occupation etc. This reduced their influence in the village and reduced their abilities in the village. However, it is noteworthy that the people still respect their family heads, by addressing them as Thampuran-Thamburatti. Their present situation can be understood by looking at their present generations and the condition of the Mana.

Generations or Thaavazhis

In the first chapter, the generations that worked to develop the Namboothiri family to the way it is today have already been discussed. They were in the first, second and third generations. However, the present oldest generation of this family falls with the fourth generation. The present family of the Kothara Manakkar are mentioned below.

The fourth generation begins with Narayanan Namboothiripad who took charge as the head of the family and his wife is Ganga Antharjanam from Kizhakiniyath Mana. Then Raman Namboothiripad who married Subadhra Antharjanam from Parakyattu Mana. After him we see Thri vikraman Namboothiripad who married Sreedevi Antharjanam from Muthirangattu Mana. Another male sibling among them died young, named Raman Namboothiripad. Their sisters were Savithri Antharjanam, Devaki Antharjanam, and Nangayya Antharjanam who were respectively married to Nambathu Mana, Thavanoor Mana and Parakyattu Manas. Another male sibling, Jathavedan Namboothiripad died young as well.

The rest of this generation are Vasudevan Namboothiripad who became the head of the family, and his wife Sreedevi Antharjanam hails from Thavanoor Mana. Then comes Narayanan Namboothiripad who is married to Parvathi Antharjanam from Chovallur Mana. Then Krishnan Namboothiripad and his wife Vasantha Antharjanam from Mylangodathu Mana. Govindan Namboothiripad is next who married Saumini Antharjanam from Palonathu Mana. Their sisters are Sreedevi Antharjanam, Unniyama Antharjanam, Ganga Antharjanam, and Nangeli Antharjanam who were married to Kunnapilly Mana, Karuthedathu Mana, Pozhathil Mana, Thavanoor Mana and Thirumanasheri Kotta respectively. Two of their siblings passed away.

The fifth generation begins with Narayanan Namboothiripad who married Baby. The sisters are Saraswati from Kunnapilly Man and Sujatha from Perumpilly Mana. Their two siblings passed away. Then we see Unnikrishnan Namboothiripad who married Meera from Vettikattur Mana. Then comes Narayanan Namboothiripad who married Saraswati from Paattur Mana. Vijayan Namboothiripad who married Praseetha from Mannapilly Mana. Their sisters are Jayashree married to another Mana, Vrintha married to Melepaatu Mana and another sister died Vijayasree. Then we see Vasudevan Namboothiripad who married Jyothi from Muthedathu Mana. Then Narayanan Namboothiripad who married Athira from Kakkanapally Mana. Then we see Thrivikraman Namboothiripad who married Ashwathy from Padinjarepaatu Mana. Then we see a sister Smitha who married to Parakyattu Mana. Then we see Vasudevan Namboothiripad who married Rekha from Pazheyadathu Mana. Then Anil Namboothiripad who married Navya from Kolathapilly Mana. Their sisters are Bindu, Nisha, and Praseetha married to Thazhampara Mana, Karuthepara Mana and Telekattu Mana respectively. Their sister Pratyusha died young. Then we see Vivek Namboothiripad and sister Kavitha who married to Pullencheri Mana. And then we see Jayakrishnan Namboothiripad who has a sister Sreejitha who married to Nila Mana.

The sixth generation has the youngest members of the family at present include Ghanashyam, Gayathri, Anirudh, Aryananda, Nikul, Navaneetha, Bhavayami, Ardhra, Aarsha, Aryan, Swatik, Adidev, Ananya and Kaashinathan. These are the present generations of the Mana.

Mana

The Mana is currently in a very dilapidated condition. The other structures like the Padipuras were demolished in recent years as it became very hard to maintain such old structures. Presently the Mana has the main structure remain with most of its features sound. However,

the Ootupura in the Mana along with some external structures have been demolished completely. The Padipuras have also been taken down, and so has the Kokarni been filled in. The Kulapera has also been removed, though the partitions of the bays or Kadavus remain to this day. The Nadagashaala has also been cleared off, where now a flat open area remains. The area where the Pathayapura used to be, has now been converted into the space for the home of one of the members of the younger generations. The second oldest Thampuran lives right next to the Mana, in a modern home. It is interesting to know that the structure Mannumkatta remains today, though renovations and modifications have been made. The central structure for the building has been kept intact. Though these structures show wear and tear, their charm never fails to awe an average bystander.

3.3 Revival of the temples

As seen in the previous chapters the temple has had an important position in the region for quite some time. The temple was a central institute in the village, having not merely religious importance. However, the changes that have happened, in the country and consequently this village, has had its impact on the temples here as well. To understand this one must look at the temple entry shifts, the initiative of people to improve the temples, the introduction of the Velichapaadu and the changes in architecture. Let's understand these in detail.

Temple entry

There have been many struggles seen across Kerala for the rights of the lower castes. This was also seen in the case of temple entry for the lower castes into temples across Kerala. These struggles can be seen to culminate in the Temple Entry Proclamation of Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma in the year 1936. The socio-political situation in Kerala during 1920s and 1930s developed further with Indian National Congress promoting the cause of temple entry. In 1924 the Congress organized the vigorous 20 month long Satyagraha at the Vaikam temple with the simple aim of securing the right to use the approach roads of the temple for the untouchables. Because the campaign lasted for so long and Gandhi directly got involved into the case, the temple authorities were forced to come to a settlement by which all the approach roads, leaving the eastern one, of the temple were thrown open to all people irrespective of caste and community. The second struggle under KPCC against caste based pollution, but now

to get the temple open to all Hindus was organized in 1931-32, in the course of the C.D.M, at the Guruvayoor temple in Malabar.⁷⁶

As we see that the temple entry rights for the lower castes happened with great struggle and took a long time to come into practice. However the situation in Kothachira is quite different. The temples here, chiefly the Chirakkal Vishnu temple, had been strictly off limits to the lower castes. The Mana was a few hundred meters away from the temple, hence there is a straight road that connects the two. This path was also inaccessible to the lower castes in the society here. The Ayyappankaavu temple premises were inaccessible to the lower castes, but they were allowed to walk and perform rituals around the temple. This was bound to change as the region became a part of the state where political consciousness was very high.

The Chirakkal Vishnu temple had very strict rules regarding entry. The innermost parts of the temple was only accessible to Namboothiris. The area immediately outside of this was accessible to both Namboothiris and Ambalavasis. The Nairs were allowed only on the outside of the temple, and as explained before, lower castes had no access to this temple. The beginnings of the temple entry struggles can be seen when members of a lower caste were seen using the path that was inaccessible to them. The road was considered as private property and this in turn caused a legal battle to ensue regarding the same. The Ezhava caste members like Malapurathe Kunjikirishnan, Dr. Ravi Balraman and others used the smaller roads, which was the part of the temple property (privately owned) to reach the other side. This was the matter of the case against them. The legal battle was pursued for a while. All this while, the Ayyappankaavu temple was going around asking for funds to conduct temple activities, to which one of the Ezhava members responded that they would only give away the money if the case against them was withdrawn. This is how the case took turns.⁷⁷

In 1985, the temple Gopuram was constructed at Chirakkal Vishnu temple. This is the time when the case mentioned took place. After all the turmoil, a concerned members of society decided to approach the Namboothiri family head, Mahanthampuram, to grant permission to develop the Vishnu temple. The request was accepted on the terms that the money needed to construct it would be provided by the Thampuram himself. The wood needed for construction was taken from the forests under the Namboothiri family. The situation of the temple improved in this manner, from the dilapidated situation it was in. During an event, while Kottu

⁷⁶ S, Dr. Ambili, Temple Entry Movements In Kerala- A Study, International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts, Vol. 8, 2020

⁷⁷ Ibid 56

(instrumental performance) was happening, the East entrance or Gopuram was opened to let the Keli in (Keli is explained in chapter 2). The Nairs present wished to enter the temple premises but hesitated due to the rigid system that had been practised so far. When the Thampuran was asked to grant permission, he sternly replied that being in the position he is in, he cannot knowingly agree to it, however if they do how they please he would not object it. It is in this manner the lower castes got permission in the temple. The Nair group then insisted that now that they are able to enter the temple, they should be able to financially aid the temple as well. Gradually the rigid systems began to disappear and it is now in the situation it appears to be in. In this manner, a major clash to get rights of temple entry was avoided. They were able to get ahead of a major political movement from happening and grant entry to all.⁷⁸

Hence we see that the temple entry in Kothachira was much later than the other movements for the same in Kerala. However it was also able to avoid any major problems in its journey to provide the right of temple entry to all. It was rather peaceful process in comparison to that seen in Vaikom or Guruvayoor. The present day temple allows for the entry of lower castes as well as the open usage of the path in front of the temple. The temple continues to be a peaceful place of worship to this day.

Velichappaadu

Velichappadu translates to “one who reveals light”, and is considered as mediator between a diety and the devotees. They are also referred to as “Komaram”. Bhagavati (Devi) temples have some rituals which are associated with the Velichappadu. It is also interesting to note that a male Velichappadu is more common, though there are some cases where females also take the role.⁷⁹ A Velichappaadu appears to have long untied hair, dressed in red, have an anklet called Chilambu, a sword and have ash and sandalwood (Bhasmam and Chandanam). The belief is that the spirit of the Devi enters the Velichappaadu and he speaks to the devotees to and fro. Their conversations are usually difficult to decipher, it might be a frenzied foretell or a solution to the problem.

There was no Velichappaadu at Kothachira prior to 1997. The ritual of Velichappaadu is also referred to as Pottan Chaattam. The Velichappaadu here is Sri Unnikrishnan, who is now associated with the Bhagavathi temple in front of Ayyappankaavu. He had been a vegetarian

⁷⁸ Personal interview of E M Venugopal, member of committee of Chirakkal temple, age 55, taken on 18th Sept 2022

⁷⁹ Paliath, Sreekumar, ‘Velichappadu – The Oracle’, Atyukta, <https://www.atyutka.com/velichappadu-the-oracle/>

from the beginning. He had felt the urge of being the Velichappaadu as an inner calling. The Avarodikyal or appointment as the Velichappaadu was done by Mahanthampuran. There are many rituals before appointment. The Tantri would come and the ritual of Kalashamaadal is done. After this the Tantri gives permission to be the Velichappaadu. This was a turning point in the Ayyappankaavu temple. This caused the income change into the institution. The ritual continues with its glory at this temple till today.

Initiatives of the people

Both the temples have seen its revival due to the initiatives of the people in Kothachira. The temples had been in very poor conditions due to lack of funds from the Namboothiri family, since their fall of power. The temple activities had become merely ritualistic with just the main poojas being done, the puram was not as grand anymore, and the structures of the temples began to fall over time as it lacked maintenance. Both are now functioning under the oversight of public committees. The structures at the temple was renovated with money donated by the locals in whatever small fashion they could do. The Puram activities were also funded in such a manner. The interesting aspect here is that they volunteered to raise the status of the temples to its previous glory. They wanted to have the functioning here go as per how it was before.

Architecture

There have been significant improvement in the architecture of both the temples from the time they existed to today. The Namboothiri family was responsible for the bringing of the Ayyapa and Siva deity in the Chirakkal temple. The Siva idol is now surrounded by structures that did not previously exist, with a Tidapalli, Chuttambalam and outer walls. However the construction has not been completed due to lack of funds, even though locals have contributed what they can. The Ayyappankaavu temple has had much more success in that aspect. The structure has recently been completely renovated with each small aspect being funded for construction by different people in the village, at times without religious barriers. The names of the donators have been written on the pillars, walls etc. But not all is kept well, the loss of the Kulapera and the slow yet visible deterioration of the Vishnu temple is one that pains devotees. However, efforts are now being made by the committee to improve the status.

Temple systems

There have been changes or lack thereof seen at both temples. Most of the temples in Kerala came under the Devaswom Board, a government controlled institution that overlooks temple

activities. However these two temples in Kothachira did not fall into this. The temple poojas had also almost come to a halt due to lack of funding in the post-independence time. Now the temple activities are overlooked by public committees. This is a drastic change from the scenario that lower castes who could not so much so as walk near these temples, are able to actively partake in the functioning of the temple. Their traditional castes do not come into play (except for jobs that relate directly with the idol) and the power of the Namboothiris have reduced in relation to temple functioning.

3.4 Caste systems in present day Kothachira

The caste systems previously practised in the village was very rigid. The Jati system, as previously explained kept certain groups in power while others remained in poverty and struggles. The lower castes had to follow very strict rules regarding the unjust practice of untouchability and unapproachability. They were not allowed anywhere near the Vishnu temple, and not even access the paths in front of it. The road that leads from the Mana to the temple, cuts across a major connecting road. When the lower castes had to cross the road while a member of the Namboothiri family was moving along that way, they must stop and bow until the path was clear. Similarly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, no one was supposed to use the Kulam when harvesting was being done by the lower castes. Besides this, temple entry took many years before becoming a reality. Even at Ayyappankaavu temple, where all the castes had Avakaasham, they were denied entry. There was strict restrictions on temple activities as well, based on castes. The serving order of food offerings given to the devotees at Chirakkal Vishnu temple was based on caste. The Namboothiris were served first, then the Ambalavasis, then Nairs and if anything remains then to those lower. Before, if a lower caste member wanted to get a ritual performed in the temple, they would approach the Ambalavasi group, pay the necessary amount and it is them who get the ritual done. The offerings that come due to the ritual was taken by the Ambalavasis and given to the lower castes at the homes of the higher cast amongst the two. The rigid caste system even became a matter of legal dispute at one point.

However, there is no more caste based rigidity in the society at present. There is no more untouchability or unapproachability. Everyone has access to every public place in the village. The occupational patterns have changed drastically as well. Now everyone is free to pursue their interests. Even though the unjust practices do not remain today, the value of the caste they belong is still respected. This especially visible in the case of the Thampurans of the

Namboothiri family who still get the same respect as they did before. Temples are now open to all and they remain to be an important part of the culture in the village. Caste, hence can be said, does not hold up barriers as it once did in Kothachira.

3. 5 Current infrastructure in Kothachira

The small village of Kothachira has come a long way since the era of reign of the Namboothiri family. A lot of changes to the polity, economy, infrastructure, societal norms among others have occurred in the village, over the span of the years since Indian Independence. It is vital to note that though the changes have been happening slowly over a long period of time, the developments in the village today is visible evidently.

The main aspects of change can be observed in the availability of infrastructure in the village. The bygone era in this region saw a bleak presence of major facilities, such as schools, medical expertise, transport facilities, electricity, libraries etc. An understanding of the present day situation would help in creating a viewpoint on the transformation that has happened in the society here.

Area

A Taluk is a local administrative unit, considered to be a subdistrict within an area of a District in a state, including many villages within it. Panchayat is the name of the local government system in India. The Panchayat system covers the village level (Gram Panchayat), clusters of villages (block Panchayat) and the district level (District Panchayat).⁸⁰ The PINcode of a place is a six digits long number of which the first digit reflects region, second the sub-region, third the sorting district, and last three represent the post office code. India has nine such PIN zones.⁸¹

Kothachira belongs to the Ottapalam Taluk in Palakkad District. It comes under the jurisdiction of the Nagalasheri Panchayat of the Ottapalam Taluk. The Nagalasheri Panchayat has around 17 Wards under its control. Among these 17, the Wards corresponding to numbers 11 through 14 are considered to be a part of the village of Kothachira. The pincode or zipcode for some parts of this village is 679535, for the service of India Post, while the other areas have 680543.

⁸⁰ Government Mechanisms, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India

⁸¹ Website Contributors, 'Details of Post Office Kothachira, Palakkad', PINcode. net .in, <https://pincode.net.in/KERALA/PALAKKAD/K/KOTHACHIRA>

This is a wide turn from the area described to be Kothachira prior to the formation of the State of Kerala and its consequent administrative designs. Now it comprises of only a small area under the larger group in Nagalasheri Panchayat.

Population

The population of the entire village prior to Independence would be very hard to estimate. But from merely the fact that Kothachira had a self-sufficient system, it can be assumed that it had a strong enough number for population, who would have been belonging to various groups including the Manakkal, Ambalavasis, Nairs including those involved in trades, accounting for the Namboothiri family, temple activities etc, artisans, carpenters, metal workers, farmers and others. This is evident from the presence of several job based caste divisions in society here, whose descendants still live here.

The present day situation, however, is much different. A centralised and decentralised method of administration has made it viable for population checks. The population in Kothachira in today's timeline is around 7000 people.⁸² This population consists of members belonging three of the major religions, Hindu Christian and Islamic faith, of various castes within the Hindus. An important aspect to note about this is that Christian population is very few in number. Only a few families of this faith exist even today, and they had migrated here over time.

Agriculture

Agriculture has been the backbone of the economy in Kothachira for centuries. The production of grains, vegetables and other food produce has been the main source of income for the majority of the people in the village. The agrarian sector had been taxed by the Namboothiri family, and the many developments in the region happened due to this income flow. The main produce was, as explained in the previous chapter, rice or Nellikrishi. This is a staple in the diet of the residents in this village. Due to poverty and lack of availability of produce for all, any food item that was removed from the temple premises was taken by others with much enthusiasm. However situations have improved by a large scale in the village.

The main items of agricultural production in modern day Kothachira are rice (Nellu), areca nut (Kaungu), coconut (Thengu) rubber, cashew nut, nutmeg (Jathikya), and other spices (Sughandadravyangal).⁸³ The agrarian sector in the society today faces several issues, the most

⁸² Ibid 56

⁸³ Ibid 56

important one being the gradual lack of interest in the field by today's generation. Less and less people are involved in the agriculture field as years go by. The reason for this can be understood as the improvement in education and job opportunities in the village, this topic will be discussed further in the chapter. Another major reason is the failure of crops due to natural calamities like drought and floods. This incidence of repeated failure has reduced the number of farmers willing to re-enter the agrarian sector. The problem of animals ruining crops is yet another reason for the decline in farming activities in Kothachira.

Schools

The yesteryears in this region had seen different forms of education being passed down to the next generation. Most of the castes would teach the next generation the Kulathozil or caste occupation, the Ambalavasis teaching garland making to children, or the Nairs passing on their knowledge on how to manage the activities of the Mana and so on. Apart from this the teaching of art forms has also been very important in the village, with it being taught in the Mana or temple or within homes. Knowledge was also passed on from the religious events or rituals. The system of Gurukula was seen in the case of teaching art forms like Kathakali. Hence we see that education in pre-independent Kothachira was based on religious, occupational or cultural basis, rather than education for the total development of the next generation.

Now however the systems have changed completely. There are two schools in the village. They are a government run Lower Primary government school (L.P school) in the northern parts of the village and an Upper Primary government school (U.P school) in the Southern parts of the village. For education beyond these years the people of the region need to depend on the schools in Peringode, which is a nearby village. No higher secondary or college level educational institutions exist here presently. The schools that are present, however, have been conducting camps and other activities for the promotion of knowledge in aspects like environmental protection (plastic disposal and recycling) and other current issues the world is facing. These camps help give children opportunities and exposure to different fields.

Transport facilities

In the past the most common way of moving around was walking. There was long distance trade of decorative articles used on elephants during festivals called Chamayams (mentioned in chapter 2) which was carried out on the backs of Nair men who would walk to faraway places for its sale. There were only very few families which had its own vehicle prior to the developments in public transport. Previously, one would have had to walk 3-4 kilometres to

the nearest bus stop to travel. However, now bus service passes by here. These buses would reach nearby towns from where travel to faraway lands is made possible. The buses there now go to places like Guruvayoor, Kootanadu, Pattambi and others.

Medical facilities

The traditional medical treatment of Kerala is Ayurveda, and Kothachira too has this tradition in its tale. The village folk have been relying on the trusted hands of Baalan Vaidyar, who is an Ayurvedic practitioner. The village presently has an Ayurvedic dispensary to meet the needs of the region. There are clinics in nearby regions. Apart from this the village has Dr. Jayaprakash, an MBBS doctor.

Electricity

The only source of heat and light in the village was fuelwood until the electrification of the region. Even today many of the houses practice dual method of heating with fuelwood and gas stoves. The streets were not having any streetlamps or other light sources, and the only was to have small kerosene lamps or fire torches. However after the independence and the consequent developmental activities, the introduction of electricity has been seen here as well.

During the early phases of the establishment of electricity boards of the state, there was the scheme of Minimum Guarantee, which basically meant that the more electricity that was used, the less it would cost for its set up. Under this scheme, Kothachira became electrified in the 1970s. The initiative was taken by the father of a school teacher (Murali Maashu) in the Kothachira. Their family lived next to the Ayyappankaavu temple, from where they initiated the activities for the establishment of electricity lines. After this gradually all houses in Kothachira was light up with electricity.⁸⁴

Library

There was no concept of a library in Kothachira before 1970s. The Kothachira library is situated in the central part of the village near the Ayyappankaavu temple. The library is amongst the most important structures in present day Kothachira. It was constructed under the initiative of the same man who brought in electricity to Kothachira. He was a social worker and an enthusiastic farmer. He was also the one to introduce the farming methods of Sheemakonna in the village.

⁸⁴ Ibid 56

The library was constructed in 10-15 cents of land given freely by the head of the Namboothiri family in the Mana, who is referred to as Thampuran. Prior to this, during the initial days of the library's operation it was maintained at the building owned by Rama Warriar. After the land was given, a tiled roof structure was constructed to be used as the library. In 1995, for the silver jubilee celebration of the library, the building was renovated. Now, more recently, the structure was completely renovated. This was done in relation to Appukuttan Maashu, a political figure in the region. An auditorium was also constructed near to the library done in connection with the late Sri Narayanan's memory. It was named as TSM Memorial Hall, and it has an open auditorium structure. However the readership in recent years have gone now vastly. Before the boom of online sources, people referred to the books in the library very eagerly. Now however the situation is different.

3.6 Jobs and Occupation

The occupational pattern had been based on caste since medieval times in the village. The various castes would follow their hereditary jobs (Kulathozil) their predecessors had been doing. The higher castes followed jobs that were related to administration and temple activities. The lower castes provided service jobs that were in various fields like farming or carpentry. The lower castes could not even approach the areas of the higher castes, much less work in other fields of interest. This rigid occupational pattern has undergone drastic change in the recent years. Now, caste is not the basis for the selection of means of livelihood. The change can be attributed to the political shift in not merely the village, but the country as a whole.

The present occupational trend is much more modern. Due to education and political awareness, people prefer to have jobs in multiple fields. During the 1970s-80s, there was a rise in the entry of people into government sector, notably into military services. There was a striking increase in people joining army, navy or administration of armed forces, state government sector and so on. This could be due to the stability these jobs provide with regards to job guarantee and salary payment. Another factor to consider with this change is that now people of any caste could partake in the administrative, protection or political duties, which was deemed to be jobs only meant for the higher castes in the yesteryear. The other fields include teaching, IT fields, corporate jobs and self-owned businesses. These jobs require education or skill based knowledge and this was now a much more accessible and profitable means of livelihood than their hereditary jobs. There exists no caste barriers with regard to this in the village in today's time.

With regard to industries that might have boomed up in the area, there two that can be seen in the village. One of these is a quarrying industry. Since the region has elevation variation in different regions, quarry is a suitable industry. The quarry here is for granite. This industry is very harmful for the environment due to the deforestation and landslide problems. The other industry here is the fish oil company. The industry faced several protests and backlash against it due to the pollution it caused to the air and the environment of Kothachira. The results of this only decreased the intensity of the air pollution, rather than stop it.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, there is a decline in farming activities in Kothachira due to the troubling issues created by animals in farmlands. The reason for this is due to the social forestry done in the village. The term ‘Social Forestry’ was first used in 1976 by the National Commission on Agriculture constituted by Government of India. Since then Social Forestry is being implemented in India with the aim of taking the pressure off the forests and making use of all unused and fallow lands. Government forests that are close to human habitations which have degraded over the years due to human interferences also needed to be afforested. Social Forestry also aims at raising plantations by the common man so as to meet the growing demand for timber, fuel wood, fodder, etc, thereby reducing the pressure on the traditional forest area.⁸⁵ The social forestry forests in Kothachira have given home to animals like Wild pigs, monkeys, peacocks and more. These creatures eat away the crops in the farmlands. They are very hard to get rid of, even after the use of firecrackers, they remain to be an issue in the region.

Amidst all these new jobs and occupation it is interesting to also note that some families continue to practice their hereditary job. These include farming families, artisan families and garland making families. They have received education as well, but remain with the jobs that was practised earlier. This is a rather peculiar case because it proves how some things have remained unchanged in the village along with some temple activities which are also being continued the way it has been. These altogether give an idea into the jobs and occupational aspect of Kothachira.

3.7 Stance of the people

The people have proven time and again that the village is central to their lives. This continues to be the case even as they have moved out. Many had left the region in pursuit of jobs, but

⁸⁵ Kerala Forest Department, ‘Social Forestry Wing’, Kerala Forest Department Website, <https://web.keralaforest.in/class-social-forestry-wing/>

have chosen to settle back here after retirement. Some have tried and failed to do so, even though they wish it. They speak highly of their small village, and take pride in all its heritage. People also place great value to the temple and its activities. They actively partake in its organisation, participation and celebration. Some of the rituals are done by the certain caste members assigned to it by Avakaasham, sometimes out of fear of ill happenings befalling them if they failed to do so. Others gladly perform the various tasks with honour and esteem. The familial systems, however, have started to change quite a bit. From being almost exclusively joint families, people are now splitting up as families and moving to nuclear homes. Some families remain as joint families. The Puram or other celebrations are the events for the whole village, irrespective of religion, caste, age or gender. We see that they no longer follow the caste system as heavily as before even though it still plays a part in everyday lives, such as in the matters of marriage. At least the bad practices have slowly reached its climax over the last few decades. The patterns of architecture have also changed with times, with homes being demolished and reconstructed in a modern fashion. The food habits of the people have gotten more progressive with time, as dire poverty is not seen commonly anymore. Hence we see that the people of the village and the village itself has progressed slowly but steadily over the past many years.

This gives us an all-around image of the present day situation in the village. We see that there have been developments in the technological aspects of the village, removal of certain unjust practices, the revival of the temple, the shift in job opportunities and much more. Hence we see a clear picture of how the village is today.

CONCLUSION

Medieval Kerala can clearly be understood as one that was dominated by the upper caste Hindus who practically ruled the entire expanse of the state, as smaller political units, such as villages, converging as one. The base of the political authority was at the village, which was mostly in and around a Hindu temple maintained by said upper caste. In that context, this work has exclusively dealt with the historical, political, cultural and social aspects of the life in a temple village in Palakkad, called Kothachira. The village is located in the central regions of Kerala, and it shares fair resemblances with the culture seen in the Malabar regions of bygone era. During the course of research and its analysis, it has become evident there exists a modernized extension of the culture of medieval Kerala in this small village, making it a unique case study to understand the socio-political and cultural situation that must have been there in medieval era of Malabar or Kerala to an extent.

This work has been completed as five sections with the second through fourth concerning with the actual study of the subject matter. The first chapter deals with the historical analysis of the Namboothiri family that held control over the locality over the last few centuries. It helped give a glimpse on the relations of this family with the Samudiri or Zamorin of Kozhikode. The chapter helped understand the position of the Namboothiri family in Kothachira at Vengattoor or Kothara Mana during the prestigious Maamangam festival that used to happen in Malabar. It also covered the aspects of the lineage and family background of this Namboothiri family, along with their socio-cultural practices.

The second chapter of this work dealt with the cultural aspects of the region. Kothachira is said to be the home of a very rich culture regarding performing and fine arts, architecture, festivals and more. This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the temple activities of the major temples, including the grand festivals these temples conduct. It also delves into the major art forms that have been practiced here like Kathakali, Kathakali Paatu, instruments like Madhalam, Chenda and others, and the decorative art of making Chamayams. Another understanding derived from this chapter is regarding the architecture of Mana, temples etc.

The third chapter deals with the present scenario of the village. The political shift during post-independence period brought several changes in the village, which are understood through this chapter. The land reclamation policy in Kerala causing loss of land under the control of the Namboothiri family is one of the major changes. Other than that, temple entry for lower castes,

development in matters of electricity, library, agriculture, medicine, transport and so on are also understood in this section of the work.

The work has, to an extent, been successful in answering some of the questions raised during the proposal of the subject. The project was fruitful in tracing the lineage of the Namboothiri family at Vengattoor Mana back till their reason for migration to the south from Malappuram, during the Samudiri rule, their connection to the Rigvedic teachings and their ancestral patronage to the Lord Vishnu. The research also ascribes a timeline and importance to the Mana that the Namboothiri family ruled from, dating it to almost two centuries ago, while the importance of it falls on the temple and cultural activities surrounding the Mana, such as the Maamangam Aarpuvili. There has also been success in detailing the rise of the major temples in the village as well as the agricultural prominence of the region.

It is also important to note the findings made regarding the art forms that have been important in the region, such as Kathakali, Thullal, Paatu, instruments both percussion (Chenda and Madhalam) and wind (Kombu Kozhal), art forms of other castes such as Thiyyatu or Pagaltu Paatu, dance forms of the womenfolk such as Thiruvathira or Kinnamkali, decorative arts like Chamayam and others. There is also importance given to the festivals of the temples, Poorams of Ayyappankaavu temple, forming a point of convergence for all castes in an otherwise divided society. The vital role elephant rearing and maintenance in the lives of the people of this village is also worth mentioning, going as far as saying they do not fear these creatures.

The work has also paved way in detailing the gradual change in a previously rigid caste based society, to a now embracing village. From being a region of mere agricultural or religious activities, the locality has more progress in terms of education, employment and agrarian implements. This change along with the developments in post-independence era regarding infrastructure such as electricity, transportation, medicine, libraries and more have also been noted in this project.

The work however, fails to showcase the exact history of the other castes in the region and more detailed research in the further can be done in this matter. It also does not go in-depth into the agrarian lifestyle and practices done during the pre-independence era. It can also be a subject for future studies.

Depending on mainly interviews and books, this work has hence been able to somewhat give a view into how the life in medieval Kerala must have been like, through the village of Kothachira.

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APPENDIX



Pic. 1 Chirakkal vishnu temple



Pic 2. Gopuram and Kodimaram at Chirakkal Vishnu Temple



Pic 3. Eranji Thara at Ayyappankaavu Temple



Pic 4. Well in front of Shiva Idol at Chirakkal temple



Pic 5 Kothachira Mana/ Vengattoor Mana



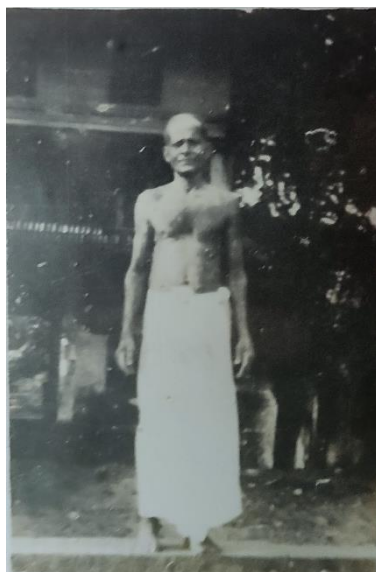
Pic 6. Dilaptated condition of the Mana



Pic 7 Naadagashaala before its demolition



Pic 8. Three storied Padipura at the Mana



Pic 9. A Photograph of a Nair Karyasthan of the Mana



Pic. 10 Thottam Chollal at Ayyappankaavu temple



Pic 11. Figure of Ayyappan drawn using natural colors, for Thiyattu ritual at Ayyappankaavu temple



Pic. 12 Performance of idol woship dance for Thiyattu ritual at Ayyappankaavu temple