Chapter 2

Homes of aRavaaNiGaL

Reading and analyzing the narratives of six aRavaaNiGaL at Ri. kalluppaTTi, the researcher has identified five homes associated with aRavaaNiGaL. They are the following:

1. Natal home (NH)

2. Natal kooti home (NKH)

3. First kooti home (1KH)

4. Sub kooti home (SKH) and

5. Second kooti home (2KH)

1. Natal home (NH)

Natal home or home of birth is also referred to as ‘native’ home. The word natal is from the Latin natalis "pertaining to birth or origin" ("natal"). Therefore, in this study, this word refers to home of birth. This home of aRavaaNiGaL consists of parents, siblings and sometimes extended blood relatives of the family (mostly from the paternal side). Though situated in a rural place away from the city, home cannot have all the qualities of a tiNai home. The natal homes of most aRavaaNiGaL are located in villages where there are no urban facilities like electricity, water pipes, and so on.

In NH, the woman (wife/mother) manages the affairs and takes care of the wellbeing of the inmates of home. Her traditional gender roles and responsibilities are much similar to those of the heroine in tiNai home. The man’s role is that of a provider. He works and earns enough money to take care of his children, wife and parents (if they stayed with him). While the
woman’s traditional gender roles and responsibilities concerned akam (inside home), the man’s responsibility with puRam (outside home). In some NHs, the mother would also help in the upkeep of the home by preparing some food and selling it to the people nearby. Though father and mother have well-defined tasks, equal efforts are put in when it comes to taking care of children. The mother is quick to admonish at the same time pamper the children while the father is looked upon as a figure of respect and fear. Some homes also have pets which are part of the family and are taken care of by the children. Children play indigenous games and are sometimes joined by their parents and relatives. The children either occupy themselves with games within home or by visiting different places in the village. If there was a temple in the village, then the children would visit the temple and play games in and around the temple premises. Places like ponds, open grounds and shades under trees would also be frequented by children for playing games and sharing stories. If the NH consists of members of an extended family, all of them would be involved in the daily affairs of family like bringing up children, assistance in kitchen and taking care of animals and plants.

Not only adults but children also sometimes worked in fields or some small company situated a few kilometers away from the village. Children either drop out of school or are forced to work to support the family. Usually NH consists of many children out of whom many siblings prefer to work rather than study in a school. They usually work for daily wages which is enough to help the family. Going to work involves interacting with a larger group of people, who are from the same village and sometimes even the same family. Work combines with laughter, gossip, teasing and silly banter. Many children and adolescents prefer working in fields and enjoying the banter rather than attending school and sitting through lessons. When the family is larger, there are many siblings who come together during meals and other communitarian
activities. At times each child is assigned a duty at home: One is in charge of washing, while another takes care of cleaning the house and so on. There are also times when there is not enough food at home and the children and adults share the food available or go hungry to bed. The food is usually simple consisting of rice or RaaGi gruel and chillies.

The main occupations of the people are farming and other activities related to the land. Many families have moved away from the occupation of their foreparents, despite staying in the same place inhabited by their ancestors. Conditions of the land and poor economic prospects have forced them to take up other forms of occupation which are completely disconnected to the land. Every natal home has a family deity which is worshipped during special ceremonies. The deities are local village gods and goddesses and in some cases those exclusive to a particular caste. Some families have a place for the deity within the compound of their home, while some worship the deity in a temple or a specific place allotted for the purpose. Festivals in honour of the deity are usually conducted once a year where the entire family with all relatives come together to worship the deity. Sacrificing a bull and cooking rice as offering are some rituals associated with the family deity. Auspicious events like tonsuring the head and piercing of ears/nose also take place during the annual festival.

2. Natal kooti Home (NKH)

Since this home is neither a separate kooti home nor a complete NH it will be referred to as “natalkooti home.” This ‘home,’ which is more or less a small room, is the space in which the individual cooks his own food and entertains friends. While this sort of an arrangement is not opted by many transitioning males, it is one of the ways to break free from the natal home. While transitioning from the male to the female, the young individual is confused and perplexed by his
own behavioural changes and temperament. The changes are not taken favourably by members of his family and extended family. During this ‘transition’ phase, the young male individual does not yet want to leave the NH to find other aravaaniGaL like him nor does he like to continue to stay in his NH. The individual therefore attempts to live on his own without severing his ties with his parents, siblings and extended family. The duration of time that an individual lives in NKH can vary for each case. It can be anywhere between a few months to years. During the period of time spent in NKH, an individual visits other aravaaniGaL and befriends them. The individual who is interested in activities such as dancing might start learning and practicing the art form with a small group of similar-minded individuals. He might also dress up in woman’s clothing and dance in festivals and programmes to test his skills and crowd-pulling abilities. Further, the period in NKH is more or less like an initiation period where the individual weighs different possibilities before finally leaving his natal home, joining an aravaani community and undergoing the operation. The person who chooses to live in a natal kooti home is still not operated to become a complete aravaani. Though he may start wearing the sari now and then and adorn himself with flowers, ornaments and other embellishments, he is still for all practical purposes a man. The occupying of a small room attached to the NH can also be seen as a form of protest where the individual does not leave the parent’s house nor makes a distant place his ‘home.’

3. First kooti Home (1KH)

1KH is the place where aravaaniGaL first gather after leaving their NHs. aravaaniGaL move out of the confines of the NH to join communities which have members of similar sexual identity. 1KH can also refer to the first aravaani community that the individual is a part of inspite of living in a separate home. At the age of thirteen or fourteen, the young individual born
as a male finds that he is not comfortable with his gender. His dream and desire is to dress, act and become a female. Staying at home with his family and extended family members, it is impossible to dress and behave like a woman. Though he could discretely dress as a woman in his NH and NKH without the knowledge of his parents, he yearns to always remain dressed as a woman. He either leaves his natal home of his own accord or is forced to leave home by his parents and other members to avoid scandals in the family and neighbourhood. The next home that he occupies is family what we have called, 1KH. He finds about the existence of an aRavaaNiGaL community through contacts and word-of-mouth information from acquaintances. Immediately, after arrival in the first kooti ‘home,’ a woman’s name and clothes are given to the individual. After living in 1KH for some time, the newcomer is adopted by a senior aRavaaNi who becomes the GuRu or ‘mother’ of the new initiate. After being adopted, the individual is known as ceela or ‘daughter’ to the mother or GuRu.

Instead of a heterosexual couple, the 1KH consists of ‘mother,’ ‘daughter,’ ‘granddaughter’ and so on. According to Reddy, “. . . “family” for hijras was defined primarily in terms of other hijraas, especially one guru lineage; relationships with other hijras(and kotis), rather than natal family or “husbands” and their kin . . .” (151). aRavaaNi community is modeled like that of a family and through “a web of fictive kinship a ceela automatically takes on the “relatives” of her GuRu, thereby expanding the ceela’s social, emotional and, economic life” (Nanda 45). The GuRu or ‘mother,’ functions like the head of ‘home’ and has under her custody ‘daughters and granddaughters’ who are called ceelaGaL, literally translated ‘disciples.’ The ‘daughters’ or ceelaGaL are those the GuRu has adopted by paying a sum of Rs. 5.50/- to the Jamaat or council of older aRavaaNiGaL. The Jamaat plays an important role while an aRavaaNi is to be adopted into the community. This system provides a
sense of belonging to aRavaaNiGaL. The Jamaat does not confine strictly to the codes followed by aRavaaNiGaL in other places like mumbai and haideraabaad. Jamaat system is very similar to pajcaayat system followed in villages where a group of elders from the village convene and take decisions and formulate certain norms for the village to follow. The term Jamaat itself “derives from a Muslim cultural pattern” (Nanda 40). Reading the account of Jamaat system in northern India and Hyderabad given by Nanda and Reddy, we learn that it is a strict council which is quite hierarchical in nature. Though aRavaaNiGaL in Ri. kalluppaTTi follow a similar system, theirs is not as stringent as it is in other places.

aRavaaNiGaL in 1KH sometimes have a ‘husband’ who is known as panti in kooti language. panti is part of an aRavaaNi’s life but not 1KH. He never stays in the aRavaaNiGaL’s ‘home but can often be seen there. He offers emotional and financial support to the aRavaaNi who is his ‘wife.’ In many cases, the man is married with family and children, but continues to have relationship of love and sex with an aRavaaNi. In some cases, the GuRu of the 1KH conducts the marriage of her ‘daughter’ or ‘granddaughter’ to the man whom she loves. This marriage which is symbolic of ‘real’ marriage involves the couple exchanging garlands and the man tying a taali (sacred thread which is a symbol of marriage) to the aRavaaNi in front of bahucaRa maata’s picture. Despite the fact that an aRavaaNi is ‘married,’ she continues to live in 1KH.

In 1KH, there are specific duties assigned to each aRavaaNi. If one aRavaaNi is in charge of cooking, another is in charge of washing and so on. The GuRu is the oldest member of kooti ‘home’ and she is the one who divides roles and responsibilities for each aRavaaNi. The main occupations of the first kooti ‘home’s’ members in Ri. kalluppaTTiis dancing, sex-work and professional mourning. paaNTiyammaaL’s first kooti home is well-known for dance
programmes and her family members often get invited to dance in neighbouring villages. The money earned from dancing and mourning is handed over to the GuRu who divides the money among the members of the ‘home.’ Some GuRuGaL do not collect the money earned by sex-work. That money can be kept by aRavaaNiGaL. Nothing is done individually by members of 1KH. But when it comes to doing sex-change operations and hormone enhancements, aRavaaNiGaL have to collect money on their own accord. Inspite of having a ‘mother’ in the 1KH, she will not provide the money required for the operation. Economically, aRavaaNiGaL are dependent on the GuRu. Some of the things which they do buy without the consent of the GuRuGaL would be make-up articles, cosmetics and small artificial jewels.

bahucaRamaata, an important deity for aRavaaNiGaL is worshipped by the community during rituals and ceremonies. Every 1KH has a picture of bahucaRamaata. The goddess does not belong to south Indian tradition but is a deity predominantly worshipped in GuJaRaat and has been adopted by the aRavaaNiGaL community as there are many myths surrounding her which speak of her as a transgendered person. The day and the time for the operation are decided after the head of the Jamaat prays and seeks the blessings of the goddess. After the individual is operated and has the forty-first day milk ceremony, the name of bahucaRamaata is evoked for courage and emotional succour. The maata’s blessings are specially sought during the operation and after for continued prosperity and long-life. Despite the fact that the goddess is from GujaRaat and the ritual has come down from north India, it has the spirit of south Indian culture; the offerings made to maata, the ornaments worn and many such things make the ritual resemble any south Indian rural custom or ritual.

The 1KH, which closely resembles the natal home in distribution of power, offers shelter and comfort to confused individuals who leave the natal home. Since the individuals are
vulnerable and directionless after fleeing home, the first *kooti* home provides emotional and financial stability. Mingling with similar individuals like them and learning the occupation gives them courage and strength. While some choose to remain in the 1KH, some leave to bigger cities for better economic prospects. The next home they establish in another city will be their second *kooti* home. But before analyzing the second *kooti* home, some *aRavaaNiGaL*, though start by staying in the 1KH, leave that and have a sub- *kooti* home. Sub-*kooti* home is situated very close to the 1KH.

### 4. Sub-*kooti* Home (SKH)

The SKH is a small house with one room which is located very close to the 1KH. The reason an *aRavaaNi* opts for a SKH may be for privacy or some indifference with the *GuRu* who lives in the 1KH. Though an *aRavaaNi* who lives in SKH might be found in 1KH most of the time, she might receive her friends and ‘lover’ in her separate home. The features of SKH are quite similar to those of the 1KH. While the 1KH has a *GuRu* as its head, the SKH does not. The SKH can be seen as an extension of the 1KH. Though the members of the 1KH, at the outset, seem quite friendly with the lone member of the SKH, there are disputes between *aRavaaNiGaL*. For purposes of occupation and livelihood, the *aRavaaNi* staying in SKH will join with the members of 1KH. Cooking, sleeping, and receiving guests are some of the activities that are only done in the SKH. In some cases, if one member quarrels with another member of 1KH, she might resolve to leave 1KH temporarily and live with *aRavaaNi* in SKH. Maybe after some time, the *aRavaaNi* who has settled her problems will return to 1KH. SKH is a branch of 1KH and often serves as a stopgap arrangement for any *aRavaaNi* who has quarrelled with members of 1KH.
5. Second *kooti* home (2KH)

Some *aRavaaNiGaL* migrate to other cities in search of better economic prospects and also to avoid the constant presence of the *GuRu* or mother and they make a new home there. This new home is the second *kooti* home (hereafter 2KH). Here the *aRavaaNi* fend for herself and is not dependent on her *GuRu*. She is free to do what she pleases. The communitarian life present in 1KH gives way to a very individualistic way of life. But in 2KH, the *aRavaaNi* should take care of her economic requirements. In many cases, since there are no communitarian activities like dancing and mourning at funerals, *aRavaaNiGaL* are forced to beg in public places like markets, bus stands and trains. The money earned from begging can be anywhere from Rs. 450/- to Rs. 500/- a day. Expenses incurred for rent, groceries, food, make-up, alcohol, cable-television and others are taken care of by the *GuRu* in 1KH since the money earned is always with her. But in the 2KH, an *aRavaaNi* is at times unable to meet all the expenses. Further in the new location, her new neighbours are strangers. In 1KH, the *GuRu* who is the head of the ‘home,’ is well-known in the locality and she is respected and treated well. The shopkeepers are known to her and over the years a good rapport is built between *aRavaaNiGaL* and the villagers. Like the shopkeepers, the people around the place also respect *aRavaaNiGaL*. They do not insult and hurt the sentiments of *aRavaaNiGaL* by calling them derogatory names. But when an *aRavaaNi* breaks away and sets up a 2KH, she is not familiar with either the neighbours or the place itself. The *aRavaaNi* has no choice but to beg and yield to the pressures of sex-work in order to feed herself. Despite the fact that an *aRavaaNi* earns money through sex-work in 1KH, sex-work is not the main source of income, whereas in 2KH, it is mandatory for livelihood.
Insipite of moving away physically from the 1KH, an aRavaaNi’s mother and GuRu will remain the same. Once a year, an aRavaaNi who has formed a 2KH will visit the 1KH bringing presents in cash and kind. Sometimes anaRavaaNi, who has left the 1KH, will also perform in dance programs involving members of the 1KH. Similarly, members of the 1KH visit the 2KH and stay there for a week or ten days. When members of the 1KH visit an aRavaaNi in the 2KH, they also take part in her everyday activities like begging just to keep company and avoid being left alone at home in a big city. An aRavaaNi who has a 2KH also cannot take part in festivals, rituals and some practices which take place in the 1KH. Though she is informed of the happenings in the 1KH, she cannot attend them for want of money and also because her new home is far away from the 1KH. The relationship shared between anaRavaaNi in 2KH and the members in 1KH is one of gratitude and memories. An aRavaaNi has fond memories of the 1KH.

In this chapter the researcher has identified five homes that are part of the lives of aRavaaNiGaL in Ri. kalluppaTTi. Though all aRavaaNiGaL do not possess all homes discussed in this chapter, they are all part of the NH and the 1KH. While some did not have NKH, some did not consider having SKH. Similarly while most aRavaaNiGaL continue living in the 1KH, some prefer to move out of the confines of 1KH and make a SKH.

Each of the five aRavaaNi homes is like, and yet unlike, the others. The NH consists of heterosexual parents, siblings, and other relatives and pets. This home has all features that could make an individual safe and comfortable. The NKH home is a mark of protest where the individual does not want to leave the natal home because of his sexual identity. Though he continues to live in a small room attached to the natal home, he starts wearing a sari and other adornments like flowers, bangles, earrings and nose-ring inspite of the parents’ opposition.
Finally after staying with the parents for some time and realizing that the gender he was born with and the gender one desires are both different, the individual becomes part of the 1KH where there are others similar to him in sexual identity. The 1KH offers him emotional stability and a sense of belonging. He is adopted by another aRavaaNi who becomes his GuRu or mother, gets a new name, changes his attire, grows his hair and undergoes sex-change operation. His earnings and decisions are controlled by the mother thus making the individual completely dependent on the latter. But sometimes the hierarchy in the 1KH stifles an aRavaaNi and therefore a need to have a SKH. This SKH is similar to the small room which was inhabited by the aRavaaNi in the NH classified as NKH. Though the aRavaaNi who lives in SKH partakes in all activities of 1KH, she does not eat and sleep in the latter home. At last, after some time, the yearning for independence from the GuRu in 1KH drives some aRavaaNiGaL to leave the 1KH and depart to bigger cities. While there are several reasons why anaRavaaNi moves from 1KH, the chief one is the need for better economic prospects and privacy for themselves. This home is 2KH where the aRavaaNiGaL are free from the GuRu and the economic dependency of 1KH.

The following three chapters will discuss each of the homes of aRavaaNiGaL in detail and the final sixth chapter will sum up and contrast the five homes with tiNai home.