Chapter-IV

Folk Communities on the Banks of Bharathappuzha

Cultural Geography has made a distinctive contribution to the understanding of relations between landscape and culture. This idea can be seen on the conceptual understanding of cultural geography through the ritual performances of the community. Cultural landscape on the banks of river Bharathappuzha from Palakkaad to Malappuram is more than two thousand years and immensely rich and has huge diversity of expressive behaviours. In this belt along Bharathappuzha, the richness is unique in different ways.

The course of river in different parts of the geographical region constitutes the life of the people on the banks. In the case of Bharathappuzha, the presence of water in the river has professed the distribution of communities from the beginning to end part of the river. This chapter looks at the relationship between the folk communities and their engagement with the river. For the sake of study, the river Bharathappuzha is divided into three parts (the tripartite methodology) based on its course – (i) origin part of the river, (ii) middle part of the river and (iii) ending part of the river- based on the flow of the river to understand the relationship between the communities and the river.

Bharathappuzha in the beginning is the totality of many small streams of water flowing in the full swing to the place Parali. The area from the beginning of small streams to Parali is considered the origin part of Bharathappuzha. The middle part of the river is the place from Parali to Kudaloor. Here less water flows are visible in the Bharathappuzha River and so sands are seen. The ending part is the place between Kudaloor to the confluence of river to Arabian Sea. The river flows with full of water. This nature of Bharathppuzha River is a vital element in the settlement of communities on the banks.

Communities on the River Banks

To understand the emergence of different communities on the banks of Bharathappuzha one has to look for the historicity on the life on the banks of the river. During historical times, several political powers facilitated the settlements of different
caste groups and communities for their sustenance. As a result, several social groups with different occupations were encouraged by the rulers to settle on the banks for the expansion of agriculture, trade, commerce and industry for augmenting the resources. For this reason a brief account of history of this region is essential.

**Historicity of Bharathappuzha Valley**

Geography has a pivotal role to decide the historicity of that area. Humans have migrated from place to place and later settled in one place. These migrations have created many complexities and Kerala is not an exemption. Infact, the history of Kerala is the history of migrations and immigrations.

The banks of the river Barathappuzha are one of the early inhabitants in Kerala. The area is very rich in megalithic monuments such as dolmens; pot-hole, *kudakkallus* (hood stones), *topikkallu* (umbrella stones) and rock cut caves found in various parts of the banks of Bharathappuzha; especially on hills and forests. Literate rock cut caves have been noticed at Tavanur *amsom* (area) in Ponnani taluk and megalithic sites have been noticed in an area of two to three acres in Pallavur area and Chittor taluk. In Attapadi and Pallavur area, a number of hero stones and a megalithic burial site have also been discovered, respectively.

**Sangam Age**

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1 William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1887 In Malayalam, *Mathrubhumi Books*, 2008, Kozhikode: Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970; A.Sreedhara Menon, *A survey of Kerala History*, Chennai: S. Viswanathan Publishers, (1967) revised edition, 2003; MGS.Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala: Political and Social Condition of Kerala Under the Cera Perumals of Makotai (A.D 800- A.D 1124)*, Kerala: Xavier press, 1996. It was Prof Elamkulam who made the first attempt to write about major issues related to Kerala history. But he never attempted to address dark periods from 300 AD to 800 AD. According to him there were no direct evidences to analyse the history of dark periods. He never thought of common people, settlements, markets, network of sacred groves, family systems, customs and manners and such direct and indirect evidences. It was because he neglected the lower and local administrative factors of the Kulasekhara rulers. Later, Dr M G S Narayanan started the investigation and analysed the Kerala history and he also could not narrates the history of these periods. Following the works of the former scholars, N.M Namboothiri looked to study the village history of Kerala based on toponymical data. It was taken up to understand the social and cultural history of *Malayala Naatu* and these studies are generally termed as Janapadanam or settlement studies.

2 For a detailed study of the major pre-historic sites of Kerala the following book and articles may be referred to: (1) A.Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, Kottayam: DC Books, 2007; (2) V.D Krishnaswami, “Megalithic Types of South India”. *Ancient India*, 1995, No.5, Pp.35-46.
It is the *pazhamtamiltattu* (Sangam literature) that helps to understand the history of South India during the first centuries of A.D. and Kerala was the part of old *tamizhakam*. So the socio-economic and political system of this period also reflects the history of Kerala. Modern scholars have divided *pazhamtamiltattu* into three. They are *ettuthukai*, *pathupattu* and *pathinenkizhikanaku*. It explains history of the Chera administrations, the lineage of kings such as Uthiyil Chera Lathan, Nedum Chera Lathan, Narmudicheral, Cheran Chenguttuvan etc and their achievements, the wars, love, family life, geographical features of old *tamizhakam* and so on³. It was the Ezhimalai kingdom which ruled the northern part of Kerala at the Sangam age. This region lay to the north of Cannanore and Tulunadu, making Ezhimalai as their capital. Nannan was the powerful king of the Ezhimali kingdom. He expanded his territory to the mountainous region such as Wayanad, Gudaloor and the northern part of Coimbatore districts. As part of the expansion of his kingdom, he fought against the Cheras many times and his success over the Cheras is mentioned in the literature of Akananoru and Purmannanoru. Later the Chera king Naar Mudi Cheral defeated Nannam in the battle of Vakaiperumthurai and brought the Ezhimali land under the control of Cheras. The history of the Ezhimalai kingdom after the death of Nannan is not clear.

The 1st kingdom of Cheras was an important power in Kerala in the early centuries of Christian era. With the expansion of the Chera kingdom, the members of the Chera family settled in various places such as *Vanchi*, *Tondi* and *Karur*. On the basis of collective succession (*Kuttuvazhcha*), the eldest member of the family ascended the throne. In the case of Kerala history, the Post-Sangam age (6, 7, 8 Century) is considered as a dark age. The only information about this period is from the records of south Indian powers who ruled Kerala, such as the *Chalukyas*, Pallavas, and *Pandyas*.

After the 3rd C, the socio-political system of old *tamizhakam* underwent a change and it was during this time that the Pallavas, Pandyas and Chalukyas became a prominent power in *Tamizhakam*⁴. In 7th Century, the Chalukyas conquest of the

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Alluvars of South Canara also helped the migration of another group of Brahmins from Karnataka to the northern side of Cheranadu (*Keralam*).

**Advent of the Brahmins in Kerala**

There is no clear cut idea about the period of Brahmin migration to Kerala among historians. During B.C 3rd C, Jains-Budhist religion reached Kerala from North India. Brahmins also migrated to Kerala as the continuation of the above people’s migration. These Brahmins migrated to South India, especially Karnataka and Tamil Nadu before 3rd C B.C reaching Kerala through North Kerala (Tulu country) and the Palakkad area.

The advent of the Brahmins and their settlement has been a turning point in the Kerala history. There is no unanimous opinion among the historians about the date of the migration of Brahmins to Kerala. According to K.P Padmanabha Menon, the Brahmins reached in 3rd C A.D\(^5\) where as William Logan opined that it was in 8th C A.D. Modern historians are not in agreement with the opinion of William Logan. Even though, they arrived in Kerala in the early century of the Christian era as the continuation of the migration of Jains and Buddhist groups from North India, the modern historians opined that one cannot assume that they have come to Kerala as a big settlement group rather than they came as small groups in different times and settled in various places. There are references of Brahmins in Kerala in Sangam literature.

Brahmins had known about Kerala through the trade and commerce of those days between North and South India. Once they reached to Kerala, Brahminism could not flourish like the North Indian Brahmanism/Vedic tradition in Kerala. In *pazhamtamil* literature, they are mentioned as *Anthanar* and their main duty was to conduct *yagas* and other Vedic rituals for Cheras.\(^6\) Brahmins gave ideological support and justification of the administration of the Chera kings. As remuneration, they got land and other valuable things from the king. Then the Brahmins became a strong socio economic power. The other classes such as Panar (Bards of Nayar community), Vedar (local tribe) and Kuravar (local tribe) who were getting help from the king were sidelined and downgraded their position to the lower strata of society.

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Second Chera kingdom (Kulashekharas of Mahodayapuram)

The Cheras became a powerful group after the Sangam Age 800 A.D. Cheras revived their power under Kulasekhara Varman and they ruled over Kerala from 800-1102 A.D with their capital in Mahodhyapuram. The ‘Kulasekhara Empire’ is also known as ‘Second Chera Empire’. During this period, Kerala became a homogeneous political unit till 1102 A.D. Kulasekhara Alwar, Sthanu Ravi Varman, Rama Varman and Bhaskara Ravi Varman were the main Chera kings.

After 8th C. A.D, Kerala became a special political and cultural centre under the 2nd Chera kingdom. They controlled the Mushaka dynasty of northern Kerala and the Azvars of southern Kerala. Kerala was the totality of many territorial division consisted of nadus (a district), desham/desam (small locality), taras and cherries. ‘Nadu’ was the highest administrative set up and Naduvazhi (ruler of nadu), a local chieftain was the head and under him were many desham for military purposes. Desavazhi (administrator of desam) is the head and gramas, taras, and cherries existed under him. Gramam (village) was constructed for the Brahmin settlement under the supervision of gramini. Taras for Nayars under Tara karanavar (head) and cherries for izhuvas and other castes were under the supremacy of moopans.

All the heads of this territorial land would meet at Tirunavai once in twelve years and they would elect the rakshapurusha (protector of entire area). This rakshapurusha would get the value of administrator. If there was any problem in selecting the rakshapurusha, the head of the assembly had the power to invite a member of the neighbouring ruling dynasty and would solve the problem. The Tirunavai convention invited the member of the perumals family and he got the rakshapurusha post. Thus, the Perumal era started. Kulashekharas may be one of the branches in the Chera migration of the western area of the Western Ghats from Trichinapalli. They came through ‘Palakkad slopes’ or some other parts of the Western Ghats and settled in the banks of Periyar River. Kulashekaras may have emerged from this group. Twelve perumals ruled and 12 years were the tenure of each perumal. But the last perumal ruled during three terms. At the end of the third term, he divided his kingdoms among his chieftains and appointed Valluvakkonathiri (Valluvanaattu Raja) to preside over the Tirunavai assembly. After the last Cheraman Perumal King, Rama Kulashekhara’s (12th C A.D) kingdom shattered and many nadus such as Valluvanadu, Vettathunadu, Tirumanasserinadu and Nedunganadu
emerged. Thus all the royal dynasties of Kerala came into existence only after the break-up of the Perumal’s empire.⁷

During the 9th and 10th C, the Cheras had a good relationship with the Cholas and they got help from them to defend the invasion of the Pandyas of Madhurai.⁸ Later on the friendship relation between them slowly collapsed especially after the reign of Sthanu Ravi and during the time of Bhaskara Ravi they started many wars against Cholas. Cholas attacked the military centres of Cheras especially Thalakkulam, Karakandeeshwram and Vizhinjam. They captured the Southern Travancore and attached it to the kingdom of Cholas in the 11th C. The Cholas captured Kanyakumari, Parthipapuram, Thirunanthikara, Kottaar. As a continuation of this attack during the time of Raja Raja Cholan, Cholas attacked Mahodhayapuram and Quilom.

Later Ramavarma Kulashekara became the king of Cheras and he tried to recapture the lost territories of the Cheras from the Cholas. It led to many battles between them and he got many places back. After the reign of Ramavarma Kulashekhara, due to the attack of Cholas and other internal problems within the Chera kingdom, the reign of the second Chera came to an end.

**History of Swaroopams (Local Kingdoms) on the Banks of Bharathappuzha**

After the decline of the Cheras (12-13 AD) of Mahodayapuram, many small swaroopams (local kingdoms) became stronger. There were small areas under the Cheras but later they became bigger. The local governors raised powers and claimed the independence of their local area. This led to the rise of swaroopams in Kerala. The rest of the history of Kerala after the fall of Second Chera kingdom is the history of swaroopams⁹. The major swaroopams which were emerged on the banks of Bharathappuzha were Valluvanadu (Ponnani, Perinthalmanna, Thrishur area), Nedumpurayoor nadu (Talappili, Palakkad and Chitoor area), Eralanadu (later Nediyirippu/Zamorins) and Kalkarenadu (Cochin). The expansion of agricultural

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⁷ There are many opinions still existing about the last king of Cheras of Mahodayapuram and some scholars argues that Chera kingdom could end up in A.D 1102 or A.D 1122. See M.G.S Narayan, *Calicut- City of Truth Revisited*, Tenjipalam: Publication Division, University of Calicut, 2006.


activities and settlement patterns, the increasing domination of Brahmins, division of caste based on the occupation and the rise of social order based on the administration of temple complex were the main features of the administration of the Perumals during the second Chera period.

During the period following the break-up of the Kulasekhara Empire (1102A.D), Kerala lost its political unity. A number of independent swaroopams rose in different parts of the country. Of these, the most important were the kingdom of Valluvanadu, Nedumpurayoorndadu, Perumabadappu and Zamorins. The history of the banks of Bharathappuzha during the pre-Portuguese period is centred primarily on the kingdom of Zamorins (Calicut). Before narrating the history of the rise and growth of Zamorins, it would be appropriate to make an outline about the detail of other swaroopams and that will provide a clear understanding of the political history of this period especially on the banks of Bharathappuzha.

The main administrative system of medieval Kerala was swaroopams. There is no clear cut idea about the meaning of the word ‘swaroopam’. It could be the geographical locality under a Naduvazhi. All these swaroopams had a centre for their administration. During the time of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Cheras most of the swaroopams collected the surplus product and taxes from their region and became wealthy. Each swaroopam had its military group (angarakshakar) known as akambadanam.

The name, capital and geographical area of the swaroopams are as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Locality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aaynad</td>
<td>Pothiyimalai</td>
<td>southern part of present Trivandrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Venadu</td>
<td>Quilom</td>
<td>Quilom, Kottarakar and ChirayinKeezhu taluk and the part of Nedumangadu and Trivandrum taluk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Odanadu</td>
<td>Kandiyoormattam kayamkulam</td>
<td>Karunagapalli, Mavelikara and Karthikapalli taluk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nanruaynadu</td>
<td>Trikodithanam peruna</td>
<td>Area of Tiruvala and Changanassery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Moonjunadu</td>
<td>Kumaraneloor</td>
<td>Kottayam area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vembolinadu</td>
<td>Kaduthuruthi</td>
<td>Vaikam and Meenachil area</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kizhmalainadu</td>
<td>Karikodu</td>
<td>Thodupuzha and Moovatapuzha area</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kalakarainadu (later known as Cochin)</td>
<td>Thrikakara</td>
<td>Ernakulam district, part of Thrishur district and Thrikakara area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nedumpurayoor nadu</td>
<td>Kuruva</td>
<td>Talappili, Palakkad and Chittoor area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Valluvanadu</td>
<td>Angadipuram</td>
<td>Ponnani, Perinthalmanna, Thrishur area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Eralanadu</td>
<td>Nediyirippu</td>
<td>Ernadu area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Polanadu</td>
<td>Poloor</td>
<td>Kozhikodu area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kurumburanadu</td>
<td>Kuttipuram</td>
<td>Koyilandy and Southern Wayanadu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Puraikizhenadu</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>North Wayanadu and Gudaloor area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kolathunadu</td>
<td>Chitaikal</td>
<td>Kannur and Kasargode area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the above were the *udayavar* in the Kulasekhara period and after the fall of the Kulasekharas they became independent and known as *naduvazhi swaroopams*. Among the fifteen *swaroopams* mentioned above, three *swaroopams* played a prominent role in this region. The intercine warfare among the *swaroopams*...
became a common feature for supremacy over this region. Ultimately Zamorins emerged as victorious.

**Zamorins Kingdom**

Calicut was the major power in northern and central Kerala in the medieval period. It was considered that Kondoty (20 mile away from Calicut town) was the ancestral villages of Zamorins. Calicut is said to have existed since the 13th century AD. After the fall of Kulashekara of Mahodayapuram, Calicut was formed as part of Polanadu by Porlathiri. For the purpose of getting a coastal line, the Eradis of Nediyirippu marched with Nayar (a warrior community) towards Panniankara and attacked Porlathiri. Finally, the war ended in the victory of Eradis and the Porlathiri escaped to Kolathunadu (North Malabar). After conquering of Polanadu, the Eradis shifted their headquarters from Nediyirippu to Calicut and constructed a palace. The Zamorins, also called the Erlatiri (chief of Ernad) and Nediyiruppu Muppan (chief of Nediyiruppu swaroopam),11 started commerce with Arabs and Chinese in Calicut port. They began to conquer neighbouring kingdoms and expanded his empire. The most important attack was against Valluvakkonathiri in south Malabar and had many intentions.

The banks of Bharathappuzha were the fertile lands for growing pepper and forest wealth. The Travancore kingdom, Cochin raja and Palakkad king were in needed of this area. The Zamorins began to conquer neighbouring areas. The main aim was to capture the natural resources. Valluvanadu and Palakkad were the places of paddy cultivation. Zamorins needed more paddies and the importing of paddy was a liability to Zamorins. Because of the non-fertile land, Calicut was not fit for paddy

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1405 and later changed its name to Cochin. The continuous attack of Zamorins on the banks of the Bharathappuzha influenced the decision of the Perumpadu chief to shift his capital to Cochin because Cochin was outside the orbit of the Zamorins conquests. After the fall of the Cranganore port, Cochin port became an important place for trade. This element helped Perumabadappu rise as a power in central Kerala in 15th C A.D. They also captured the place around the periyar riverbanks. For further details see Willaim Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1887 In Malayalam, Mathrubhumi Books, 2008, Kozhikode.; Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970; N.M Namboothiri, *Malabar Padanangal Zamoothirinadu*, Trivandrum: Keral State Institute of Languages, 2008; Willaim Logan, *Malbar*, Vol 1, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989; T.K Gangadharan, Kerala *Charithram* (Mal), Tenjipalam: Calicut University Central Co-Operative Stores Ltd,1997 .

cultivation and for the growth of trade he needs to collect forest products. Palakkad churam (steep ascent/slope) are the good path to connect the Kaveripoornpattanam and Bharathappuzha which is the continuation of river Kaveri. It means that Kaveri flows along the other side of the Western Ghats. Bharathappuzha is a corridor between Palakkad churam (steep ascent) and Ponnani port. According to Logan, the Bharathappuzha had a unique strategic importance, as it provided a connecting link between the harbour on the west coast and the hinterland in Tamil Nadu. A major portion was under Valluvanadu and Palakkad churam was under Taroor swaroopams. Zamorins captured the northern part of Bharathappuzha to defeat the local king of Nedunganadu area and he appointed eralaipaddu (local administer) as the administrator of that area. So, the banks of Thoothappuzha were under Zamorins.

In the process of expansion of the kingdom during 13th and 14th C A.D, Zamorins waited for a chance to interfere in the land on the banks of the Bharathappuzha. Already there was rivalry between Panniyoor and Sukapuram gramam (village) which was among the 32 settlements of Nambuthiries (Kerala Brahmins) in Kerala. Panniyoor and Sukapuram were two Nambuthiri villages and while the former group was ‘vaishnavaite’, the later was ‘saivate’ respectively. It was a local conflict between two villages. Valluvakkonathiri and Perumbadappu helped the Sukapuram group and they attacked Tirumanasseri Nambuthiri (leader of Panniyoor group). This Nambuthiri appealed to Zamorins for help and offered Ponnani as a reward. Zamorins did not miss this opportunity and he defeated the Valluvakkonathiri and captured Ponnani (Tirunavai) from him. Later Zamorins assumed the unique position of the raksapurusha or the protector of mamankam festival.

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14 The mamankam was a festivals held in every twelve years on the day of makam nakshatram (a star in Malayalam month) in makha (malayala month, February) month on the banks of Bharathappuzha (thirunavaya). Firstly, it was conducted for the checking of administrative power of perumal, which he got from other local kings and they celebrated some martial arts. But later, Zamorins captured this area from valluvanadu king and the position of présidenship of mamankam and he started the mamankam festival. During this time, valluvanadu king came and fought against zamorins army. The conflict between these two local kingdoms known as ‘mamankam’ and the last mamankam held in 1755.
Tirunavai was the place of a great assembly that met in the lunar month of Magha, once in 12 years. In the post-Chera period in Kerala, this place came under the Raja of Valluvandu and by virtue of this position he was to preside over the grand festival as the rakshapurusha (protector).\(^{15}\)

Two princes of Valluvanad had been killed in the battle between Zamorins and Valluvakonathiri. The hereditary bodyguard of the king of Valluvandu took a vow to avenge the death of the princes. The protracted struggle was manifested in the form of suicide squads (chaver) attacking the Zamorin during each mamankam. The heroic chavers of Valluvakonathiri jumped into the midst of the thousands of well armed warriors of Zamorins and they could not conquer Zamorins even in any mamankam.

Later, Zamorins continued their conquest and brought Nilamboor, Manjeri, Malappuram and Venkatakotta (Kottakkal), under the control of Calicut. In addition, Zamorins captured Nedunganadu, a principality lying between the domain of the Valluvakonathiri and Palakkad king (Taroor swaroopams). Zamorins dealt the Kollangode (Vengunadu) and gave some rights and controlled under his power. Thus, Zamorins got control on the southern part of Palakkad.

**Conflict between Zamorins and Cochin**

The Cochin kingdom (old Perumbadappu swaroopam) had friendly relation with Vengunadu as they needed Palakkad churam and controlled Chittoor (Palakkad king) and Talappili. Cochin got the southern bank of Bharathappuzha (Talappili) from Palakkad swaroopams. The territorial division of the southern banks of the Bharathappuzha was as follows. Kollangode was the east, Talappili was the west, and the southern part of Ponnnani was under Perumbadappu. Perumbadappu swaroopam (Cochin) interested the internal politics of this area for the ownership of Palakkad churam. It indicates that, Zamorins were the rulers in the northern banks of Bharathappuzha and Cochin kingdom were the ruler of the southern banks of the Bharathappuzha. Zamorins had proclaimed that he was the king of Kerala and controlled the Perumbadappu, Chavakkad and Ponnnani area. From Sukapuram (Brahmin village) onwards to the east of the southern bank of Bharathappuzha (Vengunadu) was controlled by Cochin. Cochin did not have an access to Ponnnani

because Zamorins had captured Tirunavai (a river way to Ponnani from the east to the west and conducted *mamankam*) and blocked the place. The *mamankam* festival at Tirunavai assumed all Kerala significance with the growing power and prosperity of the Zamorins. The rulers and chieftains of the land who came under the Zamorins used to send tribute and flag to show the supremacy of Zamorins over them. The following was the picture of the banks of Bharathappuzha in Medieval Kerala.
The conflict between Cochin and Calicut began in the 15\textsuperscript{th} c. After the successful campaign in the Thrishur area, Zamorins turned against the Palakkad king and Kollankod, Venganattu Naduvazhis. Later, they came under the control of Zamorins. Thus, when the Portuguese landed in the Kerala coast in 1498, Zamorins were s powerful sovereigns who had by then (under their control) almost all the chieftains of north Kerala including the king of Cochin as their vassals.

**Advent of the Europeans**

Vasco da Gama has reached Calicut (Kappad) in 1498 and this led to the starting point for modern European colonialism in Kerala. Zamorins was the king of
most of the central part of Kerala and he received Gama with traditional hospitality. Later, Gama visited Kerala two more times. For the Portuguese, the voyage of Vasco da Gama brought commercial gains. Zamorins insisted to pay customs duty for all trade activities provided by Gama in accordance of the law abiding in Calicut. Gama left Calicut in August and he started trade with Kolathiri Raja (king) who offered all facilities to the Portuguese. After Gama, another Portuguese voyager, Cabral, came to Kerala and he also tried to start trade with Zamorins. He could not follow the trade with Calicut and led to a fight with Zamorins. Finally he left Calicut for Cochin. Following Cabral, Almeida, and Albuquerque also came to Kerala. The frustrating experience of the Portuguese captains with the Zamorins helped to start trade with the rivalries of Zamorins that is Kolathunadu and Cochin. Zamorins had to fight against Portuguese numerous times until finally in 1540, a formal treaty was signed between the Portuguese and Zamorins. Under this treaty, the Portuguese were permitted to carry trade from Zamorin’s territory at the rates prevailing in Cochin.

As a continuation of European power, the Dutch had appeared in Kerala and conquered the Portuguese stronghold of Quilom, Cranganore, Purakkad, Cochin and Cannonore. In 1663, the power of the Portuguese ended in Kerala. In 1603, a Dutch admiral Stevan Van Der Hagen reached Calicut and signed a treaty with the Zamorins in 1604. The Dutch were given facilities for trade at Calicut as well as the right to station merchant. Zamorins had the idea that if he made an alliance with Dutch, he could expel the Portuguese from Kerala. In 1795, at the end of war between England and Dutch, the Dutch ceded their territories in Kerala to the English. Thus, the Dutch became weak in 1738 due to the activities of the English and French on the one hand and the forces of Zamorins and Travancore in the other. Dutch had failed in the Kulachal war of 1741 against Travancore and they withdrew from the land of Kerala.

The English also came to Kerala for the purpose of trade like the Portuguese and the Dutch. In 1615 Captain Keeling reached Calicut. He concluded a treaty with the Zamorins in which English were to assist Calicut in expelling the Portuguese from Cranganore and Cochin. Zamorins gave permission to establish trade in his land. But the English did not follow the agreement of the treaty and they tried to capture Ponnani. They made treaty with another local Naduvazhi of Kerala, Rani of Attingal and constructed a factory in Anjengo. Later in 1723, the British signed a treaty with

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the King of Travancore. At the beginning of 18\textsuperscript{th} C, Britishers had established their supremacy over the different regions of Kerala. In 18\textsuperscript{th} C, the picture of Kerala was as follows. Britishers controlled the North Kerala, Telichery as centre and in Central Kerala under Cochin kingdom and Southern Kerala under the Travancore kingdom. This division became strong and Kerala came under the domination of European power in the end of 18\textsuperscript{th} C.

In 1698, the French settled in Telichery and in 1725, they settled in Mahe. They started their attack in Kadathanadu \textit{swroopam} (a Naduvazhi under Kolathunadu) and conquered many places. In addition to that, they have faced war against Kolathunadu and the English. The Raja of Kottayam and Ali Raja of Cannanore fought against the French. The English captured Dharmadam and Kolathunadu from the French. But the French attacked Kolathiri and captured Neeleswaram. In 1761 as a continuation of the war between England and France in Europe, they fought in India. The French lost Pondicherry and Mahe in 1761. But later as treaty of Paris followed between the French and the English in Europe, the French get back their stronghold Mahe.

Meanwhile, the ruler of Mysore, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan conquered parts of Kerala around the Malabar region from Zamorins. During this time, war broke out between the English and the French in Europe (1778). As a follow up, Hyder gave help to the French in Kerala against the English. England fought against Tipu in many wars and Tipu Sultan was ultimately defeated. Finally by the treaties of Srirangapatanam signed on February 22 and March 18 1792, Tipu formally ceded Malabar to the British.\textsuperscript{17} The Mysorean hegemony over Kerala ended in the establishment of the British supremacy and the whole of Malabar was now in the hands of the English. So the history of Kerala from 1500-1800 A.D is the history of the conquest of Portuguese, Dutch, French and British mostly for monopoly of the spices business.

On the whole, the migrations into the land of Kerala contributed to the development of history of the region. The following table gives an overview of the time frame of the migrations of different religious and racial groups.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Religious Group & Time Frame & Historical Events \\
\hline
Christian & 1500-1800 & Establishment of missions \\
\hline
Islamic & 1500-1800 & Invasion by Mamluk and Ottoman \\
\hline
Hindu & 1500-1800 & Conquest by the Europeans \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Overview of migrations in Kerala}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{17} William Logan, \textit{A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Other Papers of Importance Relating to British Affairs in Malabar}, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1989.
Table No 4.2: Chronology of Migration in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jain and Buddhist</td>
<td>3 Century BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1st Brahmins</td>
<td>3 Century BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>1 AD. (St. Thomas AD 52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>1st AD (AD-68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>7 &amp; 8 Century AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2nd group of Brahmin migration</td>
<td>8 Century AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table, it is evident that the history of Kerala is the history of migrations which led to composite and complex social formation.

Social formation on the banks of Bharathappuzha

Over the centuries, several races and communities have made their contribution to the building up of the composite and pluralistic culture of Kerala which is noted for its vitality even today. There are three kinds of settlements in the Bharathappuzha banks.

The first one is that of the earliest inhabitants of the land from the hilly forest on the banks of Bharathappuzha were velar, Kuravar, Ayavar migrated from the deep forest and settled on the river banks. They began cultivation and were later known as Uzhavar and Pulayar according to their work. The second one is the Brahmins batch who reached Kerala in BC 3 C, following the Buddhists and Jains (Jains and Budhists reached the banks through Karnataka and Sravanbalgola). Irrespective of the controversy with regard to the date of Brahmin implantation over the soils of Kerala among historians, all agree that the Brahmin settlements grossly contributed to the history of Kerala. Prior to their implantation it appears that the indigenous tribal communities in small numbers occupied the hilly terrains and forest regions. The third one is in the beginning of Aryan invasion of north India wherein the Dravidians joined their kinsman such as the Nayars, Vellalars, Kammalars, and Ezhavas etc. No formidable political proceses which can create history was present prior to the Brahmin implantation. For this reason the oral tradition of Kerala created a myth on the Brahmin implantation which is quite popular even to this day. The myth is known as Parasurama myth.

On the view of William.Logan, the first Brahmins reached in Kerala only in 8 C AD. But most of historians avoid this opinion because there has many references about the Brahmins in the Sangam literature.
Origin myth of Kerala

The creation myth of Kerala is related to Parasurama, a warrior sage. He is one of the ten avatara (incarnation) of Vishnu. The sanskrit word parasu means ‘axe’ and therefore the name Parasurama means ‘Ram with Axe’. The aim of his birth was to deliver the world from the arrogant oppression of the ruling caste, the Kshatriyas. He killed all the male Kshatriyas on earth. After destroying the Kshatriya kings, he approached an assembly of learned men to find a way to get rid off his sins. He was advised by them that he must hand over the lands to the Brahmins which he had conquered. He followed the advice and sat in meditation at Gokarnam (northern Kerala). There, he was blessed by Varuna (the god of the Oceans) and Bhumidevi (goddess of Earth). He reached Kanyakumari from Gokarnam and threw his axe northward across the ocean. It was 160 katham (it is an old unit to measure the distance of place. one katham means 16 kilometres) of land lying between Gokarnam and Kanyakumari. The place where the axe landed the sea moved backwards and formed as shore between the waters and the land. This portion of land is known as Parasurama Kshetram (the land of Parasurama) because the land was reclaimed from sea by him. Later it came to be known as Keralam. Parasurama distributed this land to Brahmins that he brought down from the north to perform sacred rituals and duties in order to expiate him from his sin of slaughtering the Kshatriyas. They are known as Nambuthiri Brahmins and are found more in the middle part of the Bharathappuzha. They formed sixty four Brahmin villages.

Within the sixty four villages, thirty two villages are in Tulu Nadu (north Kerala) and the rest of the thirty two is in the territory of present Kerala. This settlement expanded from North to South Kerala. Modern historians could identify the thirty one Brahmin settlements. They are Payyanur, Perumchalam, Alathoor, Karanthol, Chokiram, Panniyoor, Karikad, Issanamangalam, Thrishivaperur, Peruvanam, Chamunda, Iringadikoodal, Avittaputhoor, Paravoor, Ayiranikalam, Muzhikalam, Kalavur, Adavur, Chenganad, Illibyam, Uliyanorr, Kazhuthanad, Etumanoor, Kumaranelloor, Kadamaruk, Aranmula, Thiruvalla, Kidangoor, Chenganoor, Kaviyoor, Venmani, and Nirmani. Most of this settlement centres had fertile land and they have constructed many temples on these lands. In relation to this sacred complex, they had created a new socio economic system in Kerala. Most of this settlement centres were on the banks of the Bharathappuzha. In the 7th century A.D, the Brahmin settlement became one of the most prominent groups in Kerala.

The Kerala Brahmins known as Nambuthiris occupy the highest position in the cast hierarchy. Even now they are the dominant priestly group especially on the middle banks of Bharathappuzha.
As stated already, for the sake of analysis the banks of the Bharathappuzha is seen in three parts i.e., origin part, middle part and end part. In each part, certain communities played dominant role in the social formation and accordingly all ritual performances are organised reflecting the social hierarchy. Therefore in this section only major community of each part of Bharathappuzha is taken for the study.

Map.No.4.2: Major Communities on the Banks of Bharathappuzha

(a) Origin Part: Major Communities

Nambuthiris

The Kerala Brahmins known as Nambuthiris are considered as the Vedic Brahmins.\(^{19}\) They lead a highly religious life by maintaining ritual seclusion from the other communities. There are many versions on the origin of the word Nambuthiri. The word Nambuthiri is derived from ‘nambuka’ (to trust) and thiri (an honorific

\(^{19}\) Date collected from the informents Jithin, 22, Kottayam; Rajan 53, Thirukkunnapalli; Shankaran 68; Puthusseri; Ramesh Nambuthiri, 61, Alappayy; Suresh Nambuthiri, 40, Chemarathoor.
suffix meaning sacred). This meaning shows the position of the Nambuthiri held as the advisors to the kings. In another version, it is derived from ‘nam’ (knowledge) and ‘purika’ (to impart) which reflects their great Vedic learning tradition.

On the basis of the anonymous texts such as Kerala Mahatmyam and Keralolpathi, it is believed that Nambuthiris are the descendants of the Brahmins who were brought to Kerala from all parts of India by Parasurama after he created the land of Kerala. When they reached Kerala (Parasurama Kshetram); Parasurama distributed Kerala land and they settled in 64 gramams (villages). The thirty two villages are in Tulu Nadu (north Kerala) and the rest of the thirty two is in the territory of present Kerala. After their settlements, the thirty two villages divided into two sects, i.e., (i) Vaishnavaites headed by Panniyoor gramakar or inhabitants of Panniyoor village (ii) Shaivaites headed by the Chovour/Sukapuram gramakkar or villagers of Chovaram/Sukapuram. These Panniyoor and Chovour (Sukapuram) are on the middle bank of Bharathappuzha. Their houses called as illam or manas are situated in the midst of extensive compounds. In the compound they have tank for bathing.

Nambuthiris were the sarvadhikaryakars (prime-ministers), karyakars (governor), judges and munsifs in the villages on the banks of Bharathappuzha. Nambuthiris claimed that the land is their birth right and substantiate it with the myth of Parasurama. Nambuthiris were the owners of most of the lands on the fertile banks of Bharathappuzha. They as landlords did not cultivate the lands for themselves alone but gave them to tenants, mostly to Nayar castes and remained as absentee landlors. They became the advisers of kings during the times of second Chera kings and also handled judicial process of those days. Gaining the confidence of the chiefs, the Brahmins received major grants of land as brahmadeyas and devadanams and other privileges thereby established themselves as a considerable force in society and economy. During pre-modern times in Kerala, land was held in two ways. The Brahminical groups held land as their own property (brahmasvam) and through sacred complexes as the property of the temple (devasvam). The other agrarian communities

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functioned under this land owning groups as tenants (karalar), share croppers/cultivators (kutiyalar) and at the bottom as the landless labourers (atiyalar).

The opening up of the river valleys for agriculture had brought about a major social change. Historians have looked upon this as one of the significant factors behind state formation in Kerala and the banks of Bharathappuzha became the core region for the formation of monarchical state by A.D. 11th century.

The newly rising agrarian settlements on the fertile river valleys must have contributed to the process of Brahminical dominance in Kerala. The settlements of Brahminical tradition of Kerala were well established since A.D. 9th century. By the close of 9th century, the vast areas of land had been brought under the plough for the cultivation of rice and a huge chunk of the tribal population was transformed into peasants. This resulted in the production of unprecedented surplus and its unequal distribution led to the social stratification. As the whole process was under the initiative of the Brahminical corporations, their power around the temples came to have immense influence on the economy and society.

In addition, there are various services in the temple, such as garland making, musical services, cleaning etc. One of the features of post- Chera period is that, the corporate bodies of the Brahmins have lost its character at the village level. During the time of Cheras, the brahminical bodies such as sabha of the ur functioned smoothly with great solidarity of the Brahmins. Later the jealous among the members, non-insistence of full attendance, lack of unanimity in decision, decrease in the strength of sabha and certain individual got domination and greater powers. The result was that, certain individual families came to acquire prominence and they imposed their control on the properties and devasam properties came to be known as brahmasvam.

There are six subdivisions that can be seen among the Nambuthiris. There is no difference in respect of honour paid to Nambuthiri. The classification is based on the performances of ritual rites and social role they had taken part. The subdivisions of the Nambuthiris are Thampurakals, Adhyans, Visishta Nambuthiris, Samanyas, Jatimatras (jatimatras) and Sapagrasthas.23

Nambuthiris are considered as the true Vedic Brahmins. Learning Vedas is an obligatory to all Nambuthiris and all Nambuthiri children (unnikal) follow one year fasting and they have to complete their Vedic studies within this period. Besides the various individual routine, Nambuthiris have temples for worship either in their own or now a days working as a priest (pujari) in the temples of other caste. They worship the deities such as, Shiva, Vishnu, their consorts and various other forms include Shakti under various names or shape. The god and goddesses are represented by images which are either self grown (swaymboo) or iconic. Besides daily pujas in the temples, there are some festivals (utsavams) attached to each in certain months of the year. Besides the priest, the temple has its own staff of servants such as the light carriers, the musicians, the sweepers, the cooks, the vessel cleaners, the accountants, garland makers according the size and tradition of the temple.\textsuperscript{24} Apart from this, they also practice the profession of medicine, sorcery, astrology and so on. The various divisions among the Nambuthiris now exist only in the name sake. The population of Nambuthiris is steadily diminishing. Nowadays, Nambuthiris have been occupying the highest position only in the matters of rituals associated with temples.

Apart from the Nambuthiris, another sect of Brahmins is also found in the origin part of the banks of Bharathappuzha known as Palakkad Brahmins who came from the Tamil soils. It is believed that they reached the banks of the Bharathappuzha through the Palakkad Gap during the reign of Nedumpurayoor kingdom which was under the Perumbadappu swaroopam. The tradition attributes that the founder of the Nedumburayoor kingdom married a low caste woman and the Nambuthiri Brahmins did not approve this relation and therefore, they moved away from Nedumpurayoorandu and settled elsewhere. In the absence of the availability of the Nambuthiri Brahmins, the king invited the Palakkad Brahmins for the administration of temples and they settled on the banks of the Kalpaathippuzha. They are more in the origin part of the Bharathappuzha where the deforestation and land reclamation for agrarian expansion was feasible.

The Tamil Brahmins also known as Paradesi or foreign Brahmins as they have migrated from Tamil Nadu to Kerala. They are titled as Iyer, Vadyar, Dikshitar and locally known as Pattar. They are also found in Ernakulam, Palakkad and Trivandrum. They are predominant in the Palakkad town. They use three horizontal

lines (namam) on their forehead as an identity marker of Saivaite sect.²⁵ Tamil Brahmins are vegetarian and they have divided into three subdivisions according to the Vedas they follow. Each sect claims a sage (rishi) as their ancestor. They also held lands as brahmasvam and devasam. They gave their land for lease to the tenants for cultivation. In addition, they are engaged in priesthood which is mainly divided into two types (i) Vaidikas are engaged in presiding the religious ceremonies and (ii) Laukikas in other occupations.

They live in gramam or agraharam which consists of two rows of houses facing each other. There is no courtyard but only the common street. At one end of the street is the temple. The Pattar form an organisation for the religious and social matters known as samooham. For the administration of this samooham a leader and five members committee is elected among the community. They have definite number of priest called vadhyaars for their ritual. Their main festivals are pongal (in January), thaipuzham (in January-February), shivaratri (February), vinayaka chathurthi (September), navaratri (September-November), deepavali (October-November) and tarpan (July-August) for the departed ancestors. In Palakkad, Kalpathi ratholsavam (chariot festival) in the month of November is one of the traditional festivals. They have been associated with the conduction of tarpan ritual on the Kalpathippuzha, one of the tributaries of Bharathappuzha. There is no vaishnavaite in the Palakkad agraharams. The family is patriarchal and sons inherit the property of their father. The worship of the deities in temples by the Tamil Brahmins does not differ from that of the Nambuthiris.

As stated already, the Brahmin implantation led to the agrarian expansion to the support of the peasant communities. The agrarian communities acted initially as tenants, sharecroppers, cultivators and landless labourers for the absentee landlords such as Nambuthiri and Pattar Brahmins. The foremost of these communities is Nayars who developed close relationship with the Nambuthiris and together formed the basis for agrarian expansion in the origin part of Bharathappuzha.²⁶ Later, some of


²⁶ Data collected from the informents, Soman, 51, Kallekulantara; Suresh, 49, Chunnambuthara; V.Pangajakshan, 60, Putthur; Ramachandran, 60, Malambuzha; Dhandapanini, 67, Kulangara; Murali, 42, Kulangara; Gopalakrishnan, 63, Vallikodu; Balan 67, Chinakathoor; Ramachandran, 56, Manappulli; Ramesh,45, Rayamangalalm; Shivaraman,58, Peringot; Krishnan, 74, Aamakavu; Pradeep,25, Kootanadu; Narayani Amma, 66, Kootanadu ; Venugopal, 54, Kodikunnu ; Murali,47,
the families of Nayars became militia for the ruling class and acquired land as service tenures thereby became landed gentry and local chieftains.

**Nayars**

The Nayars are one of the major portions of the population in the origin part on the banks of Bharathappuzha. They consider themselves as a noble caste. Nayars were the military class under the local kings and they were also the rulers of some of these localities. The word Nayar is the honorific plural of Nayan. It is derived from Nayaka, which denotes a leader of the people. According to an ancient Sanskrit text Kerala Mahatmyam, the Nayars are said to be the offspring of the Nambuthiri men with Deva, Rakshasa and Gandharva women brought in by Parasurama where as the 17th Century text Keralolpathi describes Nayars as the descendents of the Sudras who accompanied the Brahmins to Kerala. Some consider that Nayars came from Tibet where polyandry prevails and others consider them to be an early division of the Newars of Nepal. The most accepted opinion among the Scholars about the origin of Nayars is that, they belong to the Dravidian race with mixture of Aryan blood. The date of their arrival in Kerala cannot be accurately determined.

The Nayars of ancient times were the chief military group in the kingdom of Kerala. Nayar men were generally sent to kalari (martial) school at the age of seven to learn all manners of physical exercises and enable them to use the weapons. Nayars were the greatest and worst enemies of the Europeans. The Nayars whom the king selected in his military group were never dismissed and received their pay and rations. The warlike race like Nayars played very important role in the medieval history of

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27 Others consider it as a derivation from the word nagas (snake worshipers). For further details see L.Anantha Krishna Iyer, Tribes and castes of Cochin, Vol 2, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications 1981.


29 Ibid.,


Kerala. In those days the Nayar has increased their population.\textsuperscript{32} Later their weapons and modes of fighting have changed due to the influence of Europeans in Kerala.

They constructed their houses in large compounds. The strict customs of caste purity and pollution in olden days led them to construct houses in a vast land. They select the site in the margin of fertile paddy field to construct their houses. Within the Nayar community, some individual families acquired different professions and were known according to that. This created internal structure among Nayars and it handed down from generation to generation. The Nayars were divided into many subgroups based on their occupation. Each group had a separate function. The major subdivision exists in the origin banks of Bharathappuzha are as follows:

Table No 4.3: Subgroups of Nayar Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>Hereditary Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kiriyatil Nayar</td>
<td>Servants of Nambuthiri Brahmin for local administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Illathu Nayar</td>
<td>Servants of Nambuthiri Brahmin House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pallichan Nayar</td>
<td>Palanquin Bearers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chakkalan</td>
<td>Oil Makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anduran</td>
<td>Pottery Makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Attikurishi</td>
<td>Assist Nambuthiri Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Veluthedathu</td>
<td>Washeraman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Velakathala</td>
<td>Barbers of Nayar and Nambuthiri Brahmin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The members of the Kiriyatil Nayar group serve the Kerala Brahmins in the administration. They bear the titles such as Panikkar, Kurup, Kaimal, Karta and Menon. The \textit{Naduvazhi} (rulers of the nadu) and \textit{Desavazhi} (rulers of the deshams), the military leaders and other \textit{sthanis} (leaders) of Kerala include in this category.\textsuperscript{33} They are considered as superior to the members of other subdivisions.

The maid servants of the Nambuthiri house belong to Illathu Nayar groups and follow strict vegetarianism and worked as servants. They clean the vessels and houses; collect wood for the \textit{illam} (house) of the Nambuthiries. The ladies also work as servants during the post delivery period of the Nambuthiri woman (\textit{antharjanam}).


During the reign of *swaroopams* the local rulers used to travel different localities of their territories and there were no vehicles in those days. They used palanquin as vehicle and one of the subgroup of Nayar community carry them. These palanquin bearers called as Pallichan Nayar. The Malayalam word of palanquin is ‘*pallakku*’ and those who carry the palanquin is known as Pallichan.

Oil was an inevitable element in the life of the people especially for the Nambuthiri Brahmins. The Nambuthiris used oil during different occasions such as bath, temple ritual, post delivery bath of Nambuthiri women, death ritual ceremonies (sradha ritual). It was obligatory to use the oil which was made by Chakkalans, a subgroup of Nayars. They prepared oil from dried coconut and gingili. The instrument used to prepare the oil is called ‘*chakku*’ and the name is derived from that. Chakkalans sell oil to each house of the region. In later times, the Arab Muslims were also engaged in producing oil in cheap rates which led to the end of oil business of the Chakkalans.

The Anduran Nayars are the manufacturers of earthenware for use in temples and houses. The people on the central Kerala used earthenware for cooking and Anduran also make tiles for the roof of the houses. The people practice *sanchayanam* ritual after the dead body is buried. In this ritual they use the earthen pot made by Anduran. In addition to this, they even prepare pot for temple ritual such as *kalashapanikal* (small clay pot), *mulampanikal* (leaned pot) and *cheraths* (small clay lamps). It was the duty of Anduran to prepare *homakunda* during the rituals such as *upanayanam*, *samavarthanam* and *yagam* of the Nambuthiri. In contemporary times they distribute pot for ritual in the temples as their hereditary right and in return receive paddy and oil as reward from the temple authorities.

Nambuthitri Brahmin was the priestly class of Kerala and the Attikurishi Nayars assist the Nambuthiri priest during the death ritual of Nambuthiri community. They are the priests who officiate at funeral ceremonies of all sub castes above them. It was their duty to prepare *dharbha* grass, turmeric, sand, paddy for the death ritual and clean the place after the ritual was over.

The Nambuthiri Brahmins of Kerala follow strict practice of purity and pollution like the Brahmins of other parts of India. The dresses of Nambuthiri Brahmins were washed by the Veluthedathu Nayar. They were the village
washermen. The Nambuthiri would free from any pollution once they wear the washed cloth named as *mattu*. The story behind the origin of this occupation is narrated as; *once upon a time a Brahmin was washing clothes for one of his friend and on that account, he was thrown out of caste by Parasurama.* The descendents of this out caste Brahmin became Veluthedathu Nayar. They are the non-vegetarians but do not eat beef and pork. Besides this occupation, they also possessed land as property. They follow the customs from birth to death precisely similar to the Nayars. There is one more subdivision in the Veluthedathu Nayar, which is known as Velakathala Nayar. They are the village barbers for Nayars and for all castes above them.

In respect to the subdivisions among the Nayars, there are some variations that can be seen in different places. The Nayars affix their name as *Karta, Kaimal, Kurup, Panikkar, Menon, Assan, Achan, Mannadiyar* etc., based on their social status. The Nayars follow the *marumakathayam* (the law which regulates succession through the female line) law of succession.

In the past, the Kerala was divided into many *nadus* and *desham* (village) under *deshavazhi* (administrator of desam). Most of this *deshams* were under the control of Nayars. They were also the authority of the chiefs of the military division in these units which was hereditary in their respective families and accordingly appropriate some titles. The Nayars collect taxes from the villagers and they were also the supreme power in the social matters. In later stage of Malabar history some of the Nayar families became independent chieftains with their private properties which became the major sources of their income.

The Nayars follow the ritual practices of Hinduism and worship the deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, and their consorts in temples. They also adore *Bhagavathi* in the form of Kali mostly located in *kavu* (sacred grove) and the goddesses wishes are often interpreted by them through oracles which are known as *velichapad*. Nayars also follow sorcery and believe in animism. The worship of ancestors is found among them and they keep a separate place for ancestral worship adjacent to their house known as *thara* or special rooms.

They were at one time a military caste but in later times some of them became poor and lost their prestige and influence while few families maintain their ancient
position. The subclasses of Nayars, whose occupation were potters, oil mongers; servants and so on abandoned their traditional occupations.

Most of the Nayars in origin part of Bharathappuzha are agriculturists. These includes tenant farmers, agricultural labourers and very few engage in trade. Their sentiments generated by the old feudalism still exist in connection in their relations with other castes during the ritual occasion in temples/kavus in a great extent. The community is now well educated and working in government services though there are landlords and farmers among them.

The Nayars are divided into many subdivisions and many of them intermingle through marriage. The exact number of these groups cannot be enumerated as it is disputed whether certain of them have belong to Nayar community or not. The traditional occupation of the Nayars was soldiering but this does not mean that all Nayars were soldiers. The Nayars armies were disbursed in the 18th and early 19th century A.D and they took different professions in the modern times.

**Panan**

Another major community associated with agriculture in the origin part of Bharathappuzha is the Panan, Paraya and Pulaya who are the agricultural labour. Among the three, the Panan are the notable and dominant caste in this region. The Panan are populated in Pallathen, Elapully and Althur taluks of Palakkad district. They may be the descendants of the hill tribe who have settled in the plains. They belong to Scheduled Caste category. The word ‘pana’ means singer. Panan is also called Malayan and Thiruvarangan. They follow matrilineal pattern. The traditional occupation is making Palmyra leaf umbrella. There is no sub caste among the Panans and the caste is endogamous. The caste men belong to different sects known as kiriyams. The name of some of the kiriyams in Palakkad is puthana kiriyam, Mangat kiriyam, Chera kiriyam, Kaniyathi kiriyam, Kallu kiriyam, Karutha kiriyam and Arriri kiriyam. Every village consists of a few families and live in small thatched huts. These huts are built in one compound wherein their gods are located.

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34 Data collected from the informants, Sulochana Thichur; Mohanan Erumapetty; Ittyali Arangotukara; Parukutty, Kunjumon, Shrin, Kocha Koratiyam Kunnu Kanjirakode.

Marriage is endogamous and they have a kind of conjugal relation known as *sambhadham* to Nayars. The sons inherit the property of their father. Generally they are poor. There are magicians, sorcerers among them and they also perform for the high caste men. The spirits of Kali, Yakshi, Gandharvan, and Hanuman are propitiated by them with the help of *mantrams* (chants) and offerings. In Palakkad taluk, the attack of any demons in the house of any caste man is suspected, Panans are called to drive the spirits away. In order to gratifying the evil spirits, Panans conduct *homam* (sacred fire) to Kalladikode Neeli (the tutelary deity) and propitiate her with songs and offerings. They also practice black magic (*odi*). Their main gods are Mookan, Chathan, Kappiri, Malankurathi and Kali. These deities are represented by stones under neem or nerium tree and pujas are performed to them on the first of medam (April-May), Karkadakam (July-August) and on Tuesday in Makaram (January-February). They wash the places and offers *malar* (parched rice), plantain, coconuts and rice. They also worship the spirit of their ancestors and fast on new moon lights.

Their traditional occupation is to sing early morning song (*prabhatha ganam*) in the verandah of temple. In the month of Karkadakam (July-August) Panan perform a ritual called Thukilonarthuka (waking from sleep). A Panan with his wife, provided with a drum and *kuzhithalam* (cymbals) goes to the houses of Brahmins and Nayars after midnight and sing sacred songs. In return they get paddy, rice, gingerly oil and coconut. This is intended to drive away evil spirits which are believed to cause trouble in the month of karkadakam (April-July). Another ritual performance known as *Panankali/Pankali* is also performed by them.\(^{36}\)

The dead bodies of Panans are buried. In Palakkad, when the *kapradan* (head of Panan community) dies, the Raja is informed and he sends to the chief mourner a sword, a shield, a spear, a few small guns with some gun powder for a few discharges, a silver bangle and few necklaces. The chief mourner, his son (wearing the ornaments) follows as the dead body is taken to the burial ground. The persons armed with weapons go in front of it and three discharges are fired. On the sixteenth mourning after the death, the son and his family bath and free from pollution and

\(^{36}\)This ritual performance is explained in the forthcoming Chapter VI.
provide feast to others. The next day he pays his respects to the Raja with an umbrella of his own making, when the Raja bestows upon him the title of *kapradan*.

Panans is an umbrella maker. He makes the frame work and the covering is done by the female of his house. The cover is of Palmyra leaves. They also engage in all kinds of agricultural work and also build mud walls. Their women act as midwives. They receive food from Brahmins and Nayars and abstain from taking the food of all caste men below them. They cannot enter the temples and neither allowed Brahmin Street in Palakkad.

The Panan community praises the name of the deity in a particular *kavu* or temple. They sing the myth of the *kavu* and sometimes sing the Ramayana/Mahabharatha at the request of some house owners. They get money and paddy and cloth in return. After the four days fasting (*vrattha*), on the first day of the *parayeduppu* (collection of paddy before the festival in the *kavu*), they will start this performance till the evening. Finally it will end at the *vela* (annual festival on the origin banks of Bharathappuzha) day and they will get blessing from the *Bhagavathi* in the *kavu*. They don’t perform this song in the Shiva and Krishna temples. Even now they are continuing this taboo.

Apart from these major communities, the origin part also sustains the communities such as Aasaaries (carpenter), Pulaya (Agricultural labourers) and Paraya (Bamboo makers).

(b) Middle part of river Bharathappuzha: Major Communities

**Legend of Parayipetta Panthiru Kulam**

The *Parayipetta Panthiru Kulam*, literally meaning the ‘twelve castes born from Paraya woman’, is an important legend which highlights the evolution of the social structure on the middle banks of Bharathappuzha. The legend is centred on the village of Shoranur, Pattambi and Thrithala areas i.e., middle part of Bharathappuzha. According to this story, a Brahmin named Vararuchi married a lower caste woman without knowing her true identity.

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One day Vararuchi, the Brahmin king of Avanthy was invoking the support of the deity living under an aswastha tree (Ficus religiosa). Therein, he overheard a conversation between two Gandharvas on the tree. One of the Gandharva said that Vararuchi would marry a Paraya girl for whose birth the Gandharva attended and gave some offerings. Vararuchi thought that unless that child is put to death, the entire kingdom will be under threat. Accordingly, the little girl was traced, and branded with a nail mark on the forehead and kept in a small open box like object made out of banana plant peelings and then pushed it into the river. The box floated on the river waters along the down stream.

The box was, however, taken possession by a Brahmin who was bathing in the lower course of the river. He opened and found a beautiful girl whom he considered as a divine gift and looked upon her as his daughter. She grew to be a beautiful maiden.

One day the pious Brahmin was looking out for a guest to dine with him and saw Vararuchi passing by, whom he invited. He said he would accept the invitation only on condition that the host would arrange to prepare eighteen curries and give him what remained after feeding hundred Brahmins. The Brahmin host was quite embarrassed at the impracticable demand of his guest, but the step-daughter, who was close by consoled him by the promise that she would satisfy the guest’s requirements and wished him to bathe and be ready to dine with him. She took out a long leaf and placed thereon a ginger preparation which corresponded to eighteen curries. A little of boiled rice placed along with it. This corresponded to the food offered to a hundred deities in the performance of the ceremony. Seeing this to be the work of the girl, he eagerly desired to have her as his wife to which the Brahmin readily consented. Vararuchi wedded her and lived a happy married life.

One day, while conversing about their past life he had a chance to see the nail stuck mark over her forehead and knew her to be the girl whom he had caused to be floated down the stream. Consoling himself that he could not avoid the sad irony of fate, he resolved to go on pilgrimage with his wife. Travelling from place to place and worshiping the deities in many temples at last he came to Kerala. During the course of the journey, the woman became pregnant several times, and every time she delivered a baby, Vararuchi would ask her if the baby was born with a mouth. On hearing a positive reply, he would ask her to leave her newborn, with the explanation that the god which gave the mouth would also provide the food. This went on until the twelfth baby was born. This time, the wife got disgusted and lied to the same old question of her husband. On hearing this, Vararuchi asked for the baby. But the mouth of the baby had really disappeared. Vararuchi consecrated the boy as deity on the roadside. The twelve children, except the last one who was left on the roadside taken care by members of different castes.

According to another version of this legend, Vararuchi was the servant of king Vikramaditya and belongs to Brahmin caste. One day king asked Vararuchi, which is the important slokas of Ramayana and which is the important sentence. King needs the answer within forty one days. Vararuchi did not get the answer before the last day. He went into a forest and prayed for all humanity and slept. In the forest he saw
some angels walking on that side and heard them saying to the forest goddesses that they are going to drink the blood of a new baby. But the forest goddesses to accompanying them as Vararuchi prayed before going to sleep for the entire humanity. On the returning journey of angels’ forest goddess enquired about the newborn. They told that the baby is a girl of Paraya caste and Vararuchi would marry her in future. Vararuchi also heard the answer about the slokas of Ramayana from the angels. According to them, the most important verse was the advice given by Sumitra to Lakshmana, when Sri Rama, Seeta and Lakshmana started for forest exile.

‘Ramam Dasaratham vidhhi, maam vidhhi Janakaatmajam Ayodhya mataveem vidhhi, gaccha thaatha yattha sukham’

(Consider Rama as if he was his father Dasarathan, Seeta as mother and the forest as Ayodhya; may the journey be a blessed one).

And the most important phrase in it was “Maam vidhi Janakaatmajam” (Consider Seeta as your mother).

Vararuchi then returned to King Vikramaadithyan’s court and recited this most important verse of Ramayana which greatly pleased the king who presented Vararuchi with felicitations and he also informed the birth of the Paraya child. Later some Brahmins instructed that one girl was born in the village and the kingdom will collapse when she attains the age of three. King instructed to kill the girl. Vararuchi thought that killing of a girl is a big sin and he made a small boat of plantain tree and put an oil lamp and sends it in the river.

After long years, Vararuchi reached a Brahmin house for food on his journey. There he loved the girl who served him and married her. Later he saw a mark in her head and understood that it was the Paraya girl whom he had cast out in the river. Vararuchi learnt that the Brahmin who hosted him got her out of the river and brought her up as his daughter.

Then the couple went on a pilgrimage and the lady gave birth to eleven children and every child Vararuchi asked her to leave them to the care of gods by asking her that does the child have mouth, if he has, the god will provide food. So he asked to leave the children. Finally at the twelfth birth the lady give answer that the child has no mouth. Actually she told a lie. But when she looked at the child, the child had no mouth and they took the child. All the eleven children who were left by Vararuchi were brought up by different caste people.

The eleven children and their community are given in the following table:

Table No4.4: Eleven children - Their community and Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S No</th>
<th>Name of the Children</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Chief occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mezhathol Agnihothri</td>
<td>Nambuthiri Brahmin</td>
<td>Priestly and agricultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Naaraanathu Bhraanthan</td>
<td>Ilayathu Nambuthiri (temple servants)</td>
<td>Priestly and agricultural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Occupational/Religious Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kaarakkal Maatha</td>
<td>Nayar Naduvazhi (landlord)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vaduthala Nayar</td>
<td>Nayar Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Paananaar</td>
<td>Panan (caste of musicians)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Perumthachan</td>
<td>Aasaari (carpenter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rajakan</td>
<td>Mammann (washermen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Paakkanaar</td>
<td>Paraya (Harijan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Akavoor Chaathan</td>
<td>Pulaya (Harijan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vallon</td>
<td>Valluvar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Uppukottan</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The twelfth child was Vaayillaakkunnilappan and he was worshipped as deity.

As per the above table the eleven communities belong to different castes and creeds which reside in the middle part of the Bharathappuzha river.

With regard to the **Nambuthiris**, it is already discussed in the earlier passage of origin part of Bharathappuzha. They stand highest in the social hierarchy of Kerala with regard to ritual positioning.

**Ambalavasis**

The Ambalavasis is a generic name indicates all classes of temple servants in Kerala. The word amabalavasi is originated from *amabalam* and *vasi* which means ‘temple’ and ‘resident’ respectively. Each group of amabalavasi community is associated with specific jobs and have fixed duties to perform. The major subgroups in the Ambalavasis include Ilayath, Variyar, Marar, Brahmaniyar and Kallattu Kurup.

**Ilayathu**

Ilayathu is originally Nambuthiri Brahmin who suffered social degradation for having officiated as priests at the funeral ceremonies of the Nayars. All customs such as *upanayanam* (sacred thread ceremony), marriage, funeral and law of inheritance are similar to the Brahmins. They did not study the Veda and they are their own priest.

**Variyar**

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39 Data collected from Achuthan kutty, 67, Kallekulangara; damodaran, 80, Thavanoor; Nandhan, 41, Kuttipuram; Venu, 38, Alathiyoor; Satheesh Kumar,39, Thirur; Shashi, 30, Kodikunnu; Vijayaraja Menon,58, Vaileerikavu; Bhaskara Kuruppu, 59, Irimbiliyam; Chandrashekar, 62, Viruttanam.
Variyar is also one of the Ambalavasis. There are many accounts about the origin of the Variyar community. It is believed that, they are the descendants of a Brahmin married to Sudra women. The word Variyar is derived from ‘varuka’ which means to ‘sweep’. They are the sweepers of the inner yard of the temple. Another account is that, an old Brahmin married a young lady and they offered flower-garland every day to the village god. In due course she conceived and it is believed that her conception was the result of the god’s blessing. The posterity of this lady is known as Variyars. Their occupation is making garlands to the temple deity. They are saivaites and have no upanayanam. Variyar dresses in the Brahminical style and use saivaitic mark on their forehead. A Variyar marry women of his caste and sometimes formed sambhandham with Nayar girl. They follow inheritance from the female line known as marumakathayam. Now they are following makkathayam system of inheritance. Their dead bodies are cremated in the southern part of their house. Basically they are serving two ways in the temple such as garland making and sweeping. The house of a Variyar is variyam and the women are called Varisar. They are pure vegetarians. Land is their major economic resource and engaging labour from Pulayan and Paraya community. At present few persons of this community are continuing their traditional occupations. They worship Hindu gods and they are saivaites. Brahmin priests are engaged in performing pujas. They receive cooked food from Nambuthiri and Nayar and keep pollution with the other castes. They had close relation with the Nambuthiris because the Variyar women had sambhandham with the Nambuthiri. At the time of puberty and other pollution, they receive the services of the Mannan.

Marars

Marars are the drummers and the musicians in the temples. The name Marar is derived from the Tamil root mar, which means ‘to beat’. Their customs in connection with inheritance and pollution are similar to Nayar or the Brahmins. They have sambhandham with Nambuthiri men. Their own caste men act as priests for

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40 Data collected from Bharathi Varasyar, 62, Poyilathu; SVS Variyar, 73, Vavanoor.


funeral and other ceremonies. They follow vegetarian food and cremate the dead body. They are also a small land owning community and after the land reform act, they became owners of the land. Many of them still continue their traditional occupations and Nambuthiri priest perform prayers for them and their main instrument is *chenda* (a round percussion instrument). As a drummer in the temples, they keep pollution with lower caste people below the Nayar.

**Brahmaniyar or Nambiyar**

Brahmaniyar or Nambiyar is another sub-group in the Ambalavasis. There are four classes among the Nambiyars, they are - Pushpakan or Brahmaniyar, Thiyatti Nambiyar, Chakkiyar Nambiyar and Chengazhi Nambiyar. The origin of the sub caste Pushpakan is that, a Brahmin had an intercourse with his wife during her menstrual period, for which they were out casted. In another story, a Brahmin suspected his pregnant wife of adultery and therefore out casted her. She gave birth to a female and died. The child was brought up by Parasurama and in due course married her. Their descendants referred as Pushpakans. They are not eligible to read Veda. As a sub group among Brahmins, they are also known as Brahminiyar.

Their marriage customs are similar to those of Brahmins, but their women had *sambandham* with the Nambuthiri Brahmin. Their woman is known as Pushpinis or Brahmanies. The Brahmaniyar follow the matriarchal systems of inheritance. Their birth and death pollutions last for eleven days, their traditional occupation consists of sweeping the inner grounds of the temples. The males are called Nambissan.

According to Thurston (1975), Pushpakan originate out of the union of a Brahmin woman in her menses with her husband. In another tradition, in primitive ages early marriages prevailed among the Malayala Brahmin (Nambuthiri), the family of the Nambuthiri allowed to marry her daughter before her puberty. So they excommunicated and became the Pushpakan. The Pushpakan sect is distributed in Thrishur, Kozhikode districts. They have resemblance with the Nambuthiri Brahmin in respect of their dress and customs. They are pure vegetarian. Among the Ambalavasis, they occupy the highest position and wear the sacred thread. In the past, the sacred thread (*punool*) wearing ceremony called *upanayanam* was carried out for four days but in the contemporary times it is observed only for one day. They cremate the dead body.
Land is the major economic sources. Most of them have small land holdings and most of the households are associated with a temple in which they perform. Each family is allowed some land by the temple authority. Elders in the family control other members. Those who violate the norms of the community were excommunicated. They formed a caste association Pushpaka Seva Samajam. They worship Vishnu, Shiva, Parvathi, and Bhagavathi. The Nambuthiri priests are engaged for performing pujas. They accept food from Nambuthiri Brhamin and even receive services of Mannan on the occasion of pollutions. The Mannan supply mattu cloth to remove the pollution.

**Kallattu Kurup**

Kallattu Kurup is an Ambalavasi community in Kerala also known as kalam kurup as synonym. Male members affix kurup to their names. According to the origin story of this community, a sage by name Thirumanthadavu Maharshi was devotee of Thirumandhavu Bhagavathi. The sage was eager to have the true vision of the goddess and undertook penance and Bhagavathi appeared before him. The sage had an assistant from Nayar community to assist the pujas who was proficient in the art of drawing. Being an artist, he immediately drew the figure of Bhagavathi on a big stone. Then onwards he was called as ‘Kallattu Kurup’ which means ‘one who draws the figures on stones’. Thereafter, his descendant is known from this name and engaged in the occupation of kalamezhuthu, which is an art of drawing the figure of the deity on the floor with the help of colour powders from rice, turmeric, burnt charcoal, paddy husk and dried green leaves. They sing during the drawing of kalam (floral drawing) in Bhagavathi shrines. They draw kalam in shrines/temple, house of Brahmans as an offering to Bhadrakali during the time of temple rituals. Through the song they narrate the war between Kali and Dharika after drawing the full kalam of Bhadrakali. They are populated in Thrishur, Malappuram and Palakkad district of Kerala and follow vegetarian food. They claim that they are equal in rank with the Nayar but below the Nambuthiri Brahmin. Decades ago, the women of the Kallattu Kurup had sambandham relationship with the men of the Nambuthiri Brahmin. The children born out of this relationship belonged to the mother’s caste and followed matrilineal system of inheritance. At present, it has been changed to patrilineal. Unlike the other Ambalavasi group, women of the Kallattu Kurup have no role to play in temple.
Kallattu Kurup cremates the dead body. Agriculture and temple service are the major sources of their income. They own land and cultivate it by engaging labourers from other communities like the Pulaya on daily wages basis. The traditional occupation of the Kallattu Kurup is *kalamezhuthu* in Bhagavathi shrines. Some of them follow their traditional occupation. They follow Hinduism and worship Vishnu, Shiva, Ayappa and Bhagavathi. They traditionally do not accept food from communities such as the Pulaya and Mannan and in the past they observed touch pollution with these communities.

**Vishwakarma**

The chief artisan community of this region is Vishwakarma who believe that they are the descendants of Vishwakarma, the divine architect. Vishwakarma had five sons namely Manu (black smith), Maya (carpenter), Thwasta (moosari), Silpa (sculpture), Viswagna (goldsmith). They specialises in different forms of crafts. They are goldsmith (*tattan*), brass smith (*moosari*), black smith (*karuvankollan*), carpenter (*thatchanaasaari*) and masons (*silpikaltachchan*). The five communities are not exogamous. Every village had this group. The term *perumthachan* and *perumkollan* denote great craftsman. Most of them worked under a master craftsman. The community has an important role in the economy of Kerala. Women subordinate the work.43

These five castes were the basic element of pre-modern Kerala village. The blacksmith manufactured agricultural tools of production like plough shares, hoes, axes and other implements. Their workshop is erected by the side of their huts and their furnace is a small place. They made weapons such as metal shields, swords, battle axes and javelins for the military group. The gold smiths received orders from the temple and also made jewellery for the palace, temple and also for the upper castes. The *moosaries* (metal workers) supply all kinds of house hold utensils of bronze and temple idols are made by them. The mode of payment to artisan was in paddy. The masons collect stones for house construction, walls and for other purpose. They are also called *shilpiaasaaries*. The *hattans* (goldsmith) make jewellery to the

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villagers. The houses of the artisan can be recognised from their surroundings that of a carpenter from the wood piled around it, a black smith from the shed with furnace, moosari with small workshop containing metal vessels.

In Kerala, they are also known as kammalan which means ‘one who lives with same occupation’. The traditional occupations are pursued by the members of each caste and any deviation from the occupation of the community led to excommunication. The origin myth of vishwakarma narrated in the Vishwakarma puranam which says that this universe is the creation of both Brahma and Vishwakarma. Five elements formed an egg and the universe originates from the burst of egg. Shiva and Vishnu emerged from it and created Brahma and Vishwakarma respectively. Vishwakarma had five faces and it represent the five crafts. The three were smiths and the rest of two were non-smiths. The colour of the faces of Vishwakarma shows the crafts of each group such as gold for the goldsmith, copper (brass) for the brass smith, black for the blacksmith, stony colour for the mason and a wooden colour for the carpenter. The Kammalans of Kerala are said to have been migrated from the Tamil Nadu to Malabar in the beginning of the 9th C. They are listed in the OBC category of Kerala government.

Besides the tali tying marriage in their own caste, the Kammalans women had sambhandham with Nayars. Among the Kammalans the law of succession to property is in the patriarchal and women do not have any share in the family property. They have their caste assemblies which consist of the elderly members of the entire sub group. They meet special occasions of the community.

They worship Kali and Bhagavathi and also follow other deities of Nayars and other castes. Their dead bodies are buried. The Kurup is the priest who performs all

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44 Data collected from the informant Sudheesh Pariyanampetta.
45 Kaanipayoor Shankaran Namboothiripadu, Manushyalaychandrika (Mal), Kunnamkulam: Panchangam Books.
46 Data collected from the informents, Bharathi, 53, Nellikattiri; Chandran, 60, Nellikattiri; Sudheesh, 16, Mulayankavu.
47 Vijaya Ramaswamy, “Vishwakarma Craftsmen in Early Medieval Peninsular India” in JESHO, 47.4. 2004.
these rituals. There is always a great demand for the labour of these artisan classes and they earn high wages.

All the subdivisions of the Vishwakarma have the practice of inter-dining but never intermarry. When the services of the different group of the Kammalans are required for the construction of a temple, they bath early morning, go to the temple and the Nambuthiri priest gives them each a holy thread and starts their work. Further they also consult their mothers before going to work and if they are not ready to give them permission, they stay away from the work.

**Aasaaries**

Aasaaries (carpenters) are non-vegetarian and the descent is from the father’s side. Father is the head of the family. They follow makkathayam system of inheritance and all the subdivisions cooperated in others work. The Aasaari designed the traditional houses of Brahmins nalukettu (mansions) based on the principles of vasthu. They make wooden materials for construction of buildings, furniture and agricultural implements. The Aasaaries are Hindus and worship Vishnu, Shiva, Bhagavathi, and Ganapati and also worship lord Vishwakarma. The Brahmin priests are invited to perform certain pujas in their houses. They also participate in the village festival of the Bhagavathi shrines. On the occasion of ceremonies, the five groups of Kammalans invite each other.

**Musaries**

Musaries (deal with bronze metal) are said to be the descendants of Tvashtas and they are non-vegetarian and do not eat beef and pork. Descend through the father and they are an endogamous group and follow patriarchal system of inheritance. The musarisi generally make house hold utensils like goblet (kindy), frying pan (uruli), lamp (vilaku). They make the mould of the vessels first by using earth and cow dung. Wax is applied to this mould. Later metal is poured into it and heated for some time. They make the vessels as per the requirements of the villagers. All the Kammalans seeks the service of Mannan during the time of pollution.

**Thattan**

The Thattan known as swarna panikaran (gold smith) are non-vegetarian and do not eat beef and pork. In the past, property was divided equally only among the sons but now women also have the right in property distribution. Most of the
Kammalans do not own any cultivable land. They follow the occupation of jewellery manufacture which includes setting of stones, designing of silver and gold ornaments. All the Kammalans accept cooked food from Brhmin, Nayar and Ambalavasis and do not accept food from lower communities.

**Kollan**

The Kollan (blacksmith) also called as Karuvan are non-vegetarian and avoids beef and pork. Endogamy is the marriage rule. Patrilineal (makathayam) is the system of inheritance. Eldest son is the head of the family. The bodies of Kammalans are buried. The kollans are the traditional black smiths. They manufacture locks, keys, agricultural implements and small weapons. They have access to the temples and they lived in the lands of Nambuthirs and Nayars. After the land reform Act, some of them have got land.

**Mannan**

The Mannan is the washermen community in Kerala. The word ‘mannan’ comes from ‘mannuthan’ which means, one who washes soiled clothes. Their traditional occupation is washing. They are also known as vannan because people use the sound ‘va’ instead of ‘ma’. There is no sub caste among the Mannan. The origin of Mannans is reflected in the following story:

> Once when god Parameshwaran and his wife Parvati were trying to entertain each other, the latter made an elephant with earth which was accidentally trodden by the former, whence arise a man who stood bowing before them. He was called the Mannan because he came out from mun (earth) and to him was assigned his present occupation, which is washing.

The above narrative recites in song form on the fourth day of a girl’s first menses, when she takes ceremonial bath to be free from pollution. The Mannan is found all over the middle part of Bharathappuzha banks and live in thatched huts in coconut garden of some landlords. They are very poor and use earthen utensils. Son’s

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49 Data collected from Kutty Shankaran, 58, Varavoor; Devaki, 54, Varavoor; Shivashankaran, 45, Palakkal; Govindan, 53, AArangotukara; Susheela, 54, Vavanoor; Anil Kumar, 35, Vaavanoor; Janaradhanan, 60, Chandanakavu.

inherits the property of their fathers. They have their caste assemblies, which consists of the elderly members who meet on all occasions affecting the welfare of the caste men and their decisions are final.

Mannans practice magic and sorcery. With the help of certain mantram (chants) and bhasmam (holy ashes) they propitiate goddess of small pox. They worship Chandan, Mundan, Kandakarnan, Karinkutty and Chathan all of whom are separately represented by stones. It is located underneath a tree in the corners of their compounds and offers rooster, coconut, parched rice to them on the tenth of Dhanu (last week of December), on Tuesday in Makaram (January-February) and on Kumbha Bharani (March-April). Chathan, Mundiyan, Kandakarnan, Karikutty and Malavazhi are the other deities of Mannan community. For devotion they sing songs in respect of the above deities. Each Mannan family has the thara (small shrine) of these deities.51

They adore goddess Bhagavathi and the spirits of their departed ancestors, who are believed to exercise their influence in the families of those people for every good and bad. Wooden images representing the spirit of their departed ancestors are located in a room of their house and worshipped with offerings on the death anniversary and other auspicious day.

The Mannans bury their dead body. The chief occupation is the giving of mattu (a washed cloth) to Nayars to wear before going to bath the day on which they are freed from pollutions. All the members in the family are to wear mattu during birth, menstrual and death pollutions on the 16th day. After bath, they wear the washed cloth and return it as soon as the bath is over. It may either belong to the washer man or have been previously given to him by the members of the family. He gets money and paddy for his service to the woman in the menses and birth pollutions.

Mannans refuse to give the mattu to low caste people. They first plunge the dirty clothes in water, mixed with cow-dung and beat them on a stone by the side of a tank and then immerse the clothes again in water, mixed with wood ashes (charam), after which they are exposed to steam for a few hours and again beat them on the stone, until they appears to be clean. They are then dried in the sun. When the clothes

are dried they are neatly folded. They stand far away from the shrines and temples of high caste men.

The Mannan is distributed in the plain region of Bharathppuzha banks that is middle part. They belong to the Scheduled Category. They are non-vegetarian but do not eat beef and pork. A small number in the community poses cultivable land. Marriage alliances formed outside the community is regarded as offence and offenders are excommunicated. Now they have registered caste association namely, Mannan Maha Sabha works for the development of the community. They participate in the annual festivals of the Bhagavathi shrine with their ritual form, namely thira and poothan. They accept food from the Brahmins and Nayars but do not accept food from Pulayan and Paraya. They adorn themselves as the representative of goddess during the festival in the village shrine/temple.

Paraya

The Paraya belong to a lower caste of the middle Kerala next to the Pulaya.\textsuperscript{52} The word Paraya is derived from ‘para’ a percussion instrument (drum). At the time of desavazhi regime, all official orders were informed to the public in the street with the beat of the drum. It was the duty of Parayan to do this.

The Parayan delight in drum beating and are generally called on to act as drummers at funerals, marriages and village festivals. They are the agricultural labourers and manufacture of drums by tanning the leather from animals. Apart from this main occupation they also make baskets, bamboo mats grass mats, leather workers cobblers and umbrellas. Men supply bamboo to their women. They are treated as lowest of low castes. Their presence carries pollution to the members of high castes and cannot draw water from the wells of high caste. They take part in the festival and in the ordinary days, they cannot enter the temple. They belong to scheduled category who inhabit near the hill side. They were skin tappers of the animals and it was their right to bury the dead animal.

\textsuperscript{52} Data collected from Rajamani, 45, Palakkad; Karappan, 67, Kottathara; Kunjikuttan Choppan, 69, Kuttippuram; Vijayan Choppan, 66, Kuttippuram; Kurumban, 53, Chandhanakavu; Subrahmaniyan, 55, Vellarakkad; Velayudhan, 65, Varavoor; Unni, 42, Varavoor; Dillep, 24, Varavoor; Mani, 65, Varavoor; Paarutty, 53, Varavoor; Appu Thonukara, 60, Thonukara paraya colony; Shankaran, 45, and Chandran-49, Erumapetty.
It is believed that Paraya community originate from the improper/undesirable relationship between a Brahmin woman and a low caste man. There are many rituals and beliefs found among the Paraya community which is very similar to the *adivasi* (tribes) community. Most of the rituals are still continuing without any obstacles. The *Dharikavadham* is one of the ritual performances of paraya community on *Bharathappuzha* banks during ritual performance of the shrine.

There are three main opinions prevalent regarding their origin.\(^{53}\) They are the descendants of the Tamils who may have immigrated to Kerala during early times; Descendants of a high caste Hindus who suffered social degradation for eating meat; Descendants of Pakanar, one of the twelve sons of Vararuchi with a low caste woman.

Though the Paraya occupy a low and despicable position in the places where they live, they still cherish the memory of their former greatness and regard themselves as original owners of the soil. Parayan are found in almost everywhere in the rural parts of Kerala. They follow *marumakathayam* law of inheritance. Caste assembly of senior members of the caste meet for important matters. They have no temples of their own, even though they worship Kali and Shiva. The Chathan and Karimkutty\(^ {54}\) are their minor gods. In every village, there are small Bhagavathi shrines for the deity in which they are devoutly attached and who look to their aid in times of illness such as fever, small pox, and cholera and also in times of personnel calamities.

They take part in the annual festival connected with the shrine. A few days before the festival, a piece of cloth is given to their oracle. A piece of red cloth is worn around his neck and few small bells (*chelamba*) tied on a string, round his leg. On the other hand, one person from this caste carry a basket of paddy on his head, two persons with drums, another with pipe goes to every Brahmin and Nayar houses and get paddy and continues to do so for seven days. On the festival day, the *velichapadu* (oracle) and other members of the caste go to a hut put up at a distance from the

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shinre (kavu) and delight themselves by dancing and singing to the accompaniment of drum, in honour of the goddess. They spend day and night and depart only in the morning. The performing party is given three measures of rice for their work by the temple authorities before they return home. It is performed on the day of festival. The collection of the paddy is also known as para (another meaning of Para is drum).

On the first of every month, they perform a ceremony known as kalasam on behalf of the spirits of the departed. They prepare fish, meat, toddy, rice, banana, coconut, papadam and put them on a long leaf in front of a lighted lamp. They stand in front of the ancestral shrine (thara) with prayerful attitude for a shortwhile and say, “dead ancestors, come and take these and protect us”. The velichapadu (oracle) take the lead role and mediate between them and the spirits. They have no temples but called as daivapura (a small hut containing stones) in front of their huts. They make burial for the dead body.

Paraya is also named as sambavar. The origin of the word ‘sambavan’ is from samba meaning Shiva. They consider as the descendents of the Pakanar lineage (vamsham) which originate from Nambuthiri Brahmin. The Parayan are non-vegetarian and eat beef. Their traditional caste council headed by an avgasi existed.

The main role of the sacred specialist ‘karmi’ is to perform life cycle rituals and territorial rituals to protect or remove evil spirits. The umbrella is considered as a symbol of prosperity. In the past, during the marriage ritual, the parents has given an umbrella to the bridegroom as a dowry believing that their future life will be protected because Bhagavathi will be in the umbrella. There are different kinds of umbrella prevailed in the area such as, vellattu velakkuda (for festival), marakkuda (for nambuthiri ladies), thoppikuda (for the paddy field), and children kuda (for the children in entertainment). For the making of the umbrella for rituals in shrine (kavu) in each area (desham) a family is entrusted with the right to do so within this community.

**Pulayan**

The Pulayan is one of the important communities that live in the middle part of the banks of Bharathappuzha.\(^{55}\) They work as serfs in agricultural field. In the

\(^{55}\) Data collected from Madhavan,20, Mulayankavu; Shankaran,55, Maruningal; Kunjan, 75, Painkulam; Rajan, 38, Varavoor; Kamala, 57, Bhadramkulam.
northern part of Kerala, they are known as *cherumans*. They speak Malayalam amalgamated with Tamil words and consider that, they are the descendants of the original inhabitants of Kerala who must have been Tamil speaking, because the earliest form of the Malayalam language was *kodumtamil* (the oldest form of Tamil).\(^{56}\)

There are different versions about the origin of the name Pulayan. The word *Pulayan* is derived from the word *pulam* means ‘field’ or ‘place’.\(^{57}\) The name Cherumans or Cheramakal is said to signify ‘the sons of the soil’. Other opinion is that they are the *cherimakkal* (little children) and the name originates from the word cherimakal.\(^{58}\) Malabar was part of ancient Chera kingdom. The cheras/cherumans may originate from the word ‘cheranad’. Pulayans is also referred as kanakar. There is another story regarding the origin of Pulayan. They got a boon from god Shiva, along with a spade and an axe, the right to clear forest, to cultivate lands and to own them. When other people especially Nambuthiris reached Kerala, they captured the land of Pulayans and degraded the workers of the paddy field.

Considering the labour in the field, the Pulayans performed as the property of the *tampurans* (landlord). A man or woman work in the field and received a small number of paddies as reward which was not regularly paid to the landlord. In ancient times, slaves or Pulayans were transferred to the landlord in three modes: (i) *jenm* (sale) where the full value of the Pulayans was given and the property was entirely transfered to a new master (ii) *kanom* (mortgage) the proprietor received as a loan to show that his right over them still existed (iii) *pattom* or rent in this case for an annual sum, the master lent them to another man who commanded their labour and supported them. In fact the Pulayans were treated as slaves but these practices were later abolished by the Britishers in 1862.\(^{59}\)

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There were *janmis* (landlords) gave a small measure of paddy for the hardwork in the field during day time and for watching crops at night. There are subdivisions in Malabar among the Pulayans. The most important are Kanaka cherumans, Pulacherumans, Eralans, Koodans and Rolans. A proper classification in the order of social precedence becomes difficult because each group claiming superiority over the other.

Their inhabitation is generally called *mattams* constructed on the side of the paddy field so that they could watch the crops at night as they were polluted caste. The roof of the house thatched either with Palmyra or coconut leafs and sometimes the huts are made of mud walls.

Their marriage is endogamous. Marriage between the members of the same village or *koottam* (clan) does not generally permit. The system of inheritance is through sons. They have no real property. Pulayans has their assembly which consists of the elderly members of the caste. The head of the assembly called *vallon* or *valiyavan* (great man) preside their meeting, marriage, funeral and other ceremonies.

Their gods are Chathan and Karimkutty and they worship the spirits of their ancestors. Offerings to these gods are given in the month of Karakadakam (July-August), *makara sankranthi* (January) and other auspicious days. One of the Pulayans becomes *velichapd* (oracle) and speaks to the assembly. They are also devout to Kali or Bhagavathi, whose aid is invoked in all times of danger and illness. They participate in the village festivals celebrated in honour of goddess. Their priest is one of their own caste men.

The chief festival in which Pulayan take part is *pooram* (annual festival of Bhagavathi shrine on the middle banks of Bharathappuzha). This is an important festival held in the village Bhagavathi shrine/temples. The members of all castes take part and held either in *kumbham* (February-March) or in *meenam* (March-April). Toy oxes are made and attached to long bamboo poles and carried to the shrine. They dance to the accompaniment of rhythm of drum. The oracle goes in front of them and praying in honour of deity and they return home.

Pulayans celebrates *vittiduka* (harvest) festival. Pulayans are by occupation agricultural labourers and takes part in every kind of agricultural work such as fencing, ploughing, sowing, weeding, transplanting, reaping, pumping out of water,
thatching farm houses and watching the field of their landlords. Changes have occurred in their life style. Father is the head of the family. With the land reforms acts and due to the other social factors there have been improvements in their working conditions and wages. They accept food from high caste and not *vice versa*. In the past they were not permitted to enter the houses of high castes and the temple. They also construct wall with bamboos and known as *Mulayans* (bamboo).

**Kusavan**

In Kerala, the Kusavan are distributed in the district of Kozhikode, Malappuram and Thrishur. Generally ten to fifteen families are found at one place. Males are called Kusavan, whereas females are called Kusuti. They are also known as Kumbaran which means pottar. The word Kusavan is said to have derived from the Sanskrit word, ‘*ku*’ signifying earth, the material in which they work and *avan*, means a person (Thurston, 1975). The origin story of the Kusavan is that they are descended from a Brahmin father and Sudra mother. L. A. Iyer (1981) stated that they are immigrants from the Tiruchirapali of Tamilnadu. The Kumbara community is one of main community which intermingle with the banks of Bharathappuzha River. It is believe that they migrated from Andhra Pradesh years back. One who makes *kumbam* (pot) is called kumbaran. There are five subdivisions among them whereas two subdivisions have disappeared and only five groups remain namely: Patakadan, Chelavan, Samudri, Jogan and Puliyantham. These five groups must participate in all the ritual of Kumbaran.

A myth exists on the origin of this caste. When *Devas* was doing *pujas* in *devaloka*, they did not get pot to make main *karmas*. They informed this to Shiva and Shiva plucked his hair and beaten it on his thighs and created one human being. He asked him to make a pot. Shiva gave his sweat as clay, Vishnu provided his *sudharshan chakra* as wheel and in order to turn the wheel, Shiva gave his *thishool* (trident) and *poonool* (sacred thread) to remove the pot from the wheel. After that Shiva put his saliva on the pot and asked the man to remove the polluted saliva. Shiva advised him to burn and pronounces *chudu kushava*. Thereafter they are known as

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60 Data collected from the following Informants: - Gopalan Ezhumangad Kumbra colony; Rajan, Ammini, Krishnankutty, Chamy Pallam Kumbara colony.

Kushavan. The time of their arrival to their present habitat is not known. They are among one of the other backward communities (OBC) in Kerala.

The Kushavan are known vegetarians. They are an endogamous group. If a person marries outside the caste he is excommunicated. They bury the dead body. The major economic activity is pot making and they are still following this traditional occupation. Generally black clay (kalimannu) is used for pottery. Bricks and tiles are also made by them. Few of them are engaged as labourers. The marketing of pot is done mainly by the females. Now days, they have cooperative society for marketing pots.

In the past, they used to give pots to the Nayars, on whose land they lived. They have a council of elders and they act at the time of marriage, divorce and remarriage. In all the occasion, the elder members of the community meet under the headship of the pattakaran (headman). Women assist men in their work. People use their pot for cooking and also on occasions of feasts and rituals. They are Hindus and worship Vishnu, Shiva and Bhagavathi. They used to take food from almost all the castes. Their main deity is Mariamman, Hanuman and Veerabhadran.

The elders of the five sub group were firstly served food by them in any ritual occasion. Before starting to make pot in the shed (ala) they decide the date. They live in colonies and settled in interior villages located in the river basin and paddy fields. This is obviously related to the raw material availability. The work area is mostly located adjacent to the homes. Most of the settlements have a shrine which is common to all the families. A male member from within their own community functions as the priest. They live under their kiln roof and in Bharathappuzha banks they are settled in Shornur, Parali, Thrithala, Alathur, Vadakancheri, Painkulam and Tirumitakode.

Embrantiris

Apart from the above communities that live in the middle part of the banks of the Bharathappuzha there are certain other communities who are migrated from

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62 Mariamman is the goddess of small pox.

63 Veerabhadra created by Shiva. Sati, the consort of Shiva self immolated in the Yagna (sacrifice) fire of Daksha. Shiva became furious after hearing the death of Sati; he tore a lock of his hair and from that the Lord Veerabhadra born as a son. Shiva asked him to kill Daksha. Sister Niveditha and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Myth and legends of the Hindus and Budhists, Kolkata: Kessinger Publishing, USA, 2001 reprint 2011.
Karnataka and Northern Malabar are also found in this region. The foremost who deserve mention is Embrantiris who are the Brahmins migrated from the South Canara to Kerala. These Tulu Brahmins settled in Malabar are known as Embrantiris or Embrans.\(^6^4\) They are settled mostly in the ending part of Bharathappuzha especially the Cochin states and follow *Sama Veda*. The Embrans acting as priests in temples and sometimes they assist Nambuthiries in ritual. They perform pujas in the style of Nambuthiries.

The above description of communities in the middle part on the banks of Bharathappuzha shows the distribution of communities based on occupation and engagement. They are:

- Temple servants include Brahmin and other groups.
- Occupational classes such as Kammalans, Kumbarans, etc.
- Settlement of agricultural labourers.

The demography of Bharathappuzha banks is peculiar. In middle part, settlements are intermingled and each community has their own identity in relation to the other community, which is a kind of ‘participatory identity’. There were some instances of the break of the relation of community in central bank which led to the feudal rebellion in the central part. The legend of *parayipetta panthiru kulam* is the prime example of the participatory identity of the community. The identity of each community has been controlled by the collective consciousness. This collective consciousness is reflected in the ritual performances of this landscape.

The villages on the middle banks of Bharathappuzha have been centred by paddy fields which help the flood plain from the river. Most of the fields get water from the river through canal about two kilometres. Paddy fields are fertile and farmers are seeking to increase the product. Paddy is the predominant crop in most of the cultivated area of the middle part. Coconut is the dry land crop planted next to the paddy. They even cultivate tapioca, areca and banana. Rubber plantings have widespread. They displaced some of these crops and also cleared the forest for vast land for rubber cultivation. In short, middle banks are a paddy growing area from the Bharathappuzha water.

\(^{6^4}\) Data collected from Narayanan Embranthiri, 48, Rayamangalam; Chandrasekhar Virutanam.
Land holding of this area was dominated by the Nambuthiri Brahmins. The agrarian structure has been changed because of the land tenure act of 1950 and 1960. The lower castes and sub tenants such as Pulaya, Paraya, and Mannan have got their own agricultural land. The large tenants such as Nayar have now holding few acres of land. Even though, very few Nambuthiri have moved away from this locality. The migration outside of India including the gulf countries was very low in the middle part. People of this area find new opportunities in the growing commercial area surrounding them than in migration out of the locality and country.

It is very clear that, the investment direction have been changed from agriculture. The transportation network and population density leads to different marketing outlets and schools on these localities. Various socio-economic and political elements create social mobility among the communities. They are capable to construct their houses instead of living in a house on the landlords. This upward mobility creates the structural changes of the relationship of the communities and leads to the rise of new land owners and the marketing of land. Breaking the feudal and patriarchal past through education helped the emancipation of lower caste/communities.

The newly educated unemployed generation are not ready to work in the agricultural sector. This caused the higher labour demand. Farmers are using land for other purposes than paddy cultivation. The large farmers who are able to get two crops a year have interest in paddy cultivation. Even though, they are not ready to buy additional land for paddy cultivation.

In another sense, they are replacing rubber and coconut in the place of paddy. Farmers get good prices for rubber and coconut. The labour days are few once the rubber and coconut plant are established.

The above reason will provide the rise of a new middle class life style in the new generation. This new generation is the rural area and their numbers are increasing every year. The new shift of earning income and change of life style creates consequences in the social environment. The decline of common interest in farming sector, the bond among the various local communities has weakened. People start to move in new social settings with the generality of roles and relation. The emergence of new class in villages creates social change in the communities of middle banks.
(c) End part: Major Communities

Izhuvan (illavan) is a widespread caste in Kerala. They are called as Tiyans in Malabar and as Izhuvan in central and south Kerala. The etymology of the word, Tiyan is from dweepan which means islander, while Izhuvan denote one who belongs to izham or people of izham which is an old name of Ceylon (Sri Lanka). It is believed that, Izhuvans or tiyans are migrated from Ceylon to Malabar and they have brought the coconut and palmyra palms to Kerala. The occupation of this community is climbing the coconut tree and toddy taping.

According to the story, the King Illa of Ceylon went to Chidhambaram which was ruled by the Chola kings to attend the religious discussion between the Buddhists priests and the Saivaite devotees known as Manickiavachakar. After the discussion, the King Illa converted to Saivaite faith. His descendants are known as the illavans.

The Izhuvans are divided into illams and kiriyams (family groups). They have settled inhabitation and lived in small huts with mud walls and the richer Izhuvans have their big houses. Marriage between members of the same locality is permissible and marriage is exogamous. When the girl attains puberty or other pollution, Izhuvan women wears the mattu clothes brought by Mannan community. Without the clothes one cannot be freed from pollution. In Central (south Malabar), they follow makkathayam law of inheritance where as in South and North Malabar they follow marumakathayam.

In the past, they had a council of thirty two elder men of their caste in the village and settle all disputes connected with the caste and their decisions were final. In south Malabar, they used to meet under a pandali illipa, a shed under the ilippa tree (Bassia Latifolia). The head of this council is thandan, who compelled to obey the orders of Nayar and Nambuthiri Brahmin. Within the council, six members are

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65 Data collected from Dinesh Kumar, Age 47, Athaniparambu; Subheesh 31, Kodungaloor; Krishnankutty, 70, Ponnani, Sunilkumar 24, Ponnani; Shivanandhan, 53 Thirikkavu; Ramchandran 75 Ponnani; Kadungan Krishnan, 51,Purathoor; Balan, 59 Pulooni; Raman (Apoottan), 73, Pathamkulathi; Balan, 71, Thavanoor; Pradeepan, 35, Thavanoor; Velayudhan, 66, Ponnani; Padmanabhan, 58, Ponnani; Mohanan, 41, Pallivalappu.


eled as *kaikkars* (managers) and they conduct preliminary enquiries about social disputes.\(^{69}\)

Izhuvans profess Hinduism and are worshippers of Shiva than of Vishnu, who is the deity. Some of the minor deities whom the Izhuvans worship are Chathan, Parakutty, Karimkutty and Kandakarnan. Ancestor worship is another form of belief among the Izhuvans. It is also considered that if they are unable to provide proper funeral rites to the departed soul after the burial, the spirits of the men or women (the dead body) cause vengeance on the living and creates misfortunes (*pretha bhadha*) to the respective families. The poor among the Izhuvan bury their dead, while the rich men cremate them. The priest is the member of their own community and plays an important part in all the ceremonies of the caste and well rewarded for their services.

The hereditary occupation of the community from the beginning is cultivating of the coconut and palmyra palms, toddy drawing and arrack distilling. They also manufacture jaggery from toddy. The Izhuvan organised under a registered association called Sree Narayanan Paripalana Yogam for the religious and social advancement of the members of the community.

Their status in society was very low in former years. They treated with contempt by the members of the higher caste such as Nayar and Nambuthiri. The Izhuvans abstain from taking food of the Kammalans and other low castes. They have their own barbers. They also worked as agricultural labourers under the Nambuthiri and Nayars. Most of them lived besides the house of high caste. They worked as military in the North Malabar and well trained in the weapon. As population increases, Izhuvans and other castes of Kerala engaged into various occupations to which they easily gain access.

**Mappilas**

Muslims in Kerala are densely populated in the Malabar area and are known as Mappilas. The Mappilas are found all over the banks of Bharathappuzha and they are densely populated on the ending part of Bharathappuzha, i.e Ponnani and Tirur. The non-Hindu migrants in Kerala are generally known as *Mappila*. Kerala Muslims are recognized as ‘Jonaka Mappila’, Kerala Christians are called ‘Nasrani Mappila’, and Kerala Jews are termed as ‘Juta Mappila’. The word mappila is a compound

word *maha* (great) + *pillai* (child or son-in-law) which denote honoured status.\(^70\) As time progressed the ethnic composition of Kerala Jewish and Christian communities diversified and ‘*Mappila*’ came to be used only to refer to the Muslims. During the period of European, Muslims lost their profession i.e., trade and commerce; and many were forced to migrate to the interior parts of Kerala and acquired rural cultural traits in due course. Basically, Kerala Muslims are born out of hybridization of two traditions. On the maternal side, they absorb Hindu customs and on the paternal side, they incorporate aspects of the Muslim faith which are largely local variants of it. The reason is that, the early Arab traders married local women in the coastal region. Large number of converts is from the Tiyans (izhuvans) and also from the Pulaya community.

At the linguistic level, the everyday language of Kerala Muslims is *Malayalam* but they follow Arabic language for their religious studies. Unlike the North Indian Muslims and Deccani Muslims (Hyderabad Muslims), the Mappilas do not use Urdu language in everyday life. Mappila Muslims are scattered in different parts of Kerala and intermingle with people of other faiths. This has influenced their food habits, dress, customs and manners. At the political level, on 10\(^{th}\) March 1948, the Mappilas formed a party known as ‘Muslim league’ and it took a moderate stand in the political issues of the State.

The Malabar Muslims or Mappilas construct and maintain the shrines over the graves of holy men (saints and martyrs) with a belief that the sites are blessed due to the mystical presence of the spirits of the saints. Muslim saints are also referred as *wali* (*awliya*), *peer* and *shaikh* and are believed to have the ability to perform miracles. The devotees make *nercha* (votive offering) in the form of cash, kind or even as worship. Worship as votive offering includes recitation of the *Quran*, ritual performance at holy sites like Mosques, *dargas* (graves of the saints), in the believers’ houses or in public places.\(^71\) Besides the general festival, special festival called *nercha* are connected with particular localities and mosques. The major places for *darga nerchas* (offering to the grave of the saints) on the banks of Bharathappuzha are Valiyangadi and Ponnani.

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The Arab traders were settled on the west part (Ponnani and Tirur) area in the seventh century. The Mappilas created a trade relationship with Zamorins of Calicut and later they became the heads of naval force of Zamorins. The arrivals of the Europeans led the end of Arab trade carried by the Mappilas.

The Mappilas generally live in towns near the sea-coast and very few of them live in interior parts of Kerala. They are engaged in trade which induces them to settle in small towns than village. Agriculture is another occupation and each family resides in detached from their agricultural land. The houses of the wealthy Mappilas are like those of the Nayars and Nambuthiries but the poorer classes live in small houses.

Polygamy was very much prevalent among the Mappilas. In South Kerala Mappilas follow inheritance in the male line while in the North Malabar; their inheritance is through the female line. But in some places, i.e Ponnani, Parapannagadi and Tirur (south Malabar), a man’s family property goes to his nephews and his self-acquisitions to his sons and daughters.

The Mappilas belong to the Shafi School of the Sunni sect. Magic is condemned by the Quran. The Mappilas are very superstitious and follow witchcraft. Many priests cure diseases with the aid of charms and amulets. The Mappila jins (spirits) and shaitans (demons) correspond to the Hindu demons and are propitiated in the same way.

The Mappilas are engaging in all grades of work. The most on the coast are traders. Those in the interiors are both traders and agriculturalists. A large numbers of them are engaged in coolly work. The Mappilas were a class of illiterate. Those who are educated can only recite portions from the Quran. Nowadays, Mappilas are engaged with all streams of Modern education.

The Mappilas have a wide spread distribution on the banks of Bharathappuzha. In the past, males used to wear topi (cap) with dhothi (lower garments) and baniyan. At present there is no distinctive dress specific to the community. The dead body of the Mappilas are buried. A council known as Mahal-jamat functions as a socio-religious body. The executive committee of Mahal-jamat is elected by the people of the Mahal and the executive committee appoints kazi. He is the head of the jamat and all disputes are settled by him.
From the above discussion, it is evident that the banks of Bharathappuzha being fertile attracted all communities even from historical times to the present. However, the settlement pattern reveals that the tribals and indiginious communities who are the inhabitants of the banks and hilly terrains of Bharathappuzha replaced or subdued by the process of ‘Aryanisation’ wherein the ‘jatis’ (occupational ranking i.e. castes) of upper ‘varna’ (ritual ranking) encouraged to immigrate into the Kerala soils and expand the settled agrarian economy. The ‘Parasurama myth’ and the ‘Vararuchi legend’ as explained above attest to this fact. The Bharathappuzha banks are much used for acculturation of native communities into the ‘Hindu fold’ by attributing mythical origin and relationship between the ‘Aryan Varna system and the native jati matrix’. As a result the social hierarchy emerged on one hand negating the ‘Aryan varna system’ and on the other incorporating it with the native hierarchical system. This paradox is quite visible in the ethno centric overtones of the lower starta of the society and often reflected as anti-barhminical attitude especially, against Nambuthiri-Nayar alliance.

The following table and diagram shows the social hierarchy based on ritual ranking on the banks of Bharathappuzha.

**Table No 4.5: Major Communities on the banks of Bharathappuzha**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin Part</th>
<th>Middle Part</th>
<th>End Part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nambuthiri Brahmin</td>
<td>Nambuthiri Brahmin</td>
<td>Nambuthiri Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambalavasi (Kurupu, Menon, Nambyar)</td>
<td>Embranthiri Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakkad Pattar Brahmin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayar</td>
<td>Nayar</td>
<td>Nayar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulavar</td>
<td>Vishwakarma</td>
<td>Mannan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anduran</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tiyan (Izuvan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vishwakarma</td>
<td>Pulaya</td>
<td>Pulaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraya</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muslims (Mappilas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diagram No 4.1: Social Hierarchy Based on Ritual Ranking

1. Brahmins (Nambuthiris/Pattars); 2. Ambalavasis (Kurupu, Menon, Nambar); 3. Nayars (Pulavar & Anthuran); 4. Vishwakarma; 5. Mannan; 6. Tiyya (Izhuva); 7. Panan; 8. Pulaya; 9. Paraya. Muslims, Christians, tribals and outsiders are also residing on the banks but they are outside the ritual ranking of Kerala society.

The major groups such as Nambuthiri-Nayar from the ‘Hindu fold’ and Muslims and Christians have influenced the life and lore of the folk on the banks of Bharathappuzha and interestingly they themselves are affected by migrations. In other words the religious ideology of these major communities is not native to Kerala soils but immigrated into Kerala with their immigration and settlement. This feature is noteworthy because the history of Kerala is the ‘history of migrations and immigrations’.
As the major land owning and ritual management communities which exercise control over the land and people are from immigrated castes, their mythologies and ritual practices connected with sacred complexes also show the immigratory nature wherein ritual and belief is constructed with the ideologies of non-native communities. For instance, the myth and ritual of Bhagavathi on the banks of Bharathappuzha is borrowed from the northern India (Kali version) and Tamil Nadu (Kannaki version). The following chapter will focus on the myth and narrative connected with the worship of Bhagavathi.