Chapter V

Teyyam and the Malayan: Adaptive Strategy for Social Unity
CHAPTER V

TEYYAM AND THE MALAYAN:
ADAPTIVE STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL UNITY

The day-to-day life of North Malabar is more or less grappled with teyyam worship. Almost all the life activities have been directly or, indirectly revolving round the special kind of belief system embodied in the teyyam worship. As a socio-cultural panacea of North Malabar, teyyam relieves the tensions of the people, and is said to bring social solidarity and integrity. Teyyam at its best welds knowledge and technique, and unites religion, magic and science. It also controls even the contracts between social individuals. Having the ‘divine’ power, it has played a vital role in the formation of the social network. This network includes teyyam and performer, the Malayan, who too has to do certain roles in the socio-cultural milieu of North Malabar.

Significance of Teyyam

Teyyam emerged from man’s social adjustment to the environment for the sake of survival and existence. Teyyam often describes symbolically the actual social relations, status, and the role of individual in the society. Teyyam is the repository of genuine expression, imagery, truth, and ethical conceptions of the people, who belong to North Malabar. All rituals connected with teyyam performance emerge out of the belief system, and have their meaning only in relation to this system. The rituals are patterned on myth or, some aspects of myth. These rituals mark the crisis in individual or, social life—a crisis that is present as a transition from one mode of life to another.
Teyyam is the most important element of adaptive strategy, that binds the multi-caste groups of North Malabar under a common belief system. The rituals that emerge out of the belief-system constitute a firm social frame. The ‘nature-man-spirit complex’, and the social structure based on caste systems of this region further strengthen the adaptive ability of teyyam. Teyyam has a traditional agential role in healing and counselling in a situation, when everyone in the village is socio-religiously held together. Thus, teyyam acts as a ‘social doctor’ and ‘social engineer’, by providing conceptual tools to control and care many ‘diseases’ in social relations.

**Social Structure of North Malabar**

Like any other society, the social network of North Malabar takes its form on the terrain of caste, class and other social hierarchies found in human relations. The components for this active process of the formation of social structure are human beings themselves. Family, being the smallest unit, basically regulates the hierarchies and contributes to institutionalize relationships. These institutionalized relations constitute the core of this phenomenon. According to Brown, ‘a complex network of social relations connects human beings’. He uses the term ‘social structure’ to denote this network of ‘actually existing relations’.

I quote Brown:

> Social structures are just as real as are individual organisms. A complex organism is a collection of living cells and interstitial fluids arranged in a certain structure; and a living cell is similarly a structural arrangement of complex molecules. (1952:190)
The same is true even with the society of North Malabar. The society of North Malabar is mainly stratified into three components in terms of religion: Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Religions like Jainism and Buddhism are not present in this area today. These three social groups have their own life-styles, and behaviour. The Hindus are the dominant ones and, traditionally, they are said to be the old inhabitants, the Mapila (Muslim), and Christyani (Christian) the later migrant group. It is the dominant Hindus, who came in close touch with teyyam through an attempt at assimilation. This is why the structure of the Hindu caste society overlaps with that of teyyam. Precisely because of this reason, teyyam is to be studied closely.

A close look at the traditional social structure of North Malabar shows a multi faced, three folded, correlated interactive divisions: the sacred, the religious, and the political structure.

**Traditional Sacred Structure of North Malabar**

In chapter III, the sacred center and its structure have been elaborately discussed.

```
   Temple (Sanskritised form)
     ↓
  Teyya Kazhakam /other big centers
     ↓
Kavu/Kottam /other small sacred centers
```

**Figure: V.1 Traditional Sacred Structure of North Malabar**

The Sanskritised temple stands on the top, and the local teyyam centers are placed at the bottom in the hierarchy of the structure. This sacred part of the structure is always kept in touch with the
other two ingredients of social structure: the religious and the political. The former gives it life, and the latter, orderliness.

**Traditional Political Structure**

The traditional political structure emerged out of the socio-cultural interaction. The political structure was formed drawing the religious concepts of law and order. *Tampurān* or *nāduvāzhi* (local ruler), was the supreme authority, who preserved 'peace and harmony’ in the society, through his representatives like, *tantri*, *kōyma*, *ūralanmār*, *tarakār*, etc. According to the desire and decision of *tampurān* or *nāduvazhi* the Brahmin priest, *tantri* prescribed the procedure of sacred and profane. The *kōyma*, *ūralanmār* or *tarakār*, and *taravāttu Kāranavar* or *mūppan* watched and kept vigil to find out if anyone would go against these regulations. To impose and implement rules and regulations, the political setup also made use of the sacred structure. Each and every sacred center in the area creates awareness on this matter to the people.

![Diagram of Traditional Political Structure of North Malabar](image)

**Figure: V.2 Traditional Political Structure of North Malabar**
At present, the tampuran or naduvazhi has lost its power due to modern political-system, but the tantris continue to play a role in teyyam. He is a very important official now.

**Traditional Hindu Religious Structure**

Varna refers to the four main categories into which the Hindu society is traditionally divided (Dube 1955, Panikkar 1955, Ghurye 1961, Beteille 1966, Mandelbaum 1970). The whole Hindu society is commonly stratified into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vyshya, and Shudra.

![Diagram of Varna System]

**Figure: V.3 Traditional Religious Structure of North Malabar**

The four varnas are further divided into so many castes and sub-castes. Each has its own position in terms of certain criteria. The smaller sub-sections are known as, jati or samudayam. In general, the English word 'caste' is used to denote either varna or jati, not only by the foreigners but also by the Indians. It is because of Hindu
religion, the caste is the unique characteristic of the social structure of North Malabar. It exists by caste ties. This phenomenon of caste relationship is maintained through what we call the 'caste system'. Renjini says,

A unique system of social stratification based on caste system. Though not purely, was prevalent in Kerala. The caste system when began as a rudimentary form of social stratification in Kerala had been crystallized into a highly differentiated form during the Sangham period. The caste ranking in practice, was more elaborate in Kerala than in any other part of the sub continent. (2000:2)

**Caste System of North Malabar**

The traditional Hindu society has a unique social phenomenon, the *varna* system. Each *varna* is divided into many *jatis* or *castes* (Hutton 1951, Srinivas 1952, Majumdar 1958, Ghurye 1961, Beteille 1966, Mandalbaum 1970, Ketkar 1979), and each of them has its sub-divisions. But, I would like to divide the Hindu society into three, the Brahmins, the Non-Brahmins, and the untouchables, Adi-Dravidas. It is this classification, which is adopted from Beteille (1966) who used to classify the society of a Tanjore village-Sripuram, a working one, which prevails in this area rather than the traditional four folded *varna* system.

Each division has settled in its own area of residence. The Brahmins live in houses known as, *illams*, the wealthy high castes among the Non-Brahmins live in *nālukettu*, and all other castes reside in thatched huts. The untouchables, Adi-Dravidas were not allowed to enter even in the hamlet of the high castes due to the strict observations of the system of *purity and pollution*. Anyone's purity is at risk, if he comes into close contact with a lower one. It was
concretized; a low caste person could pollute a high caste person by coming even within a certain 'distance' from the latter. For example, a Pulayan could pollute a Brahmin at a distance of 64 feet. The members of high caste often refuse or, avoid eating or taking food and water from the low-caste people. If they do so, they would suffer pollution. Then, the pollution would have to be removed by appropriate and prescribed rituals. To remove mild pollutions, bathing is enough. Severe pollutions demand more complicated rituals. Some acts like illicit sexual relationship with lower caste would need outcasting. This is changed now, and the system has almost weakened.

In past, the Brahmins, the Non-Brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas live in different parts. They have occupied different positions in the economic structure. As said earlier the Brahmins own land, and they are also been engaged in various priestly functions, domestic and external related to temple. Pdarans, a rare group of people who themselves claim that they are Brahmins, are also engaged in temple priesthood.

The Non-Brahmins are basically cultivators and service renders. Among them, Ambalavasi, Variyar, Nambisan, Marar, Poduval etc., who extend their service as temple servants. Principal cultivating castes among them are Nair, Maniyani, Vaniyan and Tiyyan. The artisans include potters, carpenters, weavers etc. The Kusavan (pot maker), Asari (carpenter), Musari (ballotter), Kollan (black smith), Tattan (gold smith), Chaliyan (weaver), Kaniyan (umbrella maker and astrologer), Chembooti (copper smith), Kdaran (painter) and Muari (mason) are some other examples. The servicing castes includes, warrior (Nair and Tiyyan), washer man (Vannathan, who wash the cloths of the 'high' caste persons, and Vannathi who serves the Tiyyas as washer woman), barbers (Nathiyan, who serve the high
castes, and Kāthiyan serves the Tiyyan), fishermen (Mukkuvan, Moyon etc.), performer (Kaniyān, traditional astrologer and who also performs some rituals), toddy tapper (Tiyyan), etc.

All the Adi-Dravidas are servicing castes. The agricultural labourer, Pulayan, extends his service to the landowners, and tenants. The castes like Malayan, Vannān, Vēlan, Pulayan, Anjutān, Munnutān, Chingatan, Mayilan, Kopalan, etc., serves the society as teyyam performers. Pulluvan performs some rituals. There are boatman (Valluvan), toddy taper (Karimpalan), cobbler (Cheriputhi or Chakliyan), and the scavenger (Tōti) also among the Adi-Dravidas. Vannāthi, the woman of Vannān serves as a washer women to the Tiyya, who also washes the clothes of the persons of ‘higher’ castes, during puberty, delivery, death, etc.

The Brahmins, the Non-Brahmins and, the Adi-Dravidas have striking differences in their physical appearance. The Brahmins are regarded as fair, sharp-nosed and more ‘refined’. The Non-Brahmins are also considered fair, and almost similar to Brahmins. But, the Adi-Dravidas appears darker, shorter and broad-nosed than the others. Thus, the physical appearance of the Brahmins essentially has given them an upper hand over the others.

Dress also ascertains the boundary of castes. The lower ranked Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas have never been allowed to wear clothes below knee and above waist. The Brahmins, and the aristocratic Non-Brahmins wear upper garment, vēshti. Hairstyle also expresses the caste identity. Each group has distinctive hairstyles. Ritual separation is being elaborated to a high degree in the society. It maintains the sectarian elements within the caste system. Usually, two castes will not inter-dine unless the distance between them is less. The Brahmins do not accept cooked food from
the Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas but, the latter accept it from them. The Brahmins, the Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas behave differently. But the sub-divisions of these three divisions, castes, also behave in dissimilar fashions.

**Table: V.1 Castes and their respective traditional occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Traditional Occupation</th>
<th>Caste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>Nambuthiri (Namboor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temple service</td>
<td>Nambisan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poduval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Variyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Brahmins</td>
<td>Potter</td>
<td>Kusavan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>Asari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>Kollan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gold smith</td>
<td>Thattan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belleter</td>
<td>Musari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weaver</td>
<td>Chalyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>Kdaran (for Sacred Centres only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copper smith</td>
<td>Chembutty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>Muvvari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warrior</td>
<td>Nair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trader &amp; Oil-presser</td>
<td>Tiyyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washermen</td>
<td>Vanniyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>Nathiyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kathiyan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The economic structure of North Malabar has a special kind of system that characterizes a service-return relationship. Under this system each caste group within a territorial division is expected to give certain standardized services to the families of other castes. For example, a Nāthiyān (barber) cuts hair of a higher caste man but, he does not extend his service to others. Each man works for respective family or group of families, with which he has hereditary ties. His predecessor worked for the same families before him, and his
successor will continue to work for them because, the caste is the determinant of the occupation or service. In return, the serving person will get cash or kind. In this manner, the Malayan, the traditional performer of magic, medicine, midwifery, and teyyam extends his services to particular families, residing in a territory, or to groups of families with which he has hereditary ties. In return, he gets cash and kind. The system has also been shown that each and every caste constitutes two-way interaction, one way they give service to others, and on the other way, they receive service from others.

We have seen the differentiation in the styles of living to be of a very high degree within the caste system. This had happened because, the society strictly marked the caste boundary and rank between the Brahmins, the Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas. Beyond this point there is a good deal of ambiguity among various castes within the division of the Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas. The Ásári claims to be Brahmin; the Maniyâni, Vâniya and Vannathân claim to be Nairs; they try to make use of stories, legends and myths to prove their claim. These are never being conflicting claims to superior ranks or, status, and often it is impossible to speak of a consensus. These ambiguities are essential in a system that seems always to have permitted a certain degree of facility.

A question that requires an answer regarding the 'low' castes is, "why are they considered as low and impure-being?" This disturbs their lives and actions. To overcome such defunct, and mental strain, the society has been started to mime high castes by knitting fit myths and stories. It is a continuing process of 'equalization' among the bottom-layers. We can find several examples but, I would like to discuss only a couple of them to prove such tendency of 'equalization' among the castes in North Malabar.
The *Nanguvannam* is consisted of four ‘low’ castes, Asāri, Musāri, Tattān and Kollan, and they claim themselves as a society equal to that of Brahmins since, they believe they are the descendants of *Deva Silpi Viswakarma*, the mythical architectural engineer of Devas. I found many persons of Nanguvannam, who wear sacred thread. This is not only for self-satisfaction but also to communicate to others that they form a better society.

The other perfect example is none other than the Malayans, the focus of this study. They believe that their progenitor was a sage, *Agasthya Muni*. The myth of origin presented in *Malamashastram*, *Sathyaguruvachanam*, *Anniyarashastram* etc., supports this notion. They are proud of it, and wear *rudrakshamāla* (rosary made of Elaeocarpus lanceolatus beads) and, on few occasion, their own *poonul* (sacred thread) to show their status to the others. The Malayans also uses *chandanam* (sandal paste) and *basmam* (ash) to ritual body markings (*kuri*). During a few rituals, they hold *chural* (cane). The Malayans do all these for two reasons. First, to satisfy themselves that they are rishi putra Malayans (descendant of *rishi*, sage), and second, to perform an equally important ritual and to tell that their social ‘status’ is equal to that of the Brahmins. These two examples tell us about a unique ‘trend’: the tendency for *equalisation* among the Hindus. Such process never coincides with the concept of ‘Sanskritisation’ (Srinivas 1952, 1956). Sanskritisation,

> Is a process where a low caste changes its customs, rites, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice-born castes.

(cit. Sangeet Kumar 2005:35)

The above said castes have neither adopted any kind of ‘Sanskrit’ way of living nor new customs, rites, rituals, and ideology. This is not being an upward movement or, an elevation. They continue to keep
old customs and practices, as they existed in the past. No changes have been occurring in their social-structure and culture. So, we can say that this process, 'the equalisation process among the caste Hindus, is nothing but a tendency of people, other than that of the Brahmins, to 'show' that others they had an 'equal' social or ritual 'status', and also for their self-satisfaction to minimise the mental strains'.

Being segmented in nature, the caste system is associated with a special characteristic, fission and fusion. Cases of small segment merging or fusing with an adjacent caste are not rare. For example, the Nikkunnath Gurukal segment at Kokkanisseri recently fused with Maniyāni. The Kurichians of Kannavam, and Wayanad divide themselves into separate groups showing the fission process.

Even though the social structure of North Malabar shows high degree of stratification, examples of interaction between castes are in plenty. The society assigns different activities to different sections. The harmonious working of the social system is made dependent on the mutual co-operation of the people. After independence, the then government of Kerala headed by the E.M.S. Namboothiripad's Ministry passed the revolutionary 'Kerala Land Reforms Act', which disturbed the feudal set up as well as the occupational homogeneity of the state. Today, many Brahmins have taken up what may be considered new occupations formerly religiously forbidden to them. There are clerks, teachers, and even last grade servants among them. The Non-Brahmins engage in various kinds of manual work. Almost all of the Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas, except teyyam performers, do not give much interest to perform their traditional occupations, today. A large number of them have received government, and private employment. Several non-Brahmins are very successful in trade and business. In a few decades, the
traditional caste relationship has been altered. The agriculture based service-return system does not exist now. A good deal of overlap between the work of the Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas is noticed. But at the same time, the Non-Brahmins, and the Adi-Dravidas do not involve directly or, indirectly on the Brahmin’s traditional occupations.

The Malayan of North Malabar has to play multiple roles in the day-to-day life. First, he is a mesh of social network secondly, a performer, and finally a linking agent. He has been a link in the caste system, occupying a status and rank in the ritual and hereditary. As a performer, the Malayan brings the sacred world to the society. He stands between man and his sacred world, and also connects the past with the present. The chief aim of this chapter is to find out to what extent teyyam plays a role in the construction of the social structure of North Malabar with special reference to caste system.

**Role of Malayan in the Social Set-up**

The traditional specialist of magic, midwifery and teyyam, the Malayan, is placed among the Adi-Dravidas in the social hierarchy. By birth he is obliged to do three special kinds of services to a particular area and society. This is known as, jenmam. The jenmam is nothing but a modified form of bonded labour. Each and every member of the Malayan community of a territorial area is expected to give his services to other caste people. His father had served the same people before him, and as his children, they will continue to serve them tomorrow. The rite of heredity-based service is known as jenmam, while the man who extends service is called, cherujenni. The term, jenmam is also used to indicate a particular territorial region. The caste system, and the economic structure of North Malabar do not allow the Malayan to change his occupation. They
are tied to a service-return system; nobody can break it. The server receives his income for his service soon after the auspicious function. The Malayans are of the opinion that the 'high' caste people are very much opportunists. They are allowed to enter anywhere in the 'upper' caste's home or settlement during the performance. But, the 'high' castes deal with them as 'untouchables', the moment the function is over.

The practise of teyyam, magic and midwifery gives the Malayans all necessary goods and cash to make a living. The performance of teyyam has given the Malayan some religious and ritual importance. The traditional 'sacred complex,' 'nature-man-spirit complex' needs sacred specialists to establish liaison with spirits. Thus, to exercise this task, the society assigns teyyam performers as sacred specialists and, he stands between the nature, and the spirit. The people converse with their deity through him by his specialized teyyam performance, and magic as well. With divine utterance, counselling and guidance, the performer satisfies the people. It is believed that the utterances of the performer, who takes a divine form, will bring prosperity and peace to the society.

The Malayan plays a significant role in the cultural life of North Malabar with their occupation and service specializations. He binds the nature and spirit by his teyyam performance. In that sense, he definitely links the society and culture. This shows that the Malayan maintains a cultural continuity in North Malabar between villages. The sacred centres, which have become the core of teyyam performance act, as a link between the villagers and performers, and in a broader sense, constitutes to what is perceived as society. Thus, by keeping the cultural continuity among human beings the Malayan necessarily combines the past, the present, and the future.
Relationship between the Malayans and others

In a service-based network of social setup the Malayans have traditionally been related to everyone in the society. This relation is seen in the mutual obligations, which includes individual and religion. According to Opler and Singh,

> Not only does everyone have some place within the Hindu system, but it is significant that every group, from the Brahmin to Chamar caste, has been somehow integrated into the social and ceremonial round of the community and has been given some opportunity to feel indispensable and proud. (1948)

My observation on the life and practices of the Malayans in particular, and others in part leads to a quite different assessment. It seems evident that the relationships between the 'high', and the 'low' lend a hand to the exploitation of the 'inferior'. Land ownership being the bases of power, the high castes make the life of the others more difficult. The remedial activities of socio-political leaders, and organizations have succeeded to a small extent to question the arbitrarily held upper hand of the high caste in decisive matters. The increasing dependence on money and market has further contributed to weaken the old, notorious style of the caste system.

The old caste relationship is disturbed. The religious ritual, *teyyam*, is a means for the Malayan to continue the age-old service relation system but, only during the season of celebration. Each and every corner where *teyyam* is performed is linked with certain service relationship, and will have a story to tell regarding it. Heredity being the basis of relation between the celebrant, the performer, and the devotee, the phenomenon reflects a high degree of service-return relationships.
The Malayans are considered to be a lower and polluting caste. They will not dine even with other teyyam performers and low castes. In the past, they got respect whenever the ‘high’ caste people received their service in the form of teyyam performance, magic, and midwifery.

At the time of these services, they are permitted to enter the house and allowed to touch even the Brahmins. Soon after their service, the high castes treat them as any other polluting lower castes. Even though the Malayan has been experiencing the ill effects of the lower status, they too consider the lowest caste as polluting. This happens because, it is believed firmly that nobody can deny the rules and regulations of caste system. The system has the strength to insist...
each and every one to observe certain patterned behaviour, i.e., purity and pollution.

The interaction between other castes and the Malayans is a patterned one. The relation between other teyyam performing castes, and the Malayan needs special mention. The intercommunity interaction between the Malayan, and the other teyyam performers is characteristically limited. They believe that all other teyyam performers are ‘inferior’ to them hence, they do not take cooked food and accept drinking water from them. Nowadays, the progress of science and modern means of life alters and weakens the many traditional practices.

The new characteristic feature of social structure of North Malabar shows group dynamics. Traditionally, the social organization has been emphasising caste, kinship, and inter and intra community interactions. The present study of the Malayan of North Malabar has discovered still another dimension of the social structure, i.e., the existence of small cohesive groups within the caste, which has a locus of power and decision-making. These small cohesive groups constitute the very heart of social life. The formation of these factions is recent, and their emergence is closely related to the increase in jobs, outside the field of teyyam, and also to the gradual break down of old service-return socio-economic system. The progressive and educated Malayan living in urban or, nearby urban centres, do not have any interest to perform teyyam because of socio-economic reasons. The change in the man-nature-spirit complex of teyyam in a new environment of the money market, forces the people to observe teyyam as an ‘art’ more than as a ‘social etiquette’. Moreover, the practise of teyyam generates only a low income. Consequently, there is a lack of attraction to the job of performing teyyam, and this forces the urban performers to give up their traditional 'bonded labour'
based service, and try for new employment and jobs. Now the traditional teyyam performers can be seen doing types of jobs that are totally different from performance. Recently, these small groups seem to be functional in the same way ‘factions’ are. The phenomenon of emergence of small dominant groups within the castes is common among all communities of North Malabar. Here I make an attempt to discuss this new phenomenon, and dimension seen in the social structure of North Malabar.

**Teyyam and Society in the New Scenario**

All over the world we can see many rituals and performance, that are related to religion, society and culture. But, we cannot acknowledge a similar creation such as, teyyam anywhere in the world. The village people heavily depend on teyyam for their survival and existence. The limited technology and know-how insist them to trust in teyyam for the common good of everyone. The nature-man-spirit complex has been the backbone of the sacred structure of the people’s life in North Malabar. There are enough grounds, religiously, and also in terms of social hierarchy, for the people to take teyyam as their ‘science’ and ‘culture’. Their day-to-day life has been directly revolving round it. According to Pallath,

> From the description of the life-cycle ceremonies, it is clear that the important life cycle ceremonies such as childbirth, initiation, and death and burial are celebrated with teyyam. Calendarical as well as devotional celebrations of teyyam almost determine the life of the people. (1983:57,58)

The social life of North Malabar still continues to be governed by caste. It has been shown that a number of castes constitute many compartments in the social divisions. In the Hindu set up, caste divisions play significantly both in actual social interactions, and in
the ideal values. Members of different castes are expected to behave differently, and to have different ideals and values. These differences are religiously sanctioned but, attested and presented as unchangeable. The individual position in the caste structure is fixed by birth, and is immutable.

The caste is a small and named group of persons characterized by hereditary membership, endogamy and specific style of life. Life-style here includes particular traditional occupations. Usually caste is associated with ritual status in a hierarchical system.

The difference in the style of living has a very high degree of difference within the caste system. The entire social setup of North Malabar is divided to constitute a segmented structure in which each segment is differentiated from the other, in terms of certain criteria. The division into segments is never made with an egalitarian basis. However, some are closer to each other. The distance between the Brahmins and the Nairs is less than the distance between the Brahmins and the Pulayans.

Different parts of the country have varied castes. Each caste group has its own separate identity. As said earlier, there are three main sections occupying different positions in the structural hierarchy: the Brahmins at the top, the Non-Brahmins in the middle, and the Adi-Dravidas (untouchables) at the bottom. Apart from their occupations in the economic, and the political systems these three groups are also associated with different qualities and attributes.

Status in the caste hierarchy is based partly upon wealth, but not entirely. It is also being associated with specific life styles. Characteristically, the Brahmins are landowners; the Non-Brahmins are cultivating tenants and service renders, and the Adi-Dravidas are agricultural labourers and service extenders. In a technologically
inactive and tradition-bound society, land was considered to be the principal form of wealth, and the whole economic activity revolves around it. Under such a socially stratified system, an institutionalized system of land-control, which may also be called 'feudal', was emerged. With the development of trade and commerce, industrial enterprises and dominant money-economy, the concept of 'wealth' began to change.

But in recent times, as a result of industrialization, urbanization, and the influence of modern education, technologies and science, the village life of North Malabar is changing fast, and it is more so with respect to the relationship between people and teyyam. Whenever culture undergoes change in tune with new trends, the myth, the ritual modes, and the performance type are also readjusted, accordingly.

**Case Study-I**

Traditionally, offering alcohol is common and unavoidable in teyyam performance. But soon after the independence, there is a ban on using alcohol, and madyavarjanam, that generated problems for teyyam. The ban had forced the people to find an alternative to liquor. In that circumstance, the people used elaneer vellam (tender coconut milk) instead of alcohol. This was ritually sanctioned and observed all over North Malabar in teyyam celebrations during that period.

**Case Stdy-II**

*Madayilchāmundi* performs a ritual called, chuttāttam. The ritual symbolically indicates the killing of the wife of Vannādil Poduval. During this ritual performance, the performer presses a fowl under his feet. A taravādu, situated very near to Payyanur, worship
Malayilchâmundi as the family deity. Years ago, at the time of nationalist movement, under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, the Kāranavar of that taravādu did not allow the killing of fowls. He strongly opposed the killing of fowls during teyyam at his taravādu. Since that time, the performers started performing Malayilchâmundi without fowl sacrifice, at that particular taravādu. As a result of this, instead of real performance, the performers imitate the action of kicking the fowl during chuttāttam. These cases clearly show the flexibility of teyyam performance in tune with the new trends, and the changes in culture.

As we have seen in the previous pages, teyyam performance is very much related to religion by its function and form. Earlier, with the limited technology and knowledge, the people mould their remedial measures for their existence in line with their 'culture-nature' interaction. The high degree of dependence on nature has possibly laid the foundation for 'nature-man-spirit complex'. The religion, the worldview, and the aesthetic sense of the human beings, prepare the ground for the germination of teyyam, a special kind of belief-system, and performance. 'Nature-man-spirit complex' being the backbone, the people of North Malabar gives trust in teyyam performance to get rid of socio-psychic diseases. Later, the introduction of modern and formal education brought serious changes in the outlook of the people. The view of Panikkar is worth quoting here:

Thus it will be noticed that the age in which we now move is one of transition and revolution, in which one form of society is rapidly passing off and its place being filled up by other forms fashioned after alien models...It is the educated masses that are responsible for welcoming and adopting them. (1900:274)
Education is one of the major agencies of socialization, an agency that ensures change. Education is commonly called as, the 'Light of Knowledge'. It removes the darkness of ignorance. The advanced technologies, and science, enforce the people to get rid of superstitious and irrational beliefs. But at same time, they cannot avoid *teyyam* performance, in spite of the fact that the nature-man-spirit interdependence does not work to the same degree and intensity in every aspect of culture and life as before. The weakening of ‘nature-man-spirit complex’ happens also due to the decrease in forest resources, and the impact of money and market.

The occupational mobility of North Malabar also ensures social change. Once, the caste-based society was highly segmented, every one was obliged to perform certain occupations, which fully rest on service-return system. In the land and heredity-based service return system, the Malayans had to do *teyyam*, magic and midwifery. They performed these three to make a living because, there were no alternatives. They had no training in other fields of knowledge hence, had no other choice. The formal education, attraction to new jobs and the modern innovations changed the Malayans attitude towards other occupations, a lot. The shift in occupation alters their viewpoint. A good number of them, who live in urban or sub-urban areas, have given up performing *teyyam*. The people of such locality are forced to bring people of the same community from villages to do the performance. Even though some significant changes are observed, the service-return and heredity-based old etiquette is still prevalent in *teyyam* performance. Still the Malayan of each village, who performs *teyyam*, extends his service on a fixed date and time every year during *teyyam* celebration, *kalpana kaliyāttam*. In most cases, he was not paid properly. Even then, the performer usually believed that it was his duty to do it even if the celebrant (*jenmi*) does not pay him properly. The celebrants take advantage of this folly.
attitude of the performer. The celebration becomes rich in outlook, but the exploitation is still going on.

The constitutional safeguards such as, equality of opportunities and protection from social injustice, and exploitation also brings changes. The activities of political parties, welfare agencies, and eminent personalities brought about serious changes in the socio-political life of this area. Since the performance is treated as a jenmam right, most of the celebrants take any effort to increase the kōlu (wage/gift for performance). However, the increasing cost of living makes life more and more miserable. But recently, some positive attitudes from the celebrant are observed. It happened so by the awakening programmes and activities of welfare agencies, particularly those headed by the Uthara Kerala Malayan Samudayoddharana Sangham, and the newly formed Malabar Area Teyyam Artists Association, ‘MATA’. The social discriminations, and injustice are plenty in teyyam performance. Almost all teyyams express the state of social discriminations in one way or another. The relationship between the celebrant and the performer also indicates high and low, superior and inferior attitudes. Nowadays, in accordance with the involvement and interference of political parties, welfare agencies, and eminent personalities this feature of teyyam weakens along with the alterations seen in the social structure of North Malabar. The alteration in the religious and political set up of this area force the people to watch teyyam performance, less ‘social’ and more ‘art’, and a ‘folk art’. But, on the contrary, the worship-system based on teyyam and its divine power remains same.

After the exhibition of teyyam in 1982 at Delhi Asiad (Asian Games), teyyam has won an increasing popularity. Such events have given birth to new attitudes towards teyyam, and consequently it is seen more as ‘folk-art’. Its scope for exhibition, and high artistic values
has given enough encouragement to watch *teyyam* as a 'piece of tourist attraction', and *teyyam*’s bodily dress materials are used as colourful decorative parts of public processions. However, *teyyam* has not lost its traditional stronghold in the society, and it still performs certain socio-cultural functions through its systems of belief, i.e., ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’. I consider it worth quoting the following enlightening words of Durkheim, regarding ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’, before concluding this chapter:

This was the real characteristic of religious phenomena, that they always supposed a bipartite division of the whole universe, known and knowable, into distinct classes... Sacred things were those that the rules and regulations protected and isolated, profane things were those to which those regulations applied and which had to remain at a distance from the former. Religious beliefs then were the representations that expressed the nature of sacred things and the relations they maintained with each other or with profane things. (cit. D'Souza 2005:110)
Photo: V.1 Teyyam Officials

"Velichappadan" – An Oracle standing infront of a Centre

"Kalasakaran" with Kalasam
Photo: V.2 Celebrants, Performer & Devotees

What a Combination..!! Celebrants, Performers & Devotees