CHAPTER II

BELIEFS AND RITUALS IN THE POLITICS OF FOOD AND CUISINE

Though a considerable amount of research has been done in the food culture and culinary practices, their embedment in the social, cultural and religious life still remains an almost unexplored area. However, there can be noticed some critical initiatives in the recent years from the perspective of cultural history to understand the gradual transitions of food history in human cult. It must also be admitted that certain commendable philosophical and religious exegeses of food, cooking and consumption were evident with the features of ritual practices, the marking of private and public spaces, the systematization of hierarchy and gender have been done in the ‘Oriental’ context.

This chapter is an endeavour to evaluate how the discourse of food and cuisine functioned as a determining factor of power in the larger context of religion in colonial Malabar. On the other hand, the religious values have always been instrumental in shaping the concepts such as fast and feast, feeding the deities and feeding the self. This chapter tries to explore the food-related customs, rituals, and practices of different religious traditions that were prevalent in the society of colonial Malabar. In the study, priority has been given to the comparison of food and eating, rituals practices, deities and festivals.

**Food in Religion**

For convenience, the concept of religion is defined, and its culinary manifestations in the form of food ways and its reflections in the socio-cultural
life of the people of Malabar are investigated. In the ‘Cultural System’, a concept propounded by Clifford Geertz, ‘religion’ provides meaning of identity and structure of a social group. Also, he argues that religion reveals the human desire for order, for people believe, that it has its origin in the divine.\(^1\) The connection between food and religion differs widely, and food and food ways are most complex when they become a part of religion. A study of Emile Durkheim describes the context of religion as a collective representation of the social group. To accomplish its goals, a social group embraces everyone in the powerfully emotional activities of ritual, ceremony, and celebration. Inevitably, such intense and all involving action involves food.\(^2\) The food often figures prominently in the functional interpretation of religion. Claude Levi-Strauss describes food as type of language that helps human beings to express their basic perceptions of reality.\(^3\) He also observes that the rules of eating cooked and raw food in some cultures are dictated by sacred stories, and prohibitions.\(^4\) These rules reflect the notion of the mutually opposing ‘Nature and Culture’.

The monumental work of Mary Dougls explains how food communicates the concept of holiness that is imperative in the creation of identity and social order.\(^5\) The feminist writers take a position that the women may be religious experts through their control of food in societies.\(^6\) Carolyn Walke Bynum’s study on the medieval Christian religion and mysticism explains how women exercised their control and spiritual power by refusing to eat through the ways of spirituality.\(^7\) So it can be observed that food has always been one of

\(^1\) Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Book Classic, New York, 1973, p. 3.
\(^5\) Ibid, p. 178.
the central themes of religion – as a symbol, as a subject of prayers, as a tool of sharing and un-sharing within the communion. By the term ‘religion’ the scholar, in this thesis indicates the ideologies and values of traditional Hinduism in the context of colonial Malabar.

It can be argued that religious food rules are capable to indicate the class or caste distinction of the existing society. The Hindu caste system can be seen communicated primarily in terms of cooking and eating. ‘What and Who’ (the food item and agency) were crucial in the caste based culinary system. In the caste structure, food habits had been used as a powerful metaphor to differentiate one caste from another. Like any other Indian society, caste system was highly rigid in Malabar. The concept of ‘Purity and Pollution’ has always been the important measure of exclusion and inclusion, and the same can be seen applied in colonial Malabar too. It is a fact that an analysis of the social landscape of caste structure in Malabar is essential before one endeavour to explain the rules and customs of the caste system and food.

Rules of Pollution and the Caste Hierarchy

The Social Theory argues that the origin of caste was first racial and then occupational, its importance is curved in religious, moral, social and political ideologies. This system of caste has formulated and set certain unwritten rules which divided the traditional Hindu society of Malabar as upper caste and lower caste. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas, the Ambalavasis, and the Nairs were considered the political and social elites. Thiyyas or Ezhavas, Kammalas or artisans and other ‘polluting castes’ belonged to the next order of social hierarchy. The depressed aboriginal groups belonged to the last rung of the social ladder.

---

Adrian C. Mayer opines that the social system of Malabar has two fundamental principles of organizations, which were caste and kinship.\(^9\) They had power to religious, political, military and judicial powers. The social status of an individual is decided by the caste to which he belongs. The rank of a caste is determined on the basis of such fake considerations such as purity of blood, fidelity to the ancestral profession, abstention from interdicted foods and drinks.\(^10\) It is a wonder that still caste is the basic base of social organization in India.\(^11\) Caste as a segmentary system means that people view themselves as belonging to units of different orders in different contexts.\(^12\) Caste system had split the society into mutually exclusive social groups and prevented social fusion more than any other social institution in the world. It is seen today as an obstacle to all progressive measures in the society and national unity.\(^13\) It was essentially related to the production and distribution of material as well as ideological sources. Its formation was based on the transformation of economy from hunting and food gathering society to settled agrarian economy. It became more rigid and paved the way for the emergence of feudalism. The status of a man born in a particular caste was determined by the rank of that caste in the social hierarchy. Since the caste system was hierarchically graded, it was based on social and legal inequalities.\(^14\) The caste system provided unlimited power to the higher castes to exploit of the lower castes. The idea of hierarchy was omnipresent in the caste.\(^15\) Kerala Brahmanism was reportedly one of the most exclusionary systems of caste-Hinduism that prevailed in India. In Kerala, however, the *sudras* were not just forbidden physical contact with the upper castes; they were also banned from even approaching the coasts of Varna-grade.

\(^12\) M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 120.
\(^14\) Ibid.
They had to keep a measured scale of distances from the so called higher castes. The concept of pollution by touch or approach was the chief source of almost all disabilities suffered by the depressed classes.\textsuperscript{16} As noted earlier, the caste Hindus imposed restrictions on the depressed classes not only in their houses, temples, but also in their food and public spaces. This has been described by foreign travelers and colonial ethnographers. Barbosa, a Portuguese traveller says, ‘In the kingdom of Malabar there are number of sects of, each one of which is much distinguished from the others in so great a degree that the ones will not touch the others under pain of death or disgrace or loss of their property.’\textsuperscript{17} Alexander Hamilton writes ‘If a Pulaya or Thiyya met a Nair on the road, he must go aside to let his worship pass by, left the air should be polluted.’\textsuperscript{18} Logan’s description of the denial of public places to the untouchables gives us more insights into the problem.\textsuperscript{19} He says, in passing from one part of the country to another, they (lower castes) tramp along through the marshes in mud, and wet often up to their waists, rather than risk the displeasure of their lords and masters by accidentally polluting them while using the public roads.\textsuperscript{20} Most of the foreign travelers mentioned in their writings that this custom prevailed in Malabar. Ibin Battuta, a traveler in the fourteenth century, refers that the Muslims were the most respected group in the country, but even in this situation the natives did not eat with them and no permission were given to enter in to the upper caste houses. Happer observed that the concept of pollution provides a link between the gods and men subsequently caste and the society.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Duarte Barbosa, \textit{A Description of Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century} (tran.), Henry, E.J. Stanley, London, 1886, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{17} George Woodcock, Kerala, \textit{A Portrait of Malabar Coast}, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{18} Francis Buchanan, \textit{Journey from Madras through the Countries for the Mysore, Canara and Malabar}, Vol. III, Directors of East India Company, Madras, 1807, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Dietary customs were one of the important media to distinguish ritual purity and impurity. The purity and impurity rules can be found as one of the making factors of dietary customs of each caste and group.

**Rules of Purity and Impurity: Making Dietary Customs**

The belief of purity and impurity pervaded everywhere and it partly explains the hierarchy of castes, Gods, peoples, social groups, and animals. Mary Douglas has recognized the distinction between the sacred and secular practices. Douglas argues that the ‘rituals of purity and impurity’ such as dietary restrictions and avoidances are central to religious behaviour.\(^{22}\) For Dumont, ‘pollution’ it does not bring misfortune, or disease, but only ‘social degradation.’ In Malabar Gazetteer, Innes describes the pollution as a matter of food. He explains that the matter of food was the general rule that no one eats a food item cooked by a person who belongs to a so called polluted community. It should be mentioned here that all these rules were strictly applicable in the case of eating cooked rice.\(^{23}\)

Conceptually, food and cooked food were unique in their functions in cultural context. Gopal Guru describes that the cooked food is a derivative of food grains, but it is different from the later in a fundamental way.\(^{24}\) It is different in as much as it deals more with meaningful survival and not just mere survival. It is the cooked food that becomes the major source of multiple readings; material, moral, metaphysical, social, cultural, political, etc. An analysis of the cooked food of a culture in a way, explains the subtle power dynamics with in a culture.\(^{25}\) The Brahmins and other upper caste were ready to accept the uncooked grain and other raw food from the untouchable caste. But they refused to eat

---

25 Ibid.
cooked food prepared or even touched by a person of lower caste. The same has been followed by all castes against their lower classes. As the pollution and purity attached with raw and cooked food maintain the social boundaries, vegetarian and non-vegetarian habits mark the social distances and hierarchies in the societies.

The vegetarian and non-vegetarian habits also signify one’s personal position in a social structure. The history of Vegetarianism in the society of India has always been highly debatable. A.L. Basham noted that the growth of Vegetarianism was fundamentally linked with the doctrine of non-violence.\(^\text{26}\) Scholars like R.S. Sharma, M.N. Srinivas and Dumont studied the material and social cause of the ideas like *ahimsa* and vegetarianism in the religious culture of Brahmins. M. N. Srinivas observes that the new ideas like Vegetarianism and renunciation was a part of the heretical sects of Jainism and Buddhism\(^\text{27}\). He argues that in Vedic period, Brahmins drank soma, an alcoholic drink, ate beef and offered blood sacrifices. It is in the post-Vedic period that they gave up all these habits. It has been suggested that all these formed as a result of Jain and Buddhist influence. Today, the identity of Brahmins is laid under the basic themes of vegetarianism, but some sects like Saraswat Brahmins, Kashmiri Brahmins and Bengali Brahmins eat non-vegetarian food.\(^\text{28}\) These beliefs formulated a strong idea: vegetarian diet characterizes the purer castes.\(^\text{29}\) Consequently the upper castes have not only made rules of their diet, but they have started prescribing the rules for other castes too. There were further varied degrees of hardcore Non-vegetarianism that is functioning as degrading one from his or her social position. However, eating the ‘sacred cow’ remained always the most abominable. The next worst thing is eating pork; subsequently the foods

\(^{28}\) Ibid, p. 201.
like mutton, chicken, fish and egg were also taken as abominable. Being consistent in the practise of vegetarianism, Brahmins became an exclusive sect and secured a higher social status while those who were in the middle of the social hierarchy were allowed to eat chicken or mutton, and the lowest were allowed pork or beef.

The concept of Vegetarianism was considered high and pure; and the opposing other, the Non-vegetarianism was taken as low and impure. The meat, particularly beef became an important marker of identity in determining the higher and lower in the social stratification. In early social structure, the untouchable were forced to depend whatever resources were available to them. They used to eat rabbits and frogs.\textsuperscript{30} The meat of the dead cow considered the major food item of the untouchables because the meat of dead cattle was easily accessible to them. For instance, there was a custom in the central Kerala according to which the Parayas (one of lower caste) ‘have the right’ to eat the dead cows of the upper caste families. This customs is known as Muliyat in this region. The skin of the animal was used to make musical instruments and the flesh of the cow was divided among the family members. The brain of the animal is given to the head of the family. Each part of animal is known by different names: the flesh as Konam, brain is Chennipuli, eyes as Manivar, ear as Kathukurumbu, tongue as Needak, and liver, Marli. The flesh is baked with toddy and jack fruit. It was also dried and stored for later consumption. This dried flesh was given to guests, and it was considered a delicious food among Paraya community.\textsuperscript{31} Gopal Guru in his study on Mahar Community in Maharashtra refers to a custom similar to Muliyat. This custom is named as ‘Chanyance Toarn’ in Dalit literature. The Mahar community also practised to eat dead cattle.\textsuperscript{32} The correlation between the untouchability and eating of dead cow has

become an appropriate metaphor of the then social hierarchy of food. Another instance of the caste based food hierarchy was related to the term, padikkalechoru,\(^{33}\) this means that the lower caste people have the right to get Sadhya (Brahaminical Food)\(^{34}\) from the marriages and festivals of the upper caste families since they have no right to celebrate festivals and marriages in their house.\(^{35}\) They had no right to celebrate the festivals and marriages in their houses. They also had no authority to conduct sadhya in their own way. The food prepared by using rice was rarely consumed by them in these functions.\(^{36}\) The language used for addressing food also reveals the existence of a caste hierarchy. The lower caste people of Malabar were not permitted to address the food items in its actual name, and they had their own terms for them. For instance, karikadi, was the term used by lower castes of Malabar to denote their food. It can be seen that each caste has its own food habits with unique culinary code that accumulated from native culture. This shows the role of food and culinary practices in determining and maintaining the social hierarchy. It can also be seen that the food taboos associated with social and ritual hierarchies were also used to distinguish not only human beings but also the gods and goddesses in terms of purity. Happer observes that the concept of ‘pollution’ provides a link between the gods and the human, in a society\(^{37}\) and Levi-Strauss sees the cuisine of a society as an unconscious language existing with its own fundamental structures. In short, food can be identified as a code whose message is the structure of a whole society and its relation to the outside world.\(^{38}\)

\(^{33}\) Central Kerala here denotes the districts of Malappuram, Palakkad, and Thrissur.

\(^{34}\) Hermann Gundert, Malayalam and English Dictionary, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1872, p. 292.


Food and Rituals

Food can be seen playing different roles in rituals: representing one’s communication with gods means of one’s amicable interaction with fellow men in ceremonies, and effective ways for social solidarity. 39 Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has stated that the density, scope, and taxonomic complexity of Hindu symbolic thought in regard to food is difficult to capture in a brief space. In Hindu thought, food, in its physical and moral forms, is a cosmos in itself. It is thought to be the fundamental link between men and gods. Food offerings are an essential part of every ritual practices in all religions in the world. A central point in Hindu rituals is that it is necessary to make offerings to the gods in order for human affairs to continue without undue disaster.41 Men and gods were believed to be the co-producers of food: the one involves in the production by making use of his technology and labour, and the other by providing appropriate ecological situation. Men assure this cooperation by feeding the gods and eating their leftovers (prasadam). Thus, at the most abstract level, the production and consumption of food are considered to be part of a single cycle of transactions with the gods.42 The intermediary between the general society and the God is the priest, who is typically a Brahmin. He gains a special social status through this and consequently the food he consumes also gains a higher status in the culinary hierarchy.

Food Offerings

Yatkarosiadsnasiyajjuhosidasiyat
Yattapasyasikauntyatatkurusvamadarpanam

‘Whatever do you, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, whatever austerity you practice, O Son of Kunti, do that as an offering to me’

_Bhagavatgita_ ; 9:27

The food offered to the gods has been much discussed in anthropological literature. Offering food as a part of rituals is important in Kerala and throughout South India. Considerations of ritual purity are naturally the major factors that decide which food may be offered, but their most important function is to eliminate all other items which are not ‘sufficiently’ pure from the God’s menu. Practices like offering vegetarian food to some deities and non-vegetarian items to another few exist in the Hindu community. In fact, one debated question was whether relationships between humans and gods were conceptualized by Hindus as analogous to the relationship between castes, based on the oppositional binary of the pure and the impure. Louis Dumont observed with regard to the South Indian cult of _Aiyanar_ that, like the relationship between castes, the Hindu pantheon was structured by the relative purity expressed in the distinction between meat-eating (relatively low) and vegetarian (relatively high) gods. Hindu deities are distinguished by what they eat.

_Food Offerings in the Temples_

Temples have been the centre of social, economic and cultural life in medieval Kerala. There were two main kinds of shrines in Kerala, the _Kshetras_ and _Kavus_. The first category is dedicated to the superior deities of the Hindu pantheon, Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, their consorts and incarnations, and the second category of the _Kavu_ are shrines of the comparatively inferior deities like _Bhagavati_ or _Bhadrakali, Ayyappan, Vettakorumakan_ etc. These _Kavus_ were

45 Ibid.
also shrines of non-Brahmin gods like Kuttichathan, Gulikan, Mundiyan, Parakutty and the like.

Temples or Kshetras are the centers of sanctity, sacredness and devotion. Normally, people develop love, liking and veneration towards a particular temple depending upon the rituals, festivals, and mode of worship offered there. The elaboration of ritual worship and varieties of food offerings made on such occasions would be depending upon the economic strength of the temple. The food offerings in the temples are made usually at the end of each of the series of the functions in the course of worship and festivals. An offering of Naivedya is an important part of the daily puja. The offering of Naivedya to the God, is considered as one of the sixteen upacharas. The focus on sacred food or prasada in the religious sphere has taken on many connotations, from that of a gift or communion to one symbolizing the grace of the divine.46

It can be found that the lower caste people of Malabar have been kept away from the vicinities of temples, and they were not allowed to make their offerings to the deities in the temple. They were also prohibited from making offers using the items used by the upper caste. In due course, they had to find different food items for offering. They ate animal flesh, drink liquor and offer the same items in their worship to their gods within the sanctum of the temples.

---

### 2.1 Rituals and Food Offerings of important Temples and Kavus in Malabar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Temples and Kavu</th>
<th>Name of The Deity</th>
<th>Rituals and food Offerings</th>
<th>Priesthood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Mahalingeshwara temple Kunjathur, Kasargod</strong></td>
<td><strong>Siva</strong></td>
<td>Offerings are <em>Pancha-Kajjaya</em> made of flour of green gram, Bengal gram, raw rice and grated coconut kernels</td>
<td>Malayalee Brahmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Saalaththoor Durga Malaraaya Daivasthannam Kasargod</strong></td>
<td><strong>Durga Devi</strong></td>
<td>Tender-cocoanut and cocks as offerings to the temple</td>
<td>Karnataka Brahmins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Gulika Bana Mangapaati (Sacred Grove) Kasargod</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sree Gulikan</strong></td>
<td>The priest sacrifices cocks and pours the blood over <em>Sthanam</em> of <em>Sree Gulikan</em>. The cooked Meat is served as <em>Prasadam</em> to devotees at night. <em>Gulikan Kolam</em> is performed on the <em>Makara Samkaramam</em> day</td>
<td><em>Poojari</em> (Priest) from Mangalapatty Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Muchumkaav Paarthhasaarathth ytemple Kumbala, Kasargod</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partha Saarathy</strong></td>
<td>Sweet Cucumber <em>Nivedyam</em> is offered for warding off diseases of cattle and pest corn</td>
<td>Mossad Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Subramanya Temple Thalaklaaye</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subramanya</strong></td>
<td><em>Vella Niveydam</em> and <em>Sarkara Payasam</em></td>
<td>Mossad Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Mariyamman Temple Dharmadam, Kannur</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sree Mariamma</strong></td>
<td><em>Vella Niveydam</em>, <em>Malar Niveydam</em>, besides cock and goats donating to temples</td>
<td>Mossad community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Vana Durga temple Karulayi</strong></td>
<td><strong>Durga</strong></td>
<td><em>Thri-Maduram</em>, <em>Vallachoru</em> and <em>Ilaneer Abhishekam</em>, and <em>Sarkara Payasam Sivarathiri</em> and <em>Thalapoli Maholasam</em></td>
<td>Malayalee Brahmin Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Korothth Naaga – Bhagavathi Temple</strong></td>
<td><strong>Naga Bhagavathi</strong></td>
<td><em>Vellat, Noorum palum</em> and <em>Payasam</em> is important offerings and also in the 2nd <em>Kumbam</em> <em>Elanner Abhishekam</em> is</td>
<td>Malayalee Brahmin Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Siva Bagavathi Temple Orakkatteri</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pancha Bhoothams, Gulikan, Pottan Daivam</strong></td>
<td><strong>Thri-Maduram, Vallachoru and Ilaneer Abhisheka, and sarkara Payasam Sivarathiri and Thalapoli Maholasam</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mossad Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maha Ganapathy Temple Ettaccheri</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lord Ganapathy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Brahmin feast (Oott) is Important ritual in this temple</strong></td>
<td><strong>Malayalee Brahmin Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Kalivaamvelli Bhagavathi Temple Ettacheri</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bhagavathi Temple – Kali Concept is Worshipped</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gurus is important ritual and also Naipayasam is important</strong></td>
<td><strong>Poojari (Priest) from Mangalapatty Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Kaaryat Vishnu Temple Purameri</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sree Maha Vishnu</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pal Payasam and Naipayasam (Ghee Payasam) is important</strong></td>
<td><strong>Malayalee Priest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Kottayal Durga Bhagavathi Temple In Vadakara Kozhikode</strong></td>
<td><strong>Panchaloha, idols of Goddess of Durga, Vettakkoru Makan and Bhadrakali also worshipped</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sarkara Payasam is important Nivedya. Theyyam and Tira Maholasalam in Medam is important festivals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Malayalee Brahmins</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Pishaarikaavu- Siva Bhadrakali Temple Pantalayini Kollam Kozhikode</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bhadrakali and Veerabhadra</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sakhtheya- type or Madhyama Pooja( Worship) - Guruthi is important offerings it is named as Valiya Vattala, Guruthi (Tender Cocoanut, Molasses, rice powder milk, lime etc used)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mossad community of Valayanad Kavu</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Thali Maha Siva Temple</strong></td>
<td><strong>Siva</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sarkara Payasam</strong></td>
<td><strong>Malayalee Brahmin</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sree Siva Temple Punnasserri Kozhikode</strong></td>
<td><strong>Siva Ayyappa Lord Hanuman and Naga Kali</strong></td>
<td><strong>Guruthi and Sarkara Payasam are the important offerings Guruthi is of two types Cheriya Guruthi and Valiya Gurthi is important offerings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Malayalee Brahmin</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Madayi Kavu Bhagavati temple Kozhikode</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bhara kali Temple</strong></td>
<td><strong>Meat is offered as Nivdeya in this Kavu</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mossad Community</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows different types of food offerings in important Vishnu, Siva and Bhagavathi temples which are situated in Malabar. The table tries to indicate the differences in the food items which were offered to the various deities. An analysis of the concept of food in the society of Malabar is clear enough to reveal the picture of hierarchy that was constructed from a divine perspective.

The creation of these concepts was not a simple process; rather it was the result of a complex social system that established a hierarchy through long years of practice. It can be seen that all certain ideas of putting things and people in hierarchical order were also reproduced through the food and culinary practices. Generally, the milk and the milk products are the main ingredients in the oblations for the ‘Brahaminical deities’. At the same time, in the case of Dravidian deities, the tender coconut and jaggery were the major items used in nivedyas. The concept of purity is the major reason of the establishment of these kinds of differentiation among the oblations to Gods and deities. Kanipayyur, an expert in Vaasthu, the traditional Indian architecture, remembers a time when the Brahmans ate the nivedyas issued from a temple of Vaishnavite inheritance, but not ready to take the nivedyas from a Siva temple. It can be inferred from this that the Brahmmin community of late colonial Malabar accepted the temples of Dravidian inheritance with a reluctance, and the nivedyas from such temples were not as ‘divine’ as those from other temples for them.47

In Malabar Manual, the Collector William Logan refers to Anachara Sukthangal to establish these kinds of customary superstitions, which prevailed among the Brahmans of Malabar.48 The Brahmin orators of those years used to explain these kinds of socio-religious construction in a mythical background like brhamahatyapapam, or attributed them to the unlawful application of power by

---

the *Shaiva* group to expand their philosophy, towards *Vishaviates*. By the emergence of a full-fledged fertility cult that was mainly based on common agricultural establishment made the concept of cow a holy one, and there arose with them the concept of purity of milk and milk products. Later these concepts were spread with the Brahaminical expansion; hence these ideas also became the part of the concept of purity among the society of Malabar. Thus milk and milk products became the tool to analyse the ritual purity and the notion of hierarchy between Aryan God *Vishnu* and the Dravidian Gods like *Siva* and *Bhagavathi*. The political dispute within the society paved the way to develop the concept of alteration of temple as a sacred landscape with the ritualistic base of Brahaminical religion.

The Dravidian way of worshipping the female goddess has an important place in it. Female goddess like *Bhagavathi*, and *Bhadarakali* were worshiped as mother goddesses. The female goddesses were the icons of fertility cult in India. The later village community framed their beliefs within the myths that prevailed in a local region. In Malabar region the association of rice with female goddesses and deities are widely reported. It is often seen, explicitly or implicitly, as a gift from a divine, and often ancestral, female entity or as having grown from the body of such a divine female entity, as is the case among them. According to C.A Innes the religion of *Malayalee* is a remarkable mixture of animism and *Vedatism*. The paramount influence of Brahmans in religion as in social and legal matters is evident everywhere, and yet Malabar is pre-eminently the home of witchcraft and magic and all that is indicated the term of animism. A number of village deities were worshiped by various communities in Malabar. Most of these gods are considered guardian sprit; they are interpreted as deities

---

or ghosts. The difference in the offered food functioned as an important tool to distinguish the Sanskrit Gods from the village deities. While the Sanskrit Gods were offered milk and milk products, the village deities were most often offered blood and alcohol.

**Muthappan and the Village Deities**

The worship of a village deity is perhaps the most ancient cult in Indian tradition. In the rural areas of India, we see a diversity of notions about the nature of gods and goddesses. They were not considered as ‘pure gods’ in contrast to the Sanskrit Gods inaccessible to the marginalised. It can be seen that the regional deities are intimately associated with social life of the Indian villages. The concept of God in a pan-Indian context is greatly diversified. They are ghosts, ancestors, personal deities and independent deities. In the primitive mode of worship, they believed that this world was peopled by a multitude of spirits, good and bad, who cause of all unusual events like diseases and disasters. The aim of their worship was to propitiate these infinite spirits. At the same time, each village or Deasam seems to have been under the protection of a spirit, a guardian deity. These divine-identities are normally called as Thattakathathu Devi, where Thattakam or Desam is the political division of Nadus in Malabar. Probably these village deities came into being at the period when the people began to settle down in agricultural communities.

The worship of the villages Gods like Karikutty, Gulikan, Parakutty, Kaligan, Mundiyan are important in the native culture of Malabar. The food offerings to these gods are closely related to the village life. Pala Ada- a special food item prepared with rice by using Arecanut rib is offered to Mundiyan in the Malayalam month of Kumbam. Mundiyan Kavu are integral part of village beliefs. The Gulikan, Parakutty Karikutty are other village gods who are

---


53 Interview with Lakshmi Varrsier, Konour Varriyam, Aryankavu, Kavalappara, Dated on 18-09-2013.
offered different types food items. The priests offer the cooked meat of cocks to their deities as a food offering (naivedyam). Toddy is also an important item in these offerings. The Karkidakam month is considered as panhamasam or month of starvation; and to improve the agricultural production people give food offerings for Kaliyan and Kalichi with the items of foods such as jackfruit, muringa, rice, pappadam etc. The food will be placed in a tiny house made of plantain stem. A ladder and stairs made of plantain stem will be put in front of the house. This is an act of propitiating super spirits for fear of the rainy season of Karkidakam when there will be starvation and danger from natural elements. These rituals continued even today.

All communities have their own beliefs; Thurston describes the animism among the various communities in Malabar. He cites the Cherumans who ‘worship certain gods, who are represented by rude stone images. What few ceremonies are in force amongst them are performed by priests selected from their own ranks, and these priests are held in great veneration by them. They kill cocks as offerings to these deities, who are propitiated by the pouring on some stones placed near them of the fresh blood that gushes from the necks of the birds’. The Cherumans are further said to worship particular sylvan gods, garden deities, and field goddesses, and the Muthappan is the most popular cult among them. For the devotee, Muthappan is considered an incarnation of the god Siva. The offerings of devotees residing elsewhere in Malabar occasionally conduct the Muthappan ritual in their homes. The offerings are pounded rice, green gram with pieces of coconut, dried fish and a glass of toddy though toddy is substituted with other alcoholic drink in some areas. After the ritual all of the offerings including the toddy or alcohol are considered duly blessed. Muthappan worship and such forms of worship come under the broader ambit of ancestor worship. It is a fact that the offering of food items to ancestors is a mode of worship that

---

54 Interview with Kali, An Old Lady, Chakooth House, Eranad, Dated on 16-09-2013.
gained great space and currency in the ritual geography by all caste and communities in Malabar.

**Feeding the Dead: Ancestor Worship in Malabar**

Ancestor worship is very familiar in South India. Robert Hertz, in his study on death ritual pointed out that in many societies the post mortem relationships are not only established in once but they have also been continuously reproduced.\(^{56}\) The dead are worshiped as ancestors, divinities or ghosts in almost all societies. Rituals provide a framework in which the living and the dead can interact with each other in a more elaborate and effective manner than usual. Edward Taylor and Herbert Spencer deemed ancestor worship as the first form of religion.\(^{57}\) The belief behind on this cult is that dead ancestors are passed in to deity and protect their own family members. In tribal way of worship, the ancestor worship gains great importance. All tribal communities in Malabar worshiped their own ancestors and practised so many rituals to propitiate these deities. During the actual death ceremonies, like death anniversary or in *pitrapaksha* (the ancestors’ fortnight) that comes in the dark part of the month of *Bhadrapad* food were offered to these ancestors. *Amavasi* is the last day of the dark fortnight of a lunar month, and in every season that considered by the Hindus to be a day especially set apart for the performance of religious ceremonies in honour of the spirits of the departed ancestors.\(^{58}\)

Whatever the actual date of a man’s death may be, his *Sraddha* (or annual worship of his departed spirit) must be performed on one of the days of this particular fortnight. In his study the *Nayars of Malabar*, Fawcett describes the

---

\(^{58}\) S. M. Natesa Sastri, *Hindu Feast, Fasts , and Ceremonies*, M.E. Publications, Madras, 1903, p. 34.
worship of ancestors prevailed among Nair communities of Malabar.\textsuperscript{59} He
describes that the cremation of the dead, as in the case of the Namboothiri, is
done in the garden or compound surrounding of the tharavad house, especially in
the south or south-west corner of it; so the Nair has the ashes and spirits of his
ancestors with him always. We have seen already how that propitiation of the
spirits of those who have passed from view, and who are in the land of the
shades, pervade the lives of the living. They are worshipped every new moon
day, but especially on the new moon of Karkitakam, Tulam and Kumbham
months. The last is the day following Sivaratri, the well-known Hindu festival.
Food is offered to the ghosts on these occasions; to all ancestors, male and
female. Food of any kind except cooked rice is offered, those are cooked and
placed in the middle room on the west side of the house where small images of
dead ancestors of the tharavad in gold or silver (in poorer houses, a stone
simply is put to represent the deceased) are placed, and the door will be shut for
about ten minutes. After this, the food will be removed and eaten by the people
in the house. Special worship of ancestors is often made at the temples especially
on the sacred, new moons days according to the advice of the traditional
astrologer.

\textit{Sarrdha Rites}

\textit{Karkidaka vavu bali} or \textit{vavubali tharpanam} is a significant ritual observed
by Hindus in Kerala in the month of \textit{Karkidakam} (mid July to mid August).
People offer \textit{bali} to the departed souls of ancestors on this day. The \textit{Bali}—a form
of ritualistic homage—is offered on the day of first \textit{amavasi} of \textit{dakshinayanam}.
This is the no moon day in the month of \textit{Karkidakam}. On this day, thousands of
people gather on the riverbanks and beaches to offer \textit{Bali}. Temples and religious
organizations make elaborate arrangements for the ritual. It is believed that the

Madras, 1915, p. 245.
souls of dead ancestors attain moksha when vavu bali is offered. The vavu bali is performed under the guidance of an elderly person or priest. Darbha (a type of long grass), pavithram (ring made of darbha grass), sesame (ello), Cheroola (a special herb), cooked rice, water and banana leaves are the important accompaniments needed for performing bali ritual.

Ancestors are not considered as gods but these kinds of rituals are capable to influence the lives of their kinsmen who therefore try to please them with offerings of food and drink. Brahmins and a few other high castes offer tarpana and pinda during the actual death ceremonies. During the ancestors’ fortnight, the high castes commonly prepare payasam, jaggery, beaten rice, and serve these to Brahmins who eat the food instead of the ancestors. The non-Brahminic caste also observed the same with the food items such as chicken and toddy. Anyway, it must be admitted that every community believed in upper world concepts, and practised rituals to connect with those who ‘live’ there.

**Death Rituals of the Muslims in Malabar**

The influence of surrounding Hinduism is also found in the belief in magic, in the practice of exorcism and such other black arts among the Muslims in Malabar notwithstanding the distinct expression of condemnation in Islam of all such beliefs and practices as treason against God. Belief in Rouhani (soul of dead) was also popular. Those who were caught up by Rouhani were exorcised through Asmah (witchcraft) by Musaliyars as well as non-Muslim sorcerers with the help of articles like Copper plates, egg, tender coconut and cock. The system of the observance of the occasion of death the Mappilas has also been adopted from the non-Muslim communities in Malabar. The funerary rites of Mappilas were almost similar to that of other communities in Malabar.

---

The idea of death pollution (pula) that was prevalent among Mappilas was altogether foreign to Islam. On the day of death, the family members give up their food. On the second day, food is being prepared in the neighbors’ house. But on the third day (kannook) an elaborate feast is arranged in the house itself with which the mourning ends. And during the observances of pula in the house of the dead, Ossans (barbers) used to shave off the hair of those who visit the house and he would be paid by the relatives. Widows of the diseased had to keep secluded in their own house for three months and ten days without seeing any of the male sex. Similarly, if the dead were rich, there was the yamoth (recitation at the tomb) for seven days in specially built yamapura (a thatched house built on the tomb). On 15th and 40th day of death, sumptuous feast and moulids were performed. All these ceremonies observed after the funerals are not part of Islam but part and parcel of the animistic belief system that was prevalent in Malabar.

Death Rituals among the Syrian Christians of Malabar

The rites of commemoration which occur every year are expressions of the Christian ideas regarding the soul. The death after ritual is very important among the Syrian Christians. Susan Viswantan, in her study about the rituals of Syrian Christian in Kerala observed that, after burial, the solemnity of the occasion is somewhat eased for all those who are not chief mourners. The rites of separations are not fully concluded but the majority who are not affected by the post mortuary rituals; the return from cemetery signifies the returns to profane time, symbolized by partaking of meal.62 When they return from the house after the funeral functions, all those who are present are given food called pasini Kanji. In that day there are no provision to serve meat, fish, eggs, curds, milk and ghee. On the third day after death the mourners celebrate the Eucharist in memory of the soul of the deceased kins. The converted Christians in India

---

continued the Hindu customs and traditions. So the Portuguese Missionaries took up the task of westernizing the St. Thomas Christians. Man, for forty days the household is in formal state of intention of the rites is always for the welfare of departed soul.

All these customs were interpreted in terms of fear of the dead. A funeral ceremony is personal in its focus and societal in its consequences. Death ceremonies often entail the central motifs of a culture; their performance usually helps to bolster the solidarity of the social group.

**Conceptualizing Feasts**

This section examines the dietary taboos that are important in the life cycle rituals among the various social communities of Malabar. The life cycle rituals were prevalent among the people of Malabar mainly through the customs and ceremonies observed from the conception to birth, naming ceremony and rice feeding ceremony to ceremonies of wedding and death. Ceremonial feastings of Hindu society begins soon after the birth. The *annaprasam*, sometimes translated as ‘weaning ceremony’ is a ritual whereby a baby is given its first tastes of rice, usually between the ages of six to twelve months—a baptism through food.\(^6^3\) It is an important and auspicious moment in the society; it indicates the membership given to a social net.\(^6^4\) These ceremonies are observed by every castes of Hindu religion. *Choruoonu* ceremony is an important one among the Hindus in general in the society. The birth of the child is a happy occasion for all communities and the first delivery generally take place at the house of the girls’ fathers. The *pula* is also prevailed in all communities and the

---


days of pollution are different in each castes and community with a feast. The feeding ceremony of new born Thamburatti in Travancore family shows how the upper caste community celebrate these kinds of functions.\textsuperscript{65} Devaki Nilayamgode, outspoken women writer from Namboothiri caste describes that the birth of a son is considered as auspicious on birthday and other special functions, and the members of home would immerse themselves in prayers at various temples on such days. So, apart from the daily food routine at home, the food cycle of society is rooted in a complex ritual calendar of festivals and ceremonies. Among these special ceremonial meals, marriage feast have great importance. The feasts in marriages are an important area of study in anthropological literature. The food transaction in marriage feast establishes the social hierarchy and statues of each caste and family. In Malabar society, traditionally, the people warmly celebrated the marriage occasions.

\textbf{The Marriages Feast}

The matrimony or wedding is one of the most important religious, social and cultural practices for almost all nations in the world. It involved processes and bringing a number of meanings that are significant to human relationships. The rites and rituals observed on the day of wedding play a very significant role in the marriage. Marriage ceremonies and rituals, though based on the common religious precepts are different for castes in India. In the customs of upper caste communities, especially among the Namboothiris of Malabar, there can be seen a number of ritual rites in connection with marriage. Normally the marriage takes place in brides \textit{illam}. In the early period, the women had no right to select her counterpart. They also had no permission to withdraw from marriage fixed by the elders. Nilayamgode shares her marriage experience; she knew about her

\textsuperscript{65} File no 16054, Bundle no 6, A Report on the Feeding Ceremony of the New Born Thamburatti, Kerala State Archives, Thriuvananthapuram, 1830.
marriage from her English teacher. The marriage is then a four day ceremony that takes place in the bride’s home. Marriage is called as veli for bridegroom’s party and penkoda (sending off a girl to another family, as wife), for the bride's family. The bride is called Kudi. Ayiniyunnu is a ritual performed in the house of both the groom and bride.  

Ayiniyunnu is exclusively for women folks. All women relatives of the bride participated in this function, though the widows had no permission to participate in this feast. Kudippeu is that is the important function associated Namboothiri marriages in Malabar.  

It is the bride’s first entry to the groom’s residence. It is probably the first chance for women to take over the control of the marriage ceremony. Women members welcome both bride and groom to be inside the house and lead them in to nadumittam (central quadrangle of the house). The eldest female married woman in the groom’s family performs offerings of appam. Feast was also conducted these four days. It is only after four days of wedding ceremony, the woman becomes a wife by feeding herself with the leftover of the food of her husband. The bride serves him and as he finishes eating, pours a little water in to his cupped palm. When he got up, she placed her right hand on the leaf and then used the same leaf to eat from. This practice would continue regularly thereafter. The marriage customs of other castes especially Nairs and Amabalavasis were called pudavakodukkal, and in the later period they also followed many customs of the Brahmins. The marriage customs of Thiyyas and other castes are peculiar in that period. They conducted a feast with non-vegetarian food. But with the advent of sanskritization they also accepted the Brahminic food culture. They started to serve sambar and other items in the marriage feast. The custom that prevailed in the feast in the early days was communal dining: all were invited to the feast conducted with the marriages and other functions. They gathered and dined together. Cherukad, a well-known Malayalam writer from Valluvanad region of Malabar, in his

66 Unni Namboothiri, Vol. III, No. 8, 3 September, 1924.  
67 V.T. Bhattathiripad, V.Tyude Prabashanagal (Mal.), Mathrubumi Books, Kozhikode, 2013, p. 27.
autobiography remembers the marriage feast conducted in his village; the Brahmins would eat first. The temple working castes like Pisharidis and Varyars would follow them and the Shudras or Nair ate only after these people. This inequality observed in the marriage feasts represents the hierarchies of caste and gender maintained by the then system of patriarchy.

The marriage custom of Muslims of Malabar was very peculiar and has warm celebrations. In the early period, they served coconut choru (Thengachor) and kumbalangakari or morukari prepared in pepper and rice flour water in the wedding eve feast. They also served fried meat, particularly beef in those days. biriyani, a special food item of Muslim community was not common at that time. Suppra culture prevailed among the Muslims of this region should be inferred as inherited from their Arabian connection. In the suppra culture people sit either on colourful mats or beautiful carpets in form of a ring-round with a maximum of ten by spreading a suppra made out of painted palm leaf or a white round cloth (in later period) was a specialty of Mappilas of Malabar. This system is also known as ‘san’, which means a large plate holding enough food for ten people, who actually eat directly with hand from the san. This culture indicates the egalitarian spirit of Islam, and they have never made any discrimination within their guest on the basis of economic capacities. During the iftar salkarams, they mainly prepared many sweet dishes that were prepared by rice, wheat, meat and fish along with vegetable salads, fruits and cooked desserts. A favourite sweet dish served often both on special occasions and festivals are the vazhakari or pidikari’ made of rice and sugar satisfying the purpose of modern concept of

---

69 Mullenzhi Sivadasan Namboothiri, Namboothiri Yogakeshma Sabha Charithrathilude (Mal.), Panchangakam, Pusthakasala, Kunnamankulam, 2011, p. 55.
puddings or *payasam*. On special occasional like marriage, they prepared the
west Asian food called as *Alsa* (wheat porridge). Even now, *Alsa* is a common
dish in the Muslim weddings. It is prepared with fine wheat, ghee and chopped
mutton. Having all these ingredients, *Alsa* functions as both a balanced routine
food to some and a rich and an occasional speciality to others. In the old Muslim
folk songs which are known as *Ammayiammapattual* in Malabar, there can be
seen interesting poetic descriptions of various food items they prepared at the
marriage functions and thereafter. A few lines of one famous
*Ammayiammapattau* are given below.

*Oravittutharamappam Koduthaammayi*
*Odalthomidikkinu Muhabathinu*
*Ottbannathramkiskisiye*
*Bannam Polamidiyappam*
*Ponnu poluirinnu muttamaricahthu*
*Mikdiyankalathappamkulisiappam*
*Mikavaullakavabappammudichilappam.........*  

The food items mentioned in the song is very famous for their tastes in
the Muslim communities of Malabar. The Arabic and Mughal influence can be
seen in these food items. K.T. Achaya observed that many of Muslim food items
were introduced here owing to the influence of Mughal and central Asian
contacts. Interestingly, he cites that the history of *samosa*, one of the important
snacks in the Muslim cuisine came from the central Asia in 10th century. Amir
Khusru has observed that the royal Kitchen prepared *samosa* with meat, ghee and
onion.  

The Mughals also introduced some kinds of new cooking practices in

---

72 B. Muhammad Ahammad, ‘Muslim Bhakashana Vibhavangal’, *Poli*, Kerala Folk Lore Academy, No. 2

India such as the baking of bread and tandoor.\textsuperscript{74} The baked cuisines likes the varieties of pathiris as neyopathiri (cooked), vattapathiri (baked) palaroti (with coconut milk) adukka pathiri (in layers) erachi pathiri (fried with meat) meenpathiri (stuffed with fish) entered into Muslim menu due their contact with Arab traders.

Another noted side dish speciality is the muttamala made out of egg, sugar, ghee, prepared so colourfully and ornamentally. Unnakaya (stuffed banana rolls) is another important Muslim food. kozhinirachatu (stuffed chicken), taripolo, muttapola are other noteworthy food items. A pudding called kinnathappam was made from separated egg whites which have been whisked up with the remaining sugar syrup, steamed and cut in to diamond shape. The lime tea and spice tea are very popular among the Muslims and other communities. A favourite drink since those days was the tari kanji (gruel of rava or sooji) made of sooji, milk and sugar, and jeeraka kanji (cumin gruel) made of cumin seed, egg, and coconut milk and fine broken rice are considered as Ramzan specialities.\textsuperscript{75} It can be noticed that most of the Muslim food items are mainly from the group of non-vegetarian menu. Owing to the same reason, the Muslim food was not accepted by the Brahmins.

The marriage customs of Christian community in Malabar followed Hindu customs and rituals in early days. The Syrian Church of Malabar and It’s Cultural Contributions (A Historical Survey), written by Rev. Palacid and K.E Jobmalt, gives a reference to the wedding function of the Suriyani Christians of Malabar in the early days and their peculiar food items like cheepam, kulappam, thenkuzhal etc. A reference also was made of ayini, the marriage custom of Suriyani Christians of Malabar. Bride and Bridegroom were treated with ayini


\textsuperscript{75} Interview with Aiysha Hajumma, Dated on 10-11-2012.
sweets. A reference to the Decrees of the Synod of Diamper expressly prohibited the Syrian Christian of Malabar from joining their heathen neighbours. They were not allowed to join the Hindu feasts like *Onam*. This reference shows that how religious power shaped food and cuisine of a community.\textsuperscript{76}

It can be found that the marriage feast symbolises many social and cultural power relations that existed in and out of a community. Feast determines the status and reputations of bride’s family, and the marriage feast was the responsibility of the bride’s family. Its main goal was to ensure the gastronomic satisfaction of the groom’s family, which signifies their larger satisfaction with the alliance in economic and moral transactions.

**Ritual Feastings**

This section explores the feasting and fasting in religious context, and analyses how individuals shape their spiritual, religious, gender, and ethical identities through their ritual practices. This daily food cycle is embedded in a complex ritual calendar of festivals and ceremonies in which the different contexts of worship are marked by a variety of special ceremonial meals. Dietlar defined the feast as form of public ritual activity centred on the communal consumption of food and drink.\textsuperscript{77}

Feasting and fasting can be argued as having powerful associations with charity and asceticism. Feasting and fasting are very important in all religions of the world. The purity of ritual fasting is maintained by the women in all societies. Arjun Appadurai, in his study on gastronomic experience in South Asian Context has noted that how the gender discourse in the domestic sphere maintained through the distribution and consumption of food.\textsuperscript{78} He observes that the children, whether resident or non-resident, stand to some degree outside the


arena in which the above rules are systematically applied. Their transgression of gastronomic proprieties is often indulged and culinary whims are given as much play as possible within the broad constraints of the household budget and the boundaries of ritual propriety. However, between the ages of five and ten, a sharp distinction begins to be made between the male and female children. While the male children were encouraged to demand deference in culinary etiquette, female children are increasingly socialized into the subordinate, service role that they must learn to occupy as future daughters-in-law. In this regard, we might say that children in their early years, whether male or female, are treated by analogy with deities: they often eat first, and their ‘leavings,’ at least for their mothers, are not considered degraded (echchal) but rather transvalued (prasadam), and their tastes, like those of the divinities, are paid serious attention. Same power relationship can be seen in the agrarian feudal structure also. In the Janmi system, the relationship between the dominate class and upper-class are communicated through the exchanges of food. Arjun Appdurai underlies the South Indian society, as an example. Celebrations and festivals associated with the agrarian society express the role of food in various power discourses. Feasts have very important role in these celebrations and festivals. These feasts communicate the power differences in the social hierarchy maintained by the social and religious ideologies. Offering food to priest was glorified in all communities. Offering food to priest was considered as one of the important vehicles to communicate with the upper world. The priests had the role of intermediary between the divine and men. These ideas can be seen propagated by all religious ideologies established here. So, offering to priest is magnificent act in the religious exegeses. The terms like oottu and oottupura are closely associated to medieval feudal society of Kerala. These terms and the related

79 Ibid.
rituals were maintained for the power relationship between the ruler and priest in a feudal agrarian society.

**Otta, Varam and Other Brahminical Feasts**

Feeding the Brahmins is considered to be one of the most pious duties by Hindus of all castes. The days of the new and full moon are considered best days for fasting, as also the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth days of each lunar month which are called the *ekadasi vratam*; on the tenth and twelfth days one meal may be taken, on the eleventh day, called *ekadasi*, no meal at all is allowed. The one who observes fast is not permitted to eat with his guests unless he himself is a Brahmin. If he belongs to other caste, he is allowed to appear only after the feast. Then he prostrates himself humbly before these gods of the earth who have done him the favour to devour the food, and who in return give him their *asirvada* or blessing. If their host crowns the feast with a distribution of presents of cloth or money; their fulsome compliments will know no bounds, and they will exalt him even above their own deities.

*Oottupura* lie adjacent to all important temples, *Kovilakams* and important *Nair tharavadus* of Malabar. The Kavalappara family record mentioned number of feasts conducted for the Brahmins.\(^80\) The feasts are held in temples known as *varam* with Vedic *manthrams* followed by an elaborate meal. The meal was conducted as an offering to the deity.\(^81\) Some *varams* were held on a large scale using thousands bananas. All traditional items such as *errissery*, *pulissery*, *kaalan*, *olan*, eight different fried items and eight different pickles in addition to this *prathaman* also were prescribed for it. Curries like *rasam* and *sambar* which were not indigenous, and required onions to be added were not included since onion was not permitted in the temple premises. *Namboothiri* and children ate there and food was sent their home for the women. *Caraganore Devaswom* records gave a detailed report of the *Sadhyya* conducted in various temples under

---

Devaswom. Apart from the sadhya conducted in temples large Nair tharavads conducted feast for Brahmins. Moyarath Sankarn in his memories remembered these customs held in villages.

The Granthavari of various feudal houses in Malabar shows the actual expenses of these oottu and varam. The Tirunnavayya ootu, Panniyakara ootu, Thirumasam Oottu virunnu Oottus are conducted in Kovilakams and temples. The articles like rice, jaggery, coconaut and vegetables are largely used for these Oottu and feasts. The Vrakkal Granthavari records that 1739 Para paddy was needed for one year expense of temples functions like oottu,varam and other daily worships in temple. The people belong to agriculture community have responsibility to give these items in feudal Kovilakam and temples. Moyarath shares that in the time of these feasts in Kovilakam and other joint families the lower caste people have great burden. Through these feasts the power relationship was also maintained. This feast was conducted only for Brahmin Community. The Nairs and other caste have no right participate these feasts. This record also has a reference to a custom called sakshi bhojanam. It means that the Moopil Nair of Kavalappara family has the right to see the Brahmins eat whereas other members of the Nair caste have no such privilege. Through these types of customs, the regional rulers maintained power with the help and recognition of Brahmins. The reference of number of adiythrams performed in the temples is also mentioned in the Kalavappara records. These expenses reveal the importance of these Oottu and feast in feudal power structure. In colonial period too, these caste relations were maintained without large changes. Correspondent of Kerala Pathrika vehemently criticised the Oottupuras

82 Craganoor Devaswom Pathivu Kannakkau Record, 1939.
84 N.M. Namboothiri, Samoothiri Nodu, Malabar Padanagal (Mal.), Kerala Basha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 198.
86 Ibid.
maintained by the Travancore government. They criticised that the government is not all justified in wasting public money.87

In the period of Second World War, the Colonial government closed many Oottupuras maintained in temples and Kovilaks. But in big temples this custom continued for many years. Namskarasadya conducted in Guruvayur temple exclusively for Brahmins. The records mention that even after Gurvayur sathyagraha such customs prevailed in the temple without change. In 1931-32, a Sathyagraha was launched under the leadership of Kerala Gandhi, i.e., Kelappan, social reformer and freedom fighter of Kerala, to secure the entry of untouchables in to the temple.88 All these resulted in the Travancore Temple Entry proclamation in 1936 and similar measures in British Malabar in 1946 & Cochin in 1947. Since then every Hindu is permitted to have a darshan of the Lord outside the sanctum sanctorum (sree kovil). Yet the offering of namaskarasadhya (feast) for Brahmins in the oottupura(dining hall) continued and finally this custom also stopped. Apart from this, feasts or common dinners are an important feature of all festivals among all communities of Malabar.89 Apart from this Brahiminical feasts, a number of feasts associated with various communities can be traced out. Feasts are very important in the religious institutions like mosques and church of different communities of Malabar.

**Nercha: Ritual Feast among Mappilas of Malabar**

Nerchas, the important public feast of Mappilas were closely linked with the saint-worship.90 These were expensive and elaborate ceremonials which combine nominally Islamic elements with specific features of indigenous folk festivals. Anniversaries of each of the Auliya were celebrated in all the major

87 NNPR, Kerala Pathrika, 21, May, 1904.
centers of Malabar with great magnificence and grandeur.\textsuperscript{91} The prayers offered to the deceased \textit{Pirs, Thangals} and \textit{Shahids} which, although contrary to the spirit of Islam, are very common in Malabar, where as it is well known that ancestral worship with all its associated phases was once widely prevalent. It was believed that they had direct interaction with the god and they can help a person to make or ruin one’s fortunes.

Thus all the \textit{nerchas} were conducted within a ritual framework derived from the worship of folk deities in Malabar.\textsuperscript{92} These were important just because of this hybrid character, that is, they provided examples of an especially complex variety of Islamic holy person and saint venerate. The most famous \textit{nerchas} of Malabar were of Kondotty, Malappuram, Pukottur, Kuttayi, Mamburam and Idiyangara in Calicut, and Chandakudamnercha in Pattambi, \textit{Trithala nercha}, and Kottakkal \textit{nercha} are most important \textit{nerchas} in Vallauvand.\textsuperscript{93} While the pattern of ceremonies was almost similar, the saints commemorated through them were of different nature. \textit{Kondotty nercha} honors the Sufi landlord Mohamed Sha, who settled at Kondotty during the period of Tipu Sulthan.\textsuperscript{94} The \textit{Pukottur nercha}, which does not exist today, was held in memory of martyrs of 1921 rebellion. Malappuram \textit{nercha} commemorates the martyrs of the revolt against Paranambi in 1728-29 AD.\textsuperscript{95} The \textit{nercha} at Idiyangara in Calicut town, which is known as \textit{Appa vaniba nercha} or \textit{Idiyangara Shaik urus} is the one which is celebrated in honour of Shaik Mamukoya, a Sufi saint of Calicut who died in 1562 AD.\textsuperscript{96}

The tradition says that one night, some \textit{Mappilas} dream that his grave which was near to the reefs, was in danger of being washed away and that they

\textsuperscript{92} C.A. Innes, \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.19
\textsuperscript{95} L.R.S. Lakshmi, \textit{The Malabar Muslims: A Different Perspective}, Foundation Books, New Delhi, 2012, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
should remove his body to a safe place. They accordingly opened the grave and found the body quite fresh with no signs of decomposition. The remains were spiritually re-interred in another place and Amaqam known as Idiyangara Shaik Maqam was built. An interesting aspect of this nercha is the offering of bread and hence the name appa vanibha nercha. The devotees believe that if they are having ailment in any part of the body, they may prepare bread in the shape of such body parts and offer to the Shaik, and the disease in that part of the body can be cured. The biggest in the history of the nercha at Idiyangara was the one held in 1914 in which Srambikkal Mammad organized a varavu(procession) with 20 elephants, whatever the content of these nerchas, these were celebrated annually in which Mappilas participated in large numbers. There were many minor nerchas in Malabar like Pullara nercha, Kottakkal nercha at Palapra Palli. The ceremonial pattern of the nercha reveals the fact that, it represents the Mappila adaptation of indigenous religious traditions. ‘Mappilas could have Islamized the already existing festivals or created new ones in the indigenous ceremonial patterns. Most of the rituals connected with nerchas were similar to those of poorams or Velas practiced by Brahminic or non-Brahminic communities. In terms of music, and drama performance, varavus, (the offertory procession), is marked similarity. Another link of nerchas with pooram is the seasonal agrarian context.

Majority of nerchas were like poorams that they take place during the harvest season. It is to be noted that Kondotty nercha began as a ceremony in which Muslim peasants brought agricultural produce to the senior Thangal. Besides, the varavu was common to both nercha and pooram. The use of decorated elephants, the fireworks, the hoisting of flags etc all further support non-Islamic aspect of the nerchas. A remarkable aspect is the participation and

98 R. 201, XCVII, Report on Fairs and Festivals in Madras Presidency by Major J.L. Ranking, 1868
99 Mathrubhumi Daily, Dated on 11-12-2013.
varavus. The ceremonial pattern of the nercha reveals the fact that, it represents the Mappila adaptation of indigenous religious traditions. It must be inferred that the Mappilas had islamised the already existing festivals or created new ones using indigenous ceremonial patterns.

**Feast in Festivals**

The festival is an event or social phenomena in all human cultures. The nature of festival is ritually defined in all communities. In Malabar, all the festivals are associated with its harvest culture. Festivals can be categorized as public festival and festival celebrated in domestic space. The pooram, vela, thalappoli are festivals associated with temples and kavus. The majority of temples in Malabar were kavus by its origin, so the rites and customs of these temples trace the number of festivals like Theyyam, Thira, Pooyam, Pooram and Vettekkaran Pattu. These festivals are closely related to the agrarian culture of Malabar. The offerings and mode of worship in these kavus are entirely different from the rituals in the Brahimanical temples. The term kalasam is associated with almost all festivals celebrated in kavus. Generally kalasam denotes offering of toddy and blood to gods or goddesses.

A look into a few festivals celebrated in various Kavus of Malabar will provide a detailed understanding of the role of toddy in the local religion. The annual festival at the Pisharikavu shrine in Quilandy was generally held in April, and the ceremonies lasted seven days. Different castes were associated with various stages of the ritual, emphasising the interdependence of castes and the role they played in sustaining rural community. At the Pisharikkavu, the fishermen community brings offerings of salt and fish to the shrine, the goldsmith 'repairs' the ornaments of the deity, the Panans deliver the umbrellas

---

used in the festival, and Thiyyas tappers bring tender coconuts and toddy. On the seventh and last day, Thiyyas play an important role in the ritual. Bearing pots of milk and toddy, nine Thiyyas run around the shrine. The ritual associated with Madayikavu shrine in Payyanur also has similar rituals. The offering of fish to the goddess was an important feature of these festivals. Apart from the temple festivals, a number of festivals and feasts were conducted at private sphere.

Dietler defines that the festival feasts are originated in an agriculture society: it is largely based on accumulation, storage and usage of the surplus. Three great festivals of Malabar are Onam, Vishu and Thiruvathira. Among these festivals the most important is Onam, celebrated by all Malayalees with some regional difference. The Northern and southern difference in cuisine is particular in the Onam festival.

**Onam Feast**

Onam is a festival for feasting and it was the harvest festival which saw the end of the dark monsoon days of Karkadakam. The month was valuable even for the rich. For common people, it meant rainy days without labour, without food. Onam became a celebration of food, and all good things in life. A good crop and the mild weather lift up the spirits. Interestingly most of the Onam proverbs and saying are centred on eating. Onamunnuka is phrase used by the natives in related with Onam celebrations. Then there is the classic saying kanamvittum Onam munnanam which advises that Onam should be celebrated at any cost, even by selling the off land. Many saying also allude to the days of

---

106 Interview with Janaki Amma, Chengara, Chemmanthatta, Malappuram, Dated on 06-01-2012.
hunger which preceded the feasting. The general scarcity of food that existed in olden days must have caused this celebration of feasting very important.

Many scholars considered *Onam* as harvest festival of Malayees. Harvest festivals have an important place in the history of human development. The origin of this festival can be trace back to the times of hunting gathered period of history. Feasting have important role in ancient gothra culture. The psychology of these festivals and feastings related to ancient remains of communal solidarity. The myths and legends related to *Onam* festival are back up with this ancient gothra remains

The feast or *Onam sadya* now one can’t imagine without sambar, kalan, ishttu, kottukari, puliyinchi, and paladapratham and these dishes were late entrants in the Malayalee menu. Sambar and Aviyal, now important in many Malayalee sadya, were absent even by the turn of 20th century. They do not appear in any olden writings on food. Asshanam the portion of four Purusharthakoothu dealing with food and eating, which describes a grand feast, that do not list sambar and aviyal in the menu though rasam is mentioned as charu (pepper water). These dishes arrived later from Tamil Nadu.

The major difference between the *Onam* feast of northern and southern Kerala is regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the non-vegetarian items in the *Onam* menu. Eating meat or fish on *Onam* day is a must for the northern people especially in Kannur and Kasaragod districts. But in the central Kerala, they abstain from fish during the *Onam*. The people of South Malabar avoid eating meat too during the *Onam* season. The pazhamnurukku, the chunks of boiled plantains (*nenthrapazham*) eaten with crushed pappadams also a feature confined to central Kerala, especially old Eranad and Valluvanadu region. People from other parts are apparently unfamiliar with this delicacy during *Onam*.

---

109 Interview with T.B. Seluraj, Writer, Kozhikode, Dated on 03-08-2013.
Making *ada* as part offerings to *thrikkakarayappan* is an important custom in the part of celebration at the Central Kerala. The *Onamsadya*, is the festival meal or feast prepared on the day of *Onam*. In early period of the *Onam Sadya* the basic dishes are ‘*Chaturavibhaavavangal*’ four dishes, such as *kalan, olan, eriseri* and *aviyal*. Some of them are the opinion that the celebrated dish of Kerala, *sambar* was introduced by Tamil Brahmin community who were an integral part of Kerala’s society from a long a time back. Similarly *rasam*, the Tamil dishes was introduced to Kerala by them. In early days *sambar* and *rasam* were unheard by the people of Kerala. *kalan, olan* and *erisseri* remain the fundamental basics of any traditional *sadya* in Kerala. Then the *uppilittathu* which literally means, those pickled in salt, was also included. Generally they were mango and lemon. The *puliyinchi* and *inchitayriu* were also included. *puliyinchi* is a special dish made in Eranadan, Vlluvanadan and central Kerala for *Onam*. Large quantities of tamarind pulp and jaggery boiled in *kalchatti* (stone vessels) over low flame for hours for its making.\(^{110}\)

In early days only pepper was added to dishes. The chillies were not heard of at those times.\(^{111}\) Chilies come in to the native cuisine after the colonialism and Columbian exchanges in the history. The fried items are the next.\(^{112}\) The sweet dish is one important item in the *Onam sadya*. In the Pre-Colonial period, there was no *palada*, and vermicelli but only pudding of coconut milk with rice and jaggery.\(^{113}\) The jackfruit *payasam* was famous in those days; *pazham* is also used for preparing *payasam*. During the *Onam* season many social customs also conducted. *Onakkazcha* was one of the important social customs at that time. The farmers in the villages would bring *onakkazcha* to the local land lords. These included vegetables like bananas, pumpkin, yams and cucumber grown by them.

\(^{111}\) Intiewiew with Sreedevi Anthrajanam, Eriyadatha Mana, Eranad Taluk, Dated on, 03-12-2011.
\(^{113}\) Interview with Velayudahan Nair, Employee, Kottakal Siva Temple, Kottakal Kovilkam, Dated on, 15-12-2011.
Each lower caste people have the right to get food from the house of upper caste people at the time of *Onam*. They would bring various items known as *kazcha*. The *Parayas* bring *muram, kuda* and *karuvans* (blacksmith) bring metal vessel and knife and the *Chettis* bring *pappadam*. The lower caste people of the society were not allowed to have separate celebration in those days. They got food from their land lords. The food was preserved for one week. And during those days they did not cook food in their houses.

The festivals are important in village life and the related rituals are very significant in these festivals. In Kerala, the agricultural year begins with *Vishu* day, at the end of summer. On the occasion of *Vishu*, the field labourers present *Janmi* with present of fruits and vegetables. On the eve of that day of *kaniyan* of *Desam* sent for to make a forecast of agricultural prospects and the probable quantity of rain. The *vishukanji*, Green jack fruit *puzhuku* and *pappadam* are the important food items on *Vishu* day. The next ceremony of importance is called *Puthari* (meal of new rice). In some places it takes place on *Nira* day, related to the agricultural society. *Nira, the* bringing of the first fruit is celebrated at the beginning of *Karkidakam*. When the new rice crop has been threshed, a day is fixed for *Puthari*. Those who had not cultivated simply add some grains of the new rice to their meal. The house is thoroughly cleaned, and the yard will be smeared with cow dung. An offering of coconut and sweets is offered to *Ganapathi* and *payasam* or *thrimathuram* was offered to Gods.

Another festival related to agricultural society was *Ucharal*. It was taken place at the end of *Magaram*, when second crop has been harvested and the year’s farming is over. The *Uchral* began in *Magaram 27th* and last in *Magaram 30th*. During this festival, all granaries are closed, and no instruments of agriculture are touched on the first day evening towards the day the granary is

---

114 Interview With Ramakrishnan, Edayattor, Eranad Taluk, Dated on 3-12-2011.
closed. The next two days are holidays for all, on the fourth day granary is opened. On that day many rituals related to the then belief system were observed. *Puthariyunu*, the feast conducted on fresh rice was an important one. The leaf curries are the other special items on the day. *Putharichunda, Takara, Payar* (pea), *kumbalam* are used for the preparation of the curry. The *appam* made on *tavid* (husk), is also a special item.117 The husk was known as *kanakapodi* at the time of *Ucharal* because of the non-availability of *tavid*.118 In an agrarian society the rituals and festivals are related to paddy cultivation because the paddy cultivation was the only indigenous and oldest cultivation item. It was started at an early period by the indigenous people, and all other cultivation was introduced later and they had no relation to cultural life of Malabar.

The process of social changes can be noticed in the feasts. Most of the feasts in pre colonial society were linked with agriculture production. But in Colonial period these feasts became an arena of articulation of colonial encounters and changes in the taste value and power relationship they imposed on an alien culture.

In the pre-colonial period, religious tradition and beliefs have shaped diet and food ways of a community. The examination of the connection between the food and religion helps us to illumine how food is used to perform rituals to guarantee fertility and prosperity, a good marriage and after life. The social hierarchies were also maintained by the food customs and rules. The Brahminical powers used to control the rituals and the social rites. Agriculture was the main occupation in feudal social structure of Malabar and the paddy, the major crop, was associated with all social and cultural life of Malabar. In due course, the power structures were altered; these changes in power structures redefined many already established cultural discourses. The rapid changes in the

field of agriculture and the introduction of cash crops market declined the feudal economic structure. In early colonial period the power centres were changed, and they redefined and reformulated the praxis of religion, caste, social norms, and gender.