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**MATRILINY AND DOMESTIC MORPHOLOGY:
A STUDY OF THE NAIR TARAWADS OF MALABAR**

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August 1998

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The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
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Master of Architecture

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GLOSSARY

<i>Anandaravan</i>	Literally translated as, 'one who comes after', and in common parlance, it meant nephew.
<i>Dikshala</i>	A building or building block oriented to one of the cardinal directions.
<i>Dwishala</i>	Two unit (block) structure.
<i>Edavapathi</i>	South-west monsoon in Kerala, from June to mid-September.
<i>Ekashala</i>	A single unit (block) structure.
<i>Ettukettu</i>	Eight-block house with two courtyards.
<i>Gandharva marriage</i>	A marriage system from ancient India arising out of a form of voluntary union of men and women.
<i>Inangars</i>	Members of a community of <i>tarawads</i> , who may inter-dine or inter-marry, and are bound to assist one another.
<i>Kalari</i>	Gymnasium or a traditional school for martial arts.
<i>Karanavan</i>	The senior-most male member of a <i>tarawad</i> who was entrusted with the responsibility of its management of the <i>tarawad</i> . <i>Karanavan</i> literally means 'man with responsibility'.
<i>Karanavathi</i>	The senior-most female member who assumed the role of the manager of a <i>tarawad</i> , in the absence of senior male members.
<i>Kizhakkini</i>	East-oriented block.
<i>Malocca</i>	Large communal house of the Panare of Venezuela.
<i>Man dassé</i>	The traditional house of the Gabras of West Africa.
<i>Mandala</i>	Defined in <i>vastusastra</i> , as a two dimensional space with defined boundaries, but representing three dimensional space.
<i>Mardana and zenana</i>	The front male domain and the rear female domain respectively, of a traditional Islamic house of South Asia.
<i>Marumakkathayam</i>	Etymologically, marumakkathayam is divided into 'marumakan' (sister's son) and 'dayam' (gift) or 'ayam' (property). However, in discussions on the matriliney of Nairs, it is translated as

	'matrilineage'.
Matriliny	A system wherein a person's descent or kinship is traced along the line of his or her ancestress.
Nadumuttam	Sunken central courtyard.
Nairs	A dominant, upper-caste Hindu community from the south-western state of Kerala, India.
Nalukettu	An assemblage of four blocks or an edifice of four halls, enclosing a courtyard.
Nambudiris	The Brahmin priestly class of Kerala.
Nilavara	An underground store or chamber to keep essential grains, as well as family heirlooms.
Oottupura	A large kitchen-cum-dining hall.
Padinjattini	South-oriented block.
Paliathachan	Honorific title of the male member of Paliam <i>tarawad</i> who was the commander of the armed forces of the King of Cochin.
Pandal	A temporary pavilion.
Patinarukettu	Sixteen-block house with four courtyards.
Pattayam	Granary.
Pudamuri	The marriage ceremony wherein the bridegroom presented the bride with a <i>pudava</i> (cloth).
Pula	Ritual pollution involving the larger family or extended clan during occasions such as birth, death etc.
Pula sambandham	Those members of a family/ <i>tarawad</i> bound by the community of ritual pollution.
Pulikudi	A pre-natal ritual among Nair women.
Shala	Meaning, hall; denotes a unit structure (block) with an independent roof structure.
Sambandham	The traditional, socially recognized alliance constituting matrimony among Nairs. The word meant alliance or binding together.

<i>Sarpa kavu</i>	Serpent grove.
<i>Sraddham</i>	Death anniversary observances.
<i>Tali</i>	A small gold plate signifying marriage/mock marriage, tied to a bride by the bridegroom.
<i>Talikettu kalyanam</i>	A pre-puberty ritual for Nairs girls. It was often held as a grand ceremony every ten or twelve years, at which time all the pre-puberty girls of a lineage of one generation of a <i>tarawad</i> were ritually married to men of <i>inangar</i> group.
<i>Taravatilamma</i>	The senior most female member of the <i>tarawad</i> .
<i>Tarawad</i>	Has been variously defined as, “clan”, “joint family”, “holistic and ritually-significant house-and-land unit”, “a joint family with community of property”, and so forth by different scholars.
<i>Tavazhi</i>	Segment of the joint family or <i>tarawad</i> , headed by one of the elder women, and including herself, her children, her daughter's children and so on.
<i>Thekkini</i>	West-oriented block.
<i>Thulavarsham.</i>	North-east monsoon in Kerala, from mid-October to late-November.
<i>Tirandukuli kalyanam</i>	Puberty bath or puberty ceremony, this was another pre-nuptial rite among Nairs, whence a girl on attaining puberty had to go through a transformative and purifying rite.
<i>Trishala</i>	U-shaped three unit (block) structure.
<i>Vadakkini</i>	North-oriented block.
<i>Vastupurushan</i>	The spirit that symbolizes the essence of universal space, graphically portrayed as a man confined within a square mandala.
<i>Vastusastra</i>	The Science of <i>Vastu</i> or the traditional Hindu science of architecture, planning and construction.
<i>Vidikshala</i>	A corner building block.

ABSTRACT

Among the few matrilineal communities from around the world were the Nairs of the south-western coast, also known as the Malabar coast, of India. The system of matrilineal consanguinity and descent practiced by the Nairs was remarkable for its complex kinship organization and joint family set up, and the unique status -- social and economic -- it afforded to the women of the community. Among the critical features of this system were: the mode of tracing descent and kin-ties along the line of ancestress; the holistic and ritually-significant quasi-corporate body, called *tarawad*; the relative latitude extended to women in both marriage and termination of marriage; the "duolocal residence" and the "visiting husband" system; the complex system of rights of ownership, division and transmission of family landed property conferred upon female descendants; and the existence of a number of descent groups, called *tavazhis*, headed by female descendants and forming sub-clans -- sometimes as large as one hundred members -- all living together in a *tarawad* house.

These factors were reflected in the spatial morphology of the traditional Nair house, an assemblage of four blocks, called the *nalukettu*. The different structural identities of the *tarawad* institution; the comparative latitude and the bias of inheritance that women enjoyed; the codes of marriage, interaction and avoidance; and the observation of rituals, an integral part of the cosmology and temporal cycle of the system, all find expression in the layout and spatial organization. On the whole, the geometry of the Nair *nalukettu* was a graphic metaphor of the social and behavioral patterns of the Nair community overlaid on the Hindu way of life, as interpreted by the community. This study investigates how the morphology of the traditional Nair houses was influenced by the matrilineal system and the concomitant gender roles and kinship pattern.

RÉSUMÉ

Parmi les rares communautés matrilineaires du monde, on retrouve les Nairs de la côte sud-ouest des Indes, aussi connue sous le nom de la Côte de Malabar. Le système de consanguinité et de descendance matrilineaire tel que le pratiquait les Nairs était remarquable par son organisation parentale complexe et l'établissement de la famille commune, et par le statut unique, social et économique, qu'il offrait aux femmes de la communauté. Parmi les caractéristiques cruciales du système, on note: la façon de retracer les origines et des liens de parenté le long des lignes ancestrales; le corps holistique quasi-collectif et rituellement révélateur, appelé *tarawad*; la latitude relative présentée aux femmes non seulement dans le mariage mais aussi et dans la conclusion du mariage; le système de "résidence duolocale" et de droit de visite du mari; le système complexe des droits de propriété, de division et de transmission des terres foncières familiales accordés aux descendantes femelles; et l'existence d'un nombre de groupes de descendants, nommés *tavazhis*, dirigés par les descendantes femelles et qui forment des sous-clans, parfois composés de jusqu'à cents membres, vivant tous dans une maison *tarawad*.

Tous ces facteurs étaient reflétés dans la morphologie spatiale de la maison traditionnelle Nair, un assemblage de quatre blocs appelés *nalukettu*. Les différentes identités structurales de l'institution *tarawad*, la latitude comparative et le droit de succession appréciés par les femmes, les codes du mariage, d'interaction et d'évasion, et l'observation de rituels faisant partie intégrale du cycle cosmologique et temporelle du système, étaient manifestes dans la disposition et l'organisation spatiale du *nalukettu*. En fait, dans son entièreté, la géométrie du *nalukettu* Nair était une métaphore graphique des comportements sociaux de la communauté Nair superposée au mode de vie hindou, tel qu'interprété par la communauté. Cette recherche examine comment la morphologie des habitations traditionnelles Nair était influencée par le système matrilineaire et le modèle concomitant du rôles des sexes et de la parenté.

1. INTRODUCTION

I belong to a community called the Nairs, native to the south-western coast, also known as the Malabar coast, of India. Nairs were among the few matrilineal communities from around the world. The matrilineal consanguinity and descent practiced by the Nairs were remarkable for their complex kinship organization and joint family set up, and the unique status -- social and economic -- it afforded to the women of the community. These factors were reflected in the spatial organization of the traditional Nair house. This study investigates how the morphology of the traditional Nair house was influenced by the matrilineal system and the concomitant gender roles and kinship pattern.

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 Introduction

In Dwellings: The House Across The World, Paul Oliver describes dwelling as both a process and an artifact (Oliver, 1987: p. 7). It is the physical expression of living at a location, ranging from the ephemeral dwellings of the hunter-gatherer groups, to the finely wrought, massive, and often centuries old traditional dwellings. But, it also transcends mere physical realms to encompass the manifold cultural and material aspects of habitation. The house definitely plays an important intermediary role between humans and their world and deserves recognition as a powerful and revealing cultural and aesthetic phenomenon.

There is, as such, no discipline or specialization that exists for the study of traditional dwellings in a holistic manner, understanding their physical, social and cultural dimensions. Oliver notes that if such a discipline were to emerge it would be one that combines elements of both architecture and anthropology (Oliver, 1987: p. 9). Anthropological inquiry is not a customary part of architectural education, and an understanding of architectural principles is never considered a significant aspect of the training of an anthropologist. The lack of a common language, graphical or technical, has meant that there have been very few inter-disciplinary studies attempting to understand traditional dwellings in the context of social customs, gender roles and kinship structures.

This research investigates the morphology of a particular traditional dwelling in the context of its singular social structure. What makes it important and unique is the social structure that played a vital role in influencing the morphology of this traditional dwelling, namely, matriliney or descent and kinship through the line of a female ancestor. Studies associating such unusual societal structures and traditional housing are far and few in architectural research. Moreover, as Rapoport remarks, such cross-cultural studies are extremely significant since they provide a great range of variables in different cultures, as well as greater extremes - hence a greater range of alternatives possible (Rapoport, 1969), in an increasingly homogeneous world.

1.1.2 Rationale

The Malabar region, along the south-western coast of India, is frequently mentioned in historical accounts for its maritime links with several foreign lands from pre-Christian period, the early visit of St. Thomas in 52 AD for gathering converts to the newly established religion of Christianity, and the medley of Portuguese, French, Dutch and British contacts and colonizations along the historical route (Logan, 1981; Kunju, 1975; Koder, 1974; Barbosa, 1967; Menon, 1924, 1929, 1933, 1937; Mateer, 1871).

The social system and familial structure of Malabar also find considerable mention in historical and anthropological research. Malabar had one of the rarest historical precedents of practicing matrilineal system of consanguinity and descent, in India, which has otherwise had an overwhelming tradition of strict male dominance. To describe briefly, the kinship that existed among some prominent communities such as the Nairs, Tiyyas, Moplahs, and also many other smaller communities, was one in which the descent and kinship of a person was traced along the female line, to a common ancestress. This arrangement was remarkable for several reasons: one, the notable status of women in these communities; two, the unique kinship organization and familial structure; and, consequently, the rules and customs governing their religious, social and cultural body that were distinct from the established norms of patrilineal societies.

Among all these communities the Nairs were the most noteworthy. Not only were they the most well-known of all the matrilineal communities of Malabar but also, the matrilineal system of Nairs was considered to be among the most complete operative system anywhere in the world (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961). Anthropological literature is abound with research on its absolute and exemplary nature.

The key structural component of this system was the institution, *tarawad*. Scholars have variously defined it as: the joint family (Rivers, 1914), clan (Aiyappan quoted in Puthenkalam, 1977), genealogical matrilineage (Gough in Schneider and Gough, eds., 1961), a holistic, ritually-significant property unit to which the members along the line of a common female ancestress were attached (Moore, 1988), and so on. It signified the family, the family seat and the family name. Among the critical features of this system were: the mode of tracing descent and kin-ties along the line of one's ancestress; the relative latitude extended to women in both, marriage and termination of marriage; the "duolocal residence" and the "visiting husband" system; the complex system of rights of ownership, division and transmission of family landed property conferred upon female descendants; and the existence of a number of sub-descent groups, called *tavazhis*, each headed by a female descendent and forming a clan, sometimes as large as one hundred members, all living together in a *tarawad* house. These features rendered the Nair matrilineal complex remarkable and unique.

Climatic, social and cultural factors find their expression in the traditional architecture of Malabar. The traditional Nair *tarawads* of Malabar are an assemblage of four blocks, called *nalukettus*, enclosing a central courtyard called *ankanam*. These houses embody principles of climatic sensibility, elegant craftsmanship and subtle understanding of the environment. They can be safely stated to be among the finest examples of wooden architecture anywhere in the world. The morphology of these dwellings, although seemingly chaotic, was strongly influenced by the matrilineal system. The singular position of women and the complex kinship structure had a range of direct and indirect implications on it.

The different structural identities of the *tarawad* institution; the comparative latitude and the bias in inheritance that women enjoyed; the codes of marriage, interaction and avoidance; and the observation of rituals, an integral part of the cosmology and temporal cycle of the system, all find expression in the layout and spatial organization. On the whole, the geometry of the Nair *nalukettu* was a graphic metaphor of the social and behavioral patterns of the Nair community overlaid on the Hindu way of life, as interpreted by the community.

Until the 1920s, the *tarawad* institution and the joint family system appear to have functioned well as a ritually-significant and integrated corporate entity. However, soon the old societal structures started giving way to the transformations taking place in their economic and social realms. Since the 1940s, there has been an accelerated breakdown and collapse of the matrilineal system. The progressive disintegration of Nair *tarawads* has been a painful chapter in Kerala's social milieu (Fuller, 1976; Balakrishnan, 1981).

The consequences of this change on the dwelling pattern and typology were far reaching. The large *nalukettus*, earlier owned by the entire *tarawads* acting as a single economic unit, were either pulled down, or underwent drastic transformations, as property holdings were divided among the newly established nuclear families. These changes were insensitive to their social, historic, environmental and aesthetic values. A few houses remain now in parts of northern Malabar, a region slower to change, as a testimony to an incomparable form of traditional architecture that was an outcome of a unique social system. Even these buildings are in the process of obliteration.

This study explores how the matrilineal system of descent influenced the underlying order of the traditional house form. The study of gender-architecture or kinship-architecture associations is comparatively young all over the world. This is particularly true of countries like India, where such subjects remain very much outside the domains of main stream research. This research, I feel, would serve as a new model for understanding the spatial dimensions of such unique gender roles as among Nairs and also, for exploring kinship structures and spatial dynamics in contexts that are unusual and often misinterpreted.

Moreover, in these countries traditional cultures and their physical environments are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by changes, technological and otherwise, that have taken place in recent decades. However, as Hutchinson remarks, "We need the rich dimension of time to help us avoid the all too common triviality of living in the moment as a continuous prelude to rushing thoughtlessly into the future" (Hutchinson in Ripley, 1966: p. 85). The matrilineal customs and practices of Nairs, and the *nalukettu*s of Malabar certainly belong to this category of traditional cultures and environments, threatened by wholesale changes that have taken place in their socio-cultural realms.

The appropriateness or inappropriateness of recent developments can be gauged only through an analysis of that which is being replaced. It becomes very important to document and study this form of traditional architecture and the unique social variables that created it before it is relegated to the anonymity of history. Considered from these points of view, this study assumes special significance and urgency.

On a personal note, the motivation for this study comes, in large measure, from the accounts of my own grandparents and parents about the bygone days, and from personal experiences gathered from the remnants of the joint family system that have survived the ravages of time, adapting to the changes, and manifesting itself in new forms.

1.2 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

This study frequently uses a few key words, fundamental to it, throughout its entire course; these words are now defined for the reader.

Matriliney: Matriliney is commonly understood as a system where a person's descent or kinship is traced along the line of his or her ancestress. In anthropological research, descent and kinship are viewed separately as they do not always correspond. However, in this study these terms are used interchangeably since, in the case of Nairs, both descent and kinship were traced through the female line.

Malabar: Malabar has been variously defined by different authors. In the context of this study, the term Malabar refers generally to the state of Kerala, India, with special reference to its central and northern areas, extending from the Ernakulam district to the Kasargode district. This delineation is solely for the purposes of this study.

Nairs: Nairs are a dominant, upper-caste Hindu community settled mostly along the south-western coast, also known as the Malabar coast, of India. Nairs find considerable mention in historical and anthropological research for their famed martial pursuits, as well as the unique matrilineal system of family structure they followed.

Tarawad: A *tara* was quasi-political Nair organization. *Tarawad* has been variously defined as, “clan”, “joint family”, “holistic and ritually-significant house-and-land unit”, “a joint family with community of property”, and so forth by different scholars.

1.3 GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to document the traditional house form of the Nairs of Malabar, and investigate how the matrilineal system of descent and consanguinity followed by the community was critical to its underlying order. In the process, this study will certainly explore the larger realms of gender-architecture and kinship-architecture associations. The fundamental research question is:

How has the unique matrilineal system of descent and kinship structure influenced the complex house morphology of the Nair *tarawads* of Malabar?

1.4 INTENDED AUDIENCE

This study will benefit scholars investigating hitherto little explored realms in architecture such as, gender-architecture and kinship-architecture associations, in the context of traditional cultures. Moreover, as an incomparable form of traditional architecture, the study will interest scholars researching traditional architecture.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is divided into three parts: one, a review of literature; two, an on-site documentation and analysis of three Nair *tarawads* of Malabar; and finally, an exploration of gender-space and kinship-space associations in the spatial morphology of the documented dwellings, based on literature review and case studies.

The review of the literature, in part, includes a detailed research on matrilineal systems of descent and kinship, with the focus on the matrilineal structure of Nairs. The second stage of literature study delves into the 'social logic of space', in the context of gender roles and kinship structures. This literature study is done by profiting from the vast library resources of McGill and other universities of North America and India. The on-site research involves: a detailed physical documentation of three Nair *tarawads*; collecting information on these *tarawads* from secondary sources; and lastly, personal interviews with experts on matriliney, elderly Nairs who had been part of the old kinship system and have lived in these houses, and also with experts on local traditional architecture.

1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

As mentioned at the outset, the study of correlation between space and gender, or space and kinship structures, especially in the context of traditional architecture, is relatively young. This is both a matter of gratification, as well as limitation. The excitement of charting relatively little explored academic realms that may have profound ramifications for further research in this area, is certainly stimulating.

The greatest limitation of the study also stems from the fact that it is new. Dearth of extensive literature is a limiting factor in such situations. This study does not attempt to provide answers to the several unresolved questions that the matrilineal system of Nairs still poses to the anthropologist or the cultural geographer. Its mandate is to examine the spatial ramifications of such a system on the traditional house form based on the existing literature and interpretations that earlier scholars have made. Nonetheless, at times, this study attempts to raise issues or questions that, I believe, have been either,

misinterpreted or, inadequately dealt by earlier authors. In doing so, more questions are sometimes raised than answered.

The initial study covered an on-site documentation of twelve Nair *tarawads* and over forty other examples from secondary sources. These houses are from the southern Malabar (Valluvanad) and Cochin regions and belong to comparatively more affluent families. Of these examples only four *nalukettus* belonging to three different *tarawads*, characteristic of three discrete scenarios, have been taken up for detailed analysis. These, I believe, sufficiently illustrate the conclusions and hypotheses that I advance towards the end.

1.7 SCHEMATIZATION OF THE THESIS

The study is organized into five chapters: an introduction followed by four other chapters, each chapter building up in an incremental manner, leading finally to the analyses and inferences.

The opening chapter introduces the topic of the study, including the background and the rationale of the study, the goal of the study with the all-important research question, the audience addressed, the research methodology adopted, the scope and limitations, and finally, the schematization of the study.

The matriliney of the Nairs is the central theme of the second chapter. The first part of this chapter briefly introduces matrilineal descent and kinship, its formative principles and general characteristics. Examples of such societies from all over the world are also cited. The second part of this chapter elaborates on the matriliney of Nairs, familiarizing the reader with complexities of the system; it is also a fairly exhaustive recapitulation of the analyses and interpretations of earlier scholars.

The implications of such kinship systems on various societal structures and their physical expressions like domestic architecture, are usually far reaching. The third chapter focuses on the social function of space, particularly relating gender and space, and kinship and space, as a precursor to the analysis of matriliney and house morphology of the Nairs. This chapter is primarily a review of the literature relating social structures

and gender roles to their physical environment, especially the built environment. The second and third chapters together attempt to equip the reader with sufficient background information to understand the case studies and analyses taken up in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter explores the spatial ramifications of the matrilineal system of Nairs and illustrates how the unique gender roles and complex kinship structure have been critical in modeling the particular housing pattern and dwelling morphology. It also shows, conversely, how the particular spatial pattern and dwelling morphology sustained the functioning of the matrilineal system. This is substantiated by case studies of *nalukettus* belonging to three Nair *tarawads*. The final chapter is an epilogue of sorts, summing up conclusions and identifying areas for further research.

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2. MATRILINY AND THE NAIRS OF MALABAR

2.1 MATRILINEAL KINSHIP

2.1.1 Background

As a kinship system, matrilineal consanguinity has intrigued many cultural and social anthropologists. This could be attributed to an interest in studying the aberrant, for matriliney is definitely an anomaly in a world otherwise dominated by patriliney and patriarchy.

The earliest study of matriliney is J.J. Bachofen's Das Mutterrecht (1861) which posed matrilineal descent as a problem. Bachofen argued that human society began in a state of "primitive promiscuity" in which there was no social organization, no regulation of behavior, sexual or otherwise. Matriliney, to him, was the second stage of cultural evolution. This was associated with the invention of agriculture by women. He says, in this state women ruled the household and the state and passed their names and property to their children. Essential to the matrilineal stage was a set of religious beliefs which centered around an Earth Goddess. It was only late in the evolution of culture, Bachofen believes, that this system gave way to patriliney and patriarchy.

Later researchers, notably Mc Lennan, Tylor and Morgan, questioned Bachofen's assumptions. These nineteenth century theorists wanted, on the whole, to establish general laws of cultural development, not merely historical sequences. In attempting to formulate such general laws, they looked at the systemic interconnections among various institutions within a particular culture and tried to explain them in a variety of ways.

The legitimacy of many of these theories have been challenged. For example, Bachofen's contention that matriliney (descent through women) and matriarchy (rule by women) were but two aspects of the same institution was discarded by later studies. It was observed in many of these studies that the generalized authority of women was never observed in most matrilineal societies, but only recorded in myths and legends. Thus the notion of matriarchy soon fell into disrepute in anthropological work (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. viii).

Similarly, it was first suggested that matrilineal descent groups were an inevitable concomitant of the mode of tracing relationship through the mother. Indeed, matrilineal descent was defined in this way. It soon became evident, however, that most societies appeared to relate members to kinspeople of both father and mother, but only some of these had organized descent groups, as distinct from categories of kin (Morgan, 1877). Hence, descent had to be treated separately from the manner of tracing relationship.

Another aspect was the early suggestion that a true matrilineal complex did not include husband or father. This was, in a way, consistent with the prevalent assumption of a stage of primitive promiscuity as the state prior to the development of matriliney. It was held that kinship was a social recognition of biological facts, and therefore, until biological paternity could be established there was no basis for social paternity. Later theorists have corrected this by establishing that social paternity need not be, and often is not, identical with biological paternity, nor is descent group necessarily composed of only biologically related members (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. xi).

The notion of residence was another matter that required clarity. For a time, "matrilocal marriage" was used almost interchangeably with matriliney. N.W. Thomas (1906) introduced the terms "matrilocal" and "patrilocal" as parallel to matriliney and patriliney. He, however, acknowledged that the terms were still not explicit or adequate enough. Meanwhile, many other sociologists were using terms like "bride's house" and "groom's house". In 1936, Raymond Firth (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. x) first introduced the term "uxorilocal" and, in 1947, Adams (1947: p. 678) paired the terms "virilocal" and "uxorilocal", suggesting that matri- and patri- referred to father and mother, and therefore with husband and wife the terms viri- and uxori- were more appropriate. In 1957, Murdock gave a further new interpretation, modifying his own earlier stipulation of parent of the couple as the defining criterion, that "matrilocal residence" meant that the couple lived with the bride's matrilineal kinspeople and "patrilocal" meant vice versa (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. xi).

In many matrilineal societies, the maternal uncle (mother's brother) was an important member of the kinship structure. The Trobriands of New Guinea and the Nairs

of Northern Kerala were examples of this. Often, as in the case of Trobriands, adult residency came to be associated with the maternal uncle's residence (Fathauer quoted in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 248). Thus, the term "avunculocal" was coined by Kroeber in 1938 (Kroeber, 1938: pp. 299-309). However, these terminologies did not quite fit the Ashantis and the Ga of West Africa, and the Central Kerala Nairs. In the case of the Nairs, husband and wife had separate residences after marriage, and the husband visited the wife at her residence occasionally. This problem was resolved by Murdock in 1957, by terming it "duolocal" (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. xi).

The early twentieth century saw a widespread revolt against the particular theories of the nineteenth, and also against cultural evolution in general. The highly specific historic reconstructions by Boas in America and the condemnation of the general evolutionary theory by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in Britain, were only part of this overall feeling. In modern anthropology, matrilineal consanguinity has been studied merely as particular examples of integrated social structures, rather than as the foci of special problems.

Bronislaw Malinowski's monumental study of the Trobriand Islands (1914-1918) provided the first full dress description of a matrilineal society and system in operation. He directed his attention to a general understanding of the interrelatedness of institutions and used the matrilineal culture of Trobriands only incidentally to counter some general theories of psychoanalysis (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961). His was, importantly, the earliest attempt to understand the relative autonomy of women in such a system. He also attempted to understand the position of the male in such society, his special relationship with his sister and her husband, and the conflict between a man's loyalties to his natal and conjugal kin.

More in-depth studies have followed, of various matrilineal societies around the world. Among them, those of Radcliffe-Brown, Rivers (1914), and Briffault (1931) are influential early discussions of matriliney and matriarchy. Perspectives based on fieldwork include Lowie (1919) Fortune (1932), Powdermaker (1933), Richards (1956), Eggan, Fortes, Colson (1958), Michell, Turner, Gough, Fuller (1976), Schlegel (1972) and

others. The most recent ethnographic and theoretical accounts are those of Nash (1987), Peletz (1988), Fogelson (1990), Lepowsky (1990a, 1993) Sanday (1990a), Schlegel (1990) et al. Thus, today theorists have a fuller picture of this kinship system as such.

Matrilineal Kinship edited by David Schneider and Kathleen Gough (1961) is a seminal work in the study of matriliney. Growing out of a summer seminar at Harvard University in 1954, this work explores the matrilineal world of nine societies from four continents, displaying the most diverse set of conditions and possibilities, minimizing, in the process, the possibility that any constant features discovered might result from diffusion rather than matrilineal descent. Thus, the Navahos represent loosely structured, acephalous tribes; the Truks and Trobriands, more tightly structured matrilineal systems with relatively settled cultivation; the Ashantis, a large, matrilineally organized state; and the communities of Kerala, highly differentiated occupational and social strata within still larger, hierarchical social systems and polities. These examples also offer the widest array of residential patterns possible. They include the matrilocal Navaho, Truk, and North Kerala Mappilas; the irregular Plateau Tonga and Tiyyars, the avunculocal Trobriands and North Kerala Nairs; and the duoloccal Central Kerala Nairs and Ashantis.

2.1.2 Distinctive Features Of Matrilineal Descent Groups

Schneider introduces a set of theoretical statements (differentiated from empirical generalizations) regarding matrilineal descent groups. In doing so, he first distinguishes kinship from descent. Kinship, he says, defines a number of statuses and their interrelationships according to a variety of rules and principles that distinguishes kinspeople from non-kin. Descent refers to the socially stipulated rule by which the unit is constituted. The unit being a consanguineal one, each member is affiliated with the unit through his or her parents and in no other way. A descent group is also a decision-making group with power to mobilize its resources and capacities (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: pp. 3-5). Thus a lineage or clan which owns property, assembles for legal, administrative, ceremonial or other purposes, and which has a head, is an instance of a descent group. A classical example of this was the Nair *tarawads* of Kerala (Fuller, 1976).

Schneider, while elaborating on the distinctive features of matrilineal descent, sets out three constants as primary conditions for any unilineal descent, matrilineal or patrilineal. They are:

- Women are responsible for the care of children, with every child being the primary responsibility of one woman,
- Adult men have authority over women and children, and
- Descent exogamy is compulsory. (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 5)

While the absolute nature of these premises could be questioned, as shall be examined later, for the time being we start with these clauses.

The most profound structural difference between matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups is that, in patrilineal descent groups the line of authority and the line of descent run through men. On the other hand, in matrilineal descent groups, although the line of authority runs through men, the descent or group placement runs through women. The immediate consequence of this are two other structural differences:

- Matrilineal descent groups depend for their continuity and operation on control over their male and female members. Briefly explained, in patrilineal groups while the control of their male members is vital, these groups can afford to relinquish control of their female members, provided they gain proportionate control over women marrying into their group. On the contrary, matrilineal groups require control over their male and female members for their operations. While women are required to ensure that children achieve primary orientation and loyalty to their matrilineal group, men are required, by Schneider's contention, to fill out authoritative roles.
- Sex role of the in-marrying affine is different in matrilineal and patrilineal descent groups.

From these fundamental structural differences, Schneider says, other distinctions follow (*ibid.*: p.7, 8). The other distinctive features briefly, are:

- In matrilineal descent groups there is an element of potential strain in the fact that while the sister is not a sexual object for her brother, her sexual and reproductive activities are a matter of concern to him.
- Matrilineal descent groups do not require the statuses of father and husband, while the statuses of the mother and wife are indispensable to patrilineal descent groups.
- The institutionalization of very strong and lasting solidarities between husband and wife is not compatible with the maintenance of matrilineal descent groups.
- Matrilineal descent groups have special problems in the organization of in-marrying affines with respect to each other.
- The bonds which may develop between father and his child tend to be in direct competition with the authority of the child's matrilineal descent group, while the reverse is not true for patrilineal descent groups.
- The processes of fission and segmentation in matrilineal descent groups do not precisely replicate those of patrilineal descent groups.
- Isolated communities of a matrilineal core and in-marrying spouses are extremely difficult to maintain (ibid.: pp. 12-29).

2.1.3 Matrilineal Communities And Women

The unique status of women in matrilineal societies provokes considerable interest. While earlier accounts of these societies record very little about this (Malinowski's The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia has just a brief chapter on "The Status of Women in Native Society"), recent anthropological inquiries have increasingly examined these societies from a gender perspective also. The issue has been discussed in relation to land rights, control of resources, division of labor, sexual rights, access to positions of prestige and institutions of power or jural authority, representation of women in ritualistic and ceremonial complex, and so forth.

Some of these studies have challenged the positions of prominent theorists in anthropology and beyond -- for example, de Beauvoir (1953), Rosaldo (1974; 1980), or Ortner (1974) -- that male dominance or sexual asymmetry is universal, and that only its forms and intensity vary (Lepowsky, 1993). Definitions of male dominance itself vary, from the materialist approaches of Engels (1891), Leacock (1978), Brown (1975), to the stress on ideological factors by Rosaldo (1974) and Ortner (1974), and the emphasis on prestige by Friedl (1975: p. 164), and Ortner and Whitehead (1981). Lepowsky (1993) feels that some of the most fruitful recent discussions of gender theory in anthropology have stressed that cultures or societies do not have one unique, monolithic and noncontradictory ideology of gender operating in the thoughts of each person on all occasions.

Challenging notions of universal male dominance or sexual asymmetry were several matrilineal societies such as the Khasis and the Garos of north-eastern India, or the Vanatinais, a Melanesian society. These societies also question Schneider's basic contention that male authority is mandatory even in matrilineal societies. While subscribing to matriliney, the suggested male authority was found non-existent in these societies.

Dasgupta records that, among Khasis the responsibility and authority of management of the house rested with the wife. Although there was no apparent imbalance in the relative positions of spouses, Dasgupta observes that the wife enjoyed a latent privilege in the overall setup. She handled money, managed family affairs, registered children in her own descent line and banished the husband after a divorce (Dasgupta, 1984: 81). In fact, among the Upland Khasis (one of the Khasi communities), the husband was referred to as a mere *U shong* or begetter. Gurdong (1914) thinks this is partly explained by the inheritance laws, whereby men did not inherit ancestral property among the Upland Khasis.

If females are at a relative advantage among the Khasis, the Vanatinai is sexually egalitarian. Maria Lepowsky notes that "men have no formal authority or powers of coercion over women" (Lepowsky, 1993: p. viii). It has an egalitarian (sexual) ethic in

both theory and practice (ibid.: p. 39). Ideologies of male superiority or right of authority over women are notably absent, and ideologies of gender equivalence are clearly articulated (ibid.: p. 281).

Schlegel's cross-cultural study of matrilineal societies (1972) identifies three factors that strongly correlate with high female autonomy: absence of punishment of wife, women-oriented residence and positions held by women outside their home.

Matrilineal and bilateral systems of land inheritance advantaged women in many respects, especially in granting them economic and social security, and considerable autonomy and equality in marital relations, notes Agarwal (1994: p. 153). Descriptions of Garo and Khasi women suggest this (ibid.: pp. 101-107; also Dasgupta, 1984). Commenting on land rights among matrilineal communities of South Asia, Agarwal notes that there were three different patterns of land inheritance among these communities. One category was of communities among which land was a clan's communal property and could not be inherited by individuals or joint family units. The Garos of north-eastern India fall under this category. A second category was of communities where land, although inherited in the female line, was held as joint family property, and women had no individual rights of alienation. Responsibility for overall management rested principally with men, typically brothers or maternal uncles. Examples for this were the Nairs, Tiyyas, Mappilas and Chettis of south-western India and the Khasis of north-western India. A third category was of communities where both men and women had land rights as individuals. Women inherited it either as dowries, as was with the Jaffna Tamils or the matrilineal Moors, or post-mortem, as was with Kandyan Sinhalese.

Scholars have speculated on the interrelatedness of land rights of women and their marriage practices. Since land was the most important form of property in agrarian economies, it was expected that communities that recognized land rights of women would try and ensure that land is not lost to persons outside the kin group. Jack Goody, for instance, proposes that in societies practicing "diverging devolution", there would be a stronger tendency to control women's marriage (Goody, 1973; 1976). Here the concept of cross-cousin marriages, common among many matrilineal communities, emerge.

However, Agarwal considers this problematic on several counts. She goes on to establish that close-kin marriage is an independent variable and the recognition of female inheritance in land the dependent one, in that communities which practiced close-kin marriages were perhaps more open to endowing property rights to women (Agarwal, 1994: p. 139).

It is noteworthy that in South Asia, wherever women have customarily had rights in landed property, it has been associated with their typically residing, and often having to reside, within the natal village and often in the natal home. For example, among Garos, Khasis and Lalungs, the heiress who inherited the ancestral property, as well as other women who had usufructuary land rights, were expected to reside near the maternal home after marriage (ibid.).

An overall analysis of land rights and gender relations among the matrilineals of South Asia prompts Agarwal to conclude that in such societies by and large, women were more independent such as, in the case of the Khasis or the central Kerala Nairs. Indeed, "where uxorilocality or matrilocality was the norm, marital breakdown led to the husband departing, sometimes with only his clothes on his back" (ibid.: p. 147). Also, in contrast to patrilineal societies, everyday marital authority was also much more limited. As Nakane illustrates, "the last person to be introduced to visitors in the family of a Khasi heiress was usually the husband" (Nakane quoted in Agarwal, 1994: p. 147), reflecting his low status in the domestic sphere.

Rites and rituals representing the cosmology of a society and governing its social and cultural body significantly express its gender perceptions. These include rites of passage, rituals relating to fertility, also sometimes connected to harvest or bountifulness, myths and legends relating to creation, birth or death, and so forth. Sanday argues that myths about origin and the sex of the creator are particularly critical in describing and validating a society's concepts of power and gender relations (Sanday quoted in Lepowsky, 1993: p. 129).

Among matrilineal societies these vary considerably. Aiyappan and Mahadevan remark that in the esoteric tantric rites of Kerala, women were considered superior to men and that, in the folk religion of Kerala, goddesses are supreme both in numbers and power (Aiyappan and Mahadevan, 1990: p. 4). Many scholars have noted that among the matrilineal Nairs of Kerala there was a preponderance of female-oriented rites and rituals, especially those related to rites of passage (see for e.g., Gough, 1955; Puthenkalam, 1977; Moore, 1988, 1985; Shetty, 1990 etc.). The paramount deity associated with the Nairs was the Goddess Bhagavati. In some others, like the Trobriands, women participated in key rituals and possess significant supernatural knowledge (Malinowski, 1922, 1929; Fathauer in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961; Lepowsky, 1993). Some societies, like the Vanatinai, consider woman, the life-giver and man, the life-taker. The Trobriand mythology about creation has a brother and sister emerging together from the underworld, the sister to establish a sub-clan and the brother to guard her (Fathauer in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 249).

But, there are also others, like some matrilineals of Melanesia, that had male initiation ceremonies, secret societies, bachelor huts, and so on. Both Fathauer (1961) and Duly (1979: p. 72) write about the *bukutmalas* or the bachelors houses of the Trobriands.

"...apart from dwelling houses proper, the impressive ceremonial or cult houses of men's societies are common throughout the area. Bachelor's often sleep there, visitors are entertained, men lounge there to drink *kawa* or chew betel nut and debate or gossip; but sacred objects are also prepared and displayed there, and complex initiation rituals are enacted."

Many societies also subscribe to rites of female pollution, especially during birth or menstruation. While some scholars have interpreted such practices as a reflection of low female status and their exclusion from key economic and ritual domains of a society (Meigs, 1983; Godelier, 1986), others, including some recent feminist anthropologists, have construed it as reflection of female power, creative or destructive, and not necessarily as evidence of low female status (Gottlieb in Lepowsky, 1993: p. 100). The Nairs traditionally, while secluding their women during menstruation or in the immediate post-natal period, celebrated a girl's maturity into womanhood with considerable rituals and festivities.

However, these features were counter-balanced by other, less favorable or discriminatory ones. The bias in property rights did not alter the overall gender division of labor; domestic work and child care were still women's responsibilities. Two, land rights did not automatically guarantee equal sexual rights also. Norms of sexual behavior outside marriage varied considerably, from the relatively egalitarian north-eastern Indian tribes or the Vanatinais, to restricted for women among Jaffna Tamils. Three, the dwindled authority of the husband did not always mean that the male authority was totally diminished. Sometimes the husband was replaced by some other male authority, usually the kinsman who was in control of the common resources, as in the case of the *karanavan* of a Nair *tarawad*.

And finally, with a few notable exclusions like the Vanatinais, women were invariably excluded from the customary institutions with jural power such as, tribal or caste councils, or from positions of power and prestige. To cite a few instances, the positions of the head of the clan among the Nairs and the Ashantis, or the head of a sub-clan among the Trobriands were exclusive male privileges.

As Lepowsky sums it up: "Matrilineal descent need not result (always) in a sexually egalitarian society or even in significant female autonomy" (Lepowsky, 1993: p. 296). In some societies, such as the Minangkabau or the Ashantis, females and males from high-ranking groups could attain the position of the leader. Several others were unstratified, yet only males occupied positions of authority. There were others, unstratified, having both, males and females in positions of authority; these may be the same kinds of positions, as among Vanatinais, or classified by gender as among Hopi or Iroquois. Matrilineal societies in which social stratification and rank were absent as organizing principles, such as the Vanatinais, were most likely to be gender-egalitarian. "Matrilineal descent provides the preconditions favorable to the development of female political and economic power, but it does not ensure it" (ibid.: p. 297).

2.1.4 Kinship Character In Matrilineal Societies

The complex nature of kinship networks and relationships of many matrilineal societies remain an enigma to many anthropologists.

Clans: Most matrilineal communities were distinguished by large, extended matrilineal clans, hierarchically followed by, sub-clans or descent groups, other social orders and groupings. Clans varied greatly in size, from one member to over 3500 members, as among the Navaho Indians (Aberle in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 108). The clan members were affiliated to each other, tracing their genealogy to a common ancestress. In all cases clans were unambiguously exogamous units.

However, the social nature of a clan varied considerably. In many cases, clans were unorganized, had no corporate character or head, nor did they congregate, or have common residency and rituals. Examples for these included the Truks of Caroline Islands, the Navahos of New Mexico, and the Trobriands of New Guinea (Schneider and Gough eds., 1961). But then there were other matrilineals, where the clan acted as a holistic and ritually significant corporate entity, owning property collectively, having a head or chief, with members partaking in common rituals, and sometimes sharing a common residency. Well known examples were the Nairs of Kerala and the matrilineals of Minangkabau.

Descent Groups or Sub-clans: Clans are hierarchically followed by sub-clans, also sometimes translated as descent groups. Among most matrilineals this was a more well-defined entity than the clan. It owned property communally, had a common legal personality, functioned as a ritually-composite entity and sometimes, commonly shared a residence.

The nature of descent group organization varied widely between different communities. Among Trobriands, for example, members of *dalas* or sub-clans believed themselves as originated from an common ancestress frequently accompanied by her brother, who emerged from the underworld. The sub-clan members considered themselves as the “real kinspeople” as distinguished from clan members, who were designated as “pseudo kinspeople” (Fathauer in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 237). Below the *dalas* were lineages, followed by families.

Similarly, among Truks, a sub-clan consisted of members of a clan who “shared a traditional common ancestry, usually about events in the past which marked the splitting of a particular lineage”. Ties of hospitality existed among these members, and extended,

in the old days, to wife-lending, or calling on each other at times of food shortage (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 103). Another example of a sub-clan was the *tavazhi* among the Nairs, a segment of the *tarawad* or larger clan, headed by one of the elder women, and including herself, her children, her daughter's children, and so on (Fuller, 1976: p. 52, 53).

Inter-personal Kinship Relationships: The gamut of inter-personal kinship relationships among different matrilineals is distinctly different from patrilineals, and this distinction is critical to the underlying social order that, among other matters, fashioned the spatial structuring of their built form also. Although variances exist from one society to another, the general nature of some of the more important ones are discussed here.

Mother-child: The most important relationship in all matrilineal communities is the mother-child. The relationship forms the fundamental basis for the perpetuation of matrilineal systems. The mother-son relationship was characterized by affection and mutual respect, if the son were to be an adult. Similarly, the mother-daughter relationship was also characterized by mutual affection and sharing.

Father-child: The status and role of father in matrilineal communities has been widely debated. Schneider sees a direct competition between the father-child bond and authority of the matrilineal descent group. He identifies two types of father-child bonds: those of authority and those of positive affect. To him, these bonds were a source of potential strain with both the father's and the child's matrilineal descent group (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: pp. 20-24). Gough argues that, higher the agricultural productivity of a matrilineal society, the more tightly organized was the descent group and its organizational structure. This meant weaker paternal, marital and affinal ties. Conversely, in societies with lower productivity an individual's shared interests with his or her father, paternal kin, children, spouse and spouse's kin were more evenly balanced against those with the maternal kin (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961).

In societies such as the Navahos and the Tongas the father-child ties and the ties with paternal kin group were strong. Among the Ndembus, unlike many other matrilineal groups, the father's and the mother's brother's roles were somewhat equivalent, rather

than contrasted (Turner, 1957: pp. 244-247, 86). Among the Yaos, a man had rights to his children only as long as the marriage ties existed. Once divorced the man lost all legal rights and obligations over his children. Among the Trobriands, the father's interests and rights in his children were only through his wife. Similarly, among the Minangkabaus, Gough states that, the father and children appeared to have no mutual legal rights, and hardly any customarily recognized moral rights.

Brother-sister: The brother-sister ties were fundamental to most matrilineal societies. Schneider states that while a brother had interests in his sister's reproductive and sexual activities for the perpetuity of the clan or sub-clan, the sister herself was a tabooed sexual object for him (Schneider in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 13). In several communities the brother-sister relationship was stressed at the expense of the marital ties. For example, among the Yao, the older brother acted as the guardian of a woman and settled her marital disputes. He could command his sister to divorce her husband (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 581). According to Trobriand myths, a brother and a sister emerge from the nether world together to establish a sub-clan. The brother also planted a garden for his sister, which became the basis of his *urigubu* gifts to his sister. Strict rules of avoidance and mutual respect characterized their inter-personal interaction (Fathauer in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 249). Scholars have attributed this mutual respect and avoidance, seen also among the Nairs, the Minangkabaus and others, to an overt fear of incest among these communities (Schneider and Gough eds., 1961).

Husband-wife: The nature of marital relations varied considerably among the different matrilineals. If, among the Ndembu, wives outranked sisters in importance and husbands and wives were initiated into curative and fertility rites together (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 580), among the Upland Khasis the husband was merely a begetter. (Dasgupta, 1984: p. 81), or a borrowed man or rooster among the Minangkabau.

The nature of relationship strongly correlated to the pattern of post-marital residence, and the principles of inheritance. In duolocals such as the Ashantis or the Nairs, the relationship was limited. Among the avunculocal Trobriands, husband and wife cooperated as a gardening team and the husband had considerable authority over his wife. Nevertheless, the husband and wife retained strongest economic and emotional ties with their own descent groups (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 585). Divorces were easily obtained among the Minangkabaus, the central Kerala Nairs, the Ndembu. Marital and affinal ties contrasted with matrilineal ties; one gained at the expense of the other.

2.2 MATRILINY IN MALABAR

2.2.1 An Introduction to the Land of Malabar

In 1498 Vasco da Gama landed on the shores of a strange tropical land to where, legends say, he was beckoned by the swaying coconut palms. This land was Malabar and its denizens spoke the language Malayalam. Bounded by the indomitable Western Ghats on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west, this linear strip of land lies between $10^{\circ} 15' N$ and $12^{\circ} 18' N$ latitudes, and $75^{\circ} 14' E$ and $75^{\circ} 15' E$ longitudes.

The etymology of the name is as much a matter of conjecture as the early history of the land. Arab voyager Al Biruni (970-1039 AD) appears to have been the first to coin the word Malabar. However, much earlier, in circa 545 AD Egyptian merchant Cosmos Indicopleustes mentions a town called Male along the western coast of India, as a great emporium of pepper trade (Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 25). He was the first foreigner to use the name in a corrupted form.

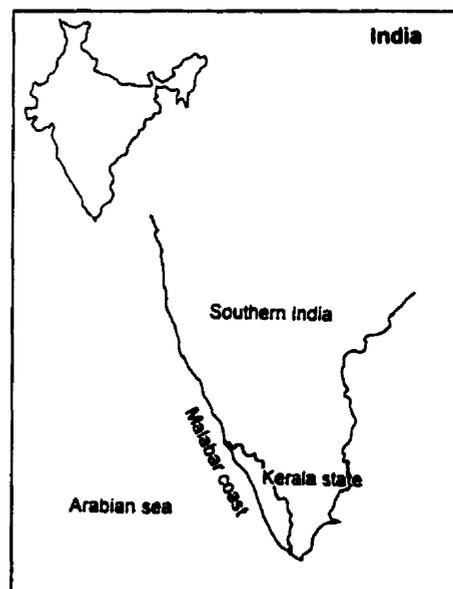


Fig. 2.1 Malabar coast and Kerala

The name probably arose from the two words *mala*, meaning mountain or hill and *bar*, a synonym for continent or country in Persian and Arabic. Thus Malabar was the country or continent of hills. Many variants to this name are found, the common ones being Melibar by Al Biruni, Manibar by Al Idrisi, Malibar by Al Kazwani, Ibn Batuta and Al Bakui, Melibara by Nicolo Conti, and so on (Logan 1981: p. 3; Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 4).

The climate of Malabar is intensely sub-tropical with two dominant seasons: the summer and the monsoon. Rains come in two stretches: as south-west monsoon from June to mid-September, called *edavapathi*, and north-east monsoon from mid-October to late-November, called *thulavarsham*.

Although a lot of the early history of Malabar is unclear, historians unanimously agree that, while Malabar was landwardly somewhat isolated from rest of the sub-continent by the mountains, it had excellent maritime contacts with several foreign lands and their peoples from early pre-Christian times. The original occupants of the land were the indigenous people of the hills, pre-Dravidian tribes such as, the Malapandarams, Kadars, Irulas, Pulayas, Uralis, Malavetans, Paniyans, Malarayans and Tandupulayans. Migration came, sometimes in trickles, sometimes in hordes, and brought the present natives of Malabar -- the Nairs, Ezhavas Nambudiris and others, among the Hindus, the Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, and so on. To each of these castes and religions is attributed a number of surmises and hypotheses on their presence in the region.

Adventurous seafarers -- the Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Phoenicians, Chinese, and the Arabs -- had frequented the coast of Malabar from very ancient times. The Jews had trade with Tarshish (Kerala) from as early as 1000 BC, during the reign of King Solomon. Many Jews made Kerala their homeland when Nebuchadnezzar invaded their lands in 6th century BC. Another early visitor was St. Thomas in AD 52, for gathering converts to the newly established religion of Christianity. The Syrian Church of Malabar consists of converts from that era.

This was followed by a period of intense trade with the Romans. When the Great Roman Empire declined in the 4th century, the Arabs became the mainstay in trading, followed by the Chinese. Subsequently, the land went through many vicissitudes; the glory of extensive trade and social and cultural exchanges, as well as the ignominy of foreign invaders and colonization. The landing of the Portuguese mariner Vasco da Gama at Kappad in Malabar, in 1498, heralded in history as the (re)discovery of India by the West, and the ensuing contacts and colonization by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and finally, the English, are comparatively recent history. Before the Indian independence in 1947, most of Malabar was directly administered by the British under the Madras Presidency. Today Malabar forms the northern extent of the southern Indian state of Kerala.

2.2.2 Matriliney in Ancient Kerala

The melange of castes and sub-castes that existed in Kerala in the 19th and early 20th century was phenomenal. Of the 3,000 castes and sub-castes enumerated by the Census of India in 1901, Kerala had a presence of 578. Jathinirmaya, an 18th century work on castes in Kerala had listed 72 castes. These early endeavors can at the best be termed as only serious attempts at classification and enumeration since, the complexities of the social order made it difficult to categorize what constituted a distinct caste or sub-caste.

Several of these castes subscribed to matrilineal consanguinity and descent. Fr. Puthenkalam lists 21 castes and sub-castes that were practicing matriliney. They were the Payyanur Nambudiris (Thirumupus), Malayala Kshatriyas, Samanthas, Ambalavasis, all Nairs except the Mannadiars of Palakkad, Saiva Vellalars, Arayas, Tiyyas of Northern Kerala, Ezhavas of Kaniyannur, Krishnavakkakars (Malayalam speaking), Channars of Mayyanad, Tandans, Mannans, Kusavans, Vaniyans of North Kerala, Chaliyans, Vannans of North Malabar, Moppilahs of North Malabar and Edava, a few Christians of Neyyatinkara, hill tribes such as, Uralas, Ulladars, Nayadis, Muthuvas, Vadakkan Parayas, Kana Pulayas and Tandu Pulayas (Puthenkalam, 1979). These communities demonstrated considerable differences between themselves in their customs and practices of matriliney.

The study pertains mostly to Nairs since, they formed the one of the most sizable and influential -- socially and economically -- communities of Malabar. Ethnographers and anthropologists have referred to the matriliney of Nairs as one of the most complete examples of a matrilineal system anywhere in the world (see Gough, Moore etc.).

2.2.3 The Origins of Matriliney in Malabar

In attempting to analyze the origins of matriliney along the Malabar coast, historians differ widely. There are few extant and tangible historic records to pinpoint the exact origins of the system. Accounts of early foreign travelers are the among the few factual references available.

Nicolo Conti (15th C.), Abdur Razzak, Duarte Barbosa, Hieronimo de Santo Stephano and Herman Lopez de Castenheda (16th C.) have made note of the Nair social complex. Sheik Zainu-ddin, an early indigenous historian of Kerala (16th C.) has written about the customs and practices, including polyandry, inheritance, and so forth, among “unbelievers”. The 17th, 18th and 19th century travelers also describe the matrilineal culture of the land. These include writings of Johnston, Baldoens, Gemelli, Charles Dellen, Nienhoff and Lavel Della Vella in the 17th century; J. Duncan, Henry Grose, Alexander Hamilton, Sonnerat and Jacobus Cantervisscher in the 18th century; and Francis Buchanan, Francis Day, Samuel Mateer etc., in the 19th century. The focus of most of these writings is the matrilineal customs and practices of the Nair community (Mary, 1993; Mateer, 1871; de Castenheda in Kerr, 1811; Johnston, 1611).

However, before these chroniclers, Friar Jordanus who lived in Quilon in the 14th century was the first visitor to refer to the “strange laws of inheritance” of the region. Since no foreign traveler who visited Kerala prior to this had remarked anything about the existence of such a system, some historians assumed a period around 12th-13th C. when they believed matriliney came to be established in the Malabar coast (Menon, K.P.P., 1924: p. 86; Mary, 1993: p. 36).

Another valuable source for the study of the medieval social system is early *manipravalam* literature dated between 12th and 16th century. Study of *vattezhuthu* and *manipravalam* literature have suggested that the social system during the Sangam era was based on *tinai* concept and the *gandharva* system of marriage, a form of voluntary union of men and women (Mary, 1993). Temple institutions appeared to have played a major role during this period in community formation and social stratification along caste lines. Religious and administrative matters were dominated by the Brahmins or Nambudiris (as they were known as in that part of the country).

However, soon the period of origin was soon pushed back to 11th century with the discovery of certain copper inscriptions from that period (the Tiruvalla Copper Plates). These inscriptions contained references about the system. Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, a savant on ancient and medieval Kerala history, holds that the caste system and *janmi* (feudal) system along with matriliney were products of economic stratification introduced by Nambudiris (Kunjan Pillai, 1970: p. 16). Many foreigner travelers record that before the advent of Nambudiri ascendancy and the subsequent *janmi* system and polyandry, the moral standards in Kerala were very high; till about 7th C. stratification along caste lines was unheard of, the only distinctions were on the basis of social groups or classes categorized by their profession. Nambudiri society, during *manipravalam* period, was at its moral worst. Several *manipravalam* works, from Vaisikatantram (13th C.) to Chandrotsavam (16th C.) reveal this aspect.

Kunjan Pillai concludes that in most parts of South India patriliney must have prevailed till about 11th century when the long war between Cheras and Cholas broke out. The war brought about fundamental structural changes in the society; Nairs, being a prominent martial community, went to the war in a big way. Meanwhile, the dominant, upper-class Nambudiris contracted alliances with the Nair women. (Kunjan Pillai, 1953; Balakrishnan, 1981: pp. 9, 10).

Further studies discounted this date also and put the period around 9th century since, the Sangam literature and Chera inscriptions carried clues to the existence of the system (Narayanan, quoted in Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 7). M.G.S. Narayanan, investigating

the Political and Social Conditions of Kerala Under the Kulasekhara Empire (C. 800-1124 AD), predicates that the Nair community was not a separate tribe, distinct from other indigenous ethnic groups, but was a section of the native Dravidian people transformed by their military profession and matrimonial alliances with Nambudiris and the consequent matrilineal practices (Narayanan, 1978).

A definite period is yet to be established. Yet, it is curious to note that some of the aborigines or indigenous people of the state like, certain tribals in parts of northern Kerala were said to have always followed this system. This has led some historians to suggest that matriliney was perhaps native to the soil.

A similar controversy surrounds the reasons for the development of matriliney. Many historians have attributed this to the martial way of life of the Nairs and the Brahmin domination of social life. As soldiers and warriors, Nair men were frequently away from their homes for months together. This inhibited the development of close ties between Nair men and women in their native villages and, at the same time gave sexual access to women throughout the land. Absence of men regularly and access to more than one man, it is said, prompted polyandry. As a consequence, society came to accept matriliney or descent through the mother (Puthenkalam, 1977; Balakrishnan, 1981; Fuller, 1976). J.P. Mencher and K.R. Unni hold that there is no way to determine either, for how long polyandry has been in existence in the Malabar coast or, whether it took different forms in different parts of the state (Mencher and Unni quoted in Mary, 1993: p. 22).

However, Kathleen Gough correctly insists that no causal connection in either direction, between the military organization and marriage structure can be presumed, i.e., it would be fallacious to be deterministic about military organization being the cause of the system or vice versa (Gough quoted in Fuller, 1976: p. 124).

T.K. Gopala Panikkar's narrative of Malabar, Malabar and its Folk, written in 1900, advances two possible theories that could be ascribed for the development of matriliney in the region, especially among the Nairs. The first of these, he calls, the "Brahminic Theory"; the Brahmins or Nambudiris (as they are known in the region) whose exact period of arrival is yet to be ascertained, brought with them their own

civilization and social laws. As 'men closest to the Gods' Nambudiris were 'Gods on Earth'. On their part, Nambudiris promulgated religious and social edicts, as oracles of Gods, to suit their purposes. To maintain racial purity, as well as retain family wealth only the eldest male in a Nambudiri family was allowed to marry from his own caste, others had to content themselves with loose liaisons with the women of other communities, especially Nairs who were next in the caste hierarchy. Because of this and due to their social ascendancy, Nairs and other lower castes submitted themselves to such illegitimate unions with Nambudiri men. The loose nature of these ties it is assumed, contributed to matriliney (Panikkar, 1983: pp. 34-37).

The second theory, Panikkar goes on to add, although less commonly accepted, was called the "Property Theory" and, "according to this theory, the system was instituted among the Nairs in order to secure the property of Nair families intact. A system of valid marriages and male-kinship would have meant partition and consequent dissipation of property in these families; and having these in view, the founders of the system declared property impartible which would have been impossible had the system of kinship been reckoned exclusively in the male line" (Panikkar, 1983: p. 38).

Although Gopala Panikkar's book can by no means be termed an authentic historic chronicle, the Brahminic theory finds support among several historians. The age of *manipravalam* literature, as mentioned earlier, was an extremely morally degenerated period in the history of Kerala. This post-Chera period, Kunjan Pillai calls, the orgiastic period of the Nambudiri elite (Kunjan Pillai, 1970, p. 85). Alliances between Nair women and Nambudiri men gave the Nairs a certain respectability and independence. For them this was an opportunity to enter the seemingly enchanting world of Aryan society by the backdoor (Dept. of Public Relations, 1980). The five centuries after Chera decline saw the ascendancy of Nambudiri aristocracy and the emergence of polyandry among Nairs.

However, these conjectures have been severely questioned. E.M.S. Nambudiripad, a communist ideologue and a respected historian, questions these by pointing out that there were many other parts of India where Brahmin overlordism, as well as martial communities existed, but never developed matriliney (Nambudiripad quoted in

Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 110, 111). Attempts have also been made by certain historians, Baron Omar Rolf Ehrenfels for example, to link the matriline in Kerala with that existed in Indus Valley (Ehrenfels, 1941). Scholastic efforts are on the whole still inconclusive on the exact period and cause of origin of matriline among the Nairs, and in the region as a whole.

Nairs were not the only prominent matrilineal and polyandrous community in Kerala during this period. The Tiyyas and Mappilas of northern Malabar were among the other more prominent communities to follow matriline, although there is much lesser written on them. Their matrilineal origins are briefly examined here.

Tiyyas, like Nairs, observed both, polyandry and matriline. Unlike Nairs, however, Tiyya polyandry was mostly fraternal; this sometimes included the *Pandava* type of marriages where one woman was married to several brothers (the term comes from the epic Hindu Mahabharata, where five Pandava brothers were married to one woman). Besides there were also illegitimate liaisons with Europeans. The Malabar Marriage Commission Report of 1894 documents thus, "In early days of the British rule Tiyya women incurred no disgrace by consorting with Europeans" (Malabar Marriage Commission Report quoted in Mary, 1993). As a result the inheritance was through the mother. It was also likely that the polyandrous and matrilineal customs and practices of the upper-caste Nairs were, to a good measure, adopted by the Tiyyas.

Although Muslim personal laws of inheritance subscribed to patriline, lineage and inheritance among Mappilas were traced through the mother's side. Barbosa Duarte records, "These follow the Heathen (non-Muslim) customs in many ways, their sons inherit half the property and their nephews take the other half" (Barbosa in M.L Dames, ed., 1967, p. 74). Another chronicler, Sheik Zainud-Din notes: "this custom of excluding immediate offspring to inheritance has been adopted by most of the Muslims of Kannur and its neighborhood. They copied it from the people of Hindu even though there are among the Muslims some who study the Koran" (S.M.H. Nainar quoted in Mary, 1993: p. 54). But, unlike Nairs or Tiyyas, polyandry was not current among the Mappilas.

How did Mappilas, a Muslim group, come to accept matriliney in contradiction of Islamic Laws? Mappilas were probably a Sunni Muslim group that originated from Arab traders and indigenous converts like the Mukkuvars (fisherfolk). Logan translates mappila as '*ma pilla*' (mother's child) or '*maha pilla*' (son or daughter of great men/foreigners) (Logan, 1986). The system of temporary marriage between the indigenous converts and Arab traders, called *muta*, consummated with the mutual consent of the parties concerned, and without the intervention of the woman's kin, may have also been critical in the development of matriliney among these Muslims. *Muta* was more in the form of a contract for a stipulated period, during which the woman could not divorce her husband; her freedom was also curtailed to an extent during this period. However, after the period of marriage or contract the children belonged to the kin of her family (Kapadia, 1977: p. 198). The reasons for matriliney are then not difficult to discern; the 'mother-rights' were naturally the acceptable mode of inheritance.

2.2.4 The *Tarawad*

A *tarawad* in a *marumakkathayam* family consisted of all the descendants in the female line of a single, common female ancestress. Here, *marumakkathayam* was commonly understood as descent through sister's children. *Tarawad* embodied all that family and marriage stood for among Nairs. It was a body of customs and usages. *Tarawad* derives its name from the words *tara* and *pad*. *Tara* was a quasi-political Nair organization. The Nair inhabitants of a *tara* formed a quasi-government or corporate body under the rule of the matrilineal chief, called the *karanavan*. M.S.A. Rao analyzing the Social Change in Malabar, writes of *tara* or *kara* as a local community associated with Nairs (Rao, 1957: p. 25). *Pad* signified an area or a certain location, as in *kidapadam* (house site) or *vilipad* (reach of the call). For reasons of euphony *pad* became *wad* (Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 132).

Tarawad signified both family and family seat. It was the largest matrilineal unit to which a Nair commoner belonged. According to J.D. Mayne, the *tarawad* and the domestic system of Nairs presented the most perfect form of joint family then existed (Mayne, 1953: p. 310). The exact connotations of the word itself has been a matter of

different interpretations. While Dr. Aiyappan translated it as clan (Dr. Aiyappan quoted in Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 132), Dr. Rivers called it a joint family (Rivers, 1914). Kathleen Gough, who has done some pioneering research on matriliney in Kerala, defines it as a genealogical matrilineage, whose solidarity was based on feelings of descendedness from a common ancestress (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 323) and whose developmental cycle follows a genealogical logic (ibid.: p. 343). She sees a typical *tarawad* as a "matrilineal household several generations deep, taking origin from a root mother, whether remaining undivided or divided into one or several property groups" (ibid.: p. 322). The fundamentals of these definitions are grounded in the tenets of 'descent theory', where the accent is on genealogical descendedness.

The Malabar Marriage Act defined *tarawad* as a joint family with community of property, and governed by the Marumakkathayam Law of Inheritance (Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 44). C.J. Fuller in Nayars Today interprets the word *tarawad*, when used without qualification (acknowledging that the qualified meaning is the one used by the anthropologists normally: matrilineal descent group), as that segment of a descent group which constituted the matrilineal joint family, and whose members owned property collectively and lived together in one house. It is important to note that this house was also referred to as the *tarawad* (Fuller, 1976: pp. 52, 53).

Further research is on, examining the institution of *tarawad* and offering new interpretations. Melinda Moore, while accepting that the issue of matrilineal sentiments is important, questions the accent on genealogical descendedness and solidarity derived from lineage to a common ancestress. The definition of *tarawad* as a "corporate property group" imposed by British Law and Western ideology, is also not wholly accurate, according to her. This definition denies the ritual component, central to the sustenance of the *tarawad* set up and the life cycle of its members (Moore, 1985: p. 524, 525).

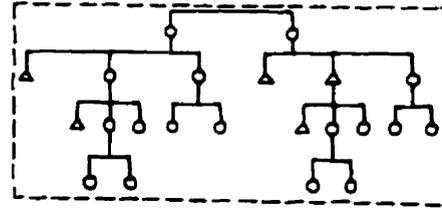
The Malayalam words *marumakkathayam* and *tarawad* are consistently translated as 'matrilineality' and 'matrilineage' respectively; the question whether they correspond exactly to these terms as used in the descent theory had never been raised. Moore goes on to probe into the etymological roots of the word *marumakkathayam*. Etymologically,

marumakkathayam is divided into 'marumakan' (sister's son) and 'dayam' (gift) or 'ayam' (property). These words are oriented towards inheritance rather than biological relatedness and also take males as their reference point. Thus, according to Moore, *tarawad* was far from a unit which derived its solidarity through remembrance of a common ancestress or stress on relatedness through women. This is supported by the fact that histories of *tarawads* were invariably histories of estates rather than lineages, and only those ancestors were remembered whose actions have in some manner brought about significant change to a *tarawad's* name or fortunes. The rites of ancestor worship, she remarks, further reinforces this. The funeral rites (*pindam*) and death anniversary observances (*sraddham*) were given to both, matrilineal and patrilineal ancestors, implying that identification with a kin-group was not isolated to the mother's side alone (ibid.: pp. 527-29). The remoteness to the common ancestress is remarked by M.S.A. Rao also. Commenting on the family life in Malabar, he notes that, rarely could the common ancestress be traced by going back several generations (Rao, 1957: p. 74).

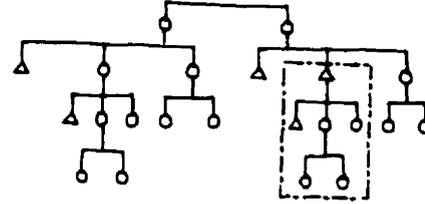
These observations lead Moore to re-define *tarawad* as a "holistic, ritually-significant property unit, the relationship to which its members have acquired through the rules of *marumakkathayam* or *makkathayam*" (Moore, 1985: p. 527). It was holistic in the sense that, an event that occurred to any of its parts (say, a birth or death) affected the whole, and in the sense that it had definite boundaries outside of which such effects did not apply. It was ritually significant because it required certain rituals for its continuation and the well being of its members (ibid.: p. 531). Equally important was the property unit -- consisting of a house and its land in and around which were kept essential beings and objects -- that *tarawad* was used more often to refer to a place than a group of people (ibid.: p. 527). The organization of a *tarawad* is explained by the Fig. 2.2.

Some of these observations and inferences are of doubtful authenticity from my own field observations, as well as first-hand familiarity with the system. While subscribing to ancestor worship along patrilineal as well as matrilineal lines, it must be noted that ritual pollution (*pula*) involving the larger family or extended clan was observed only on the matrilineal side. Also, it seems distorted to state that histories of

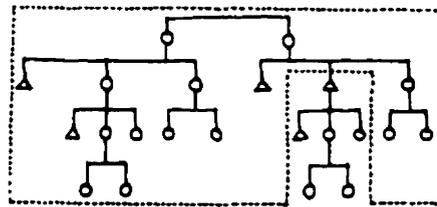
Clan refers to all members who claim decent to a common ancestress. They also form the property group if they own property collectively.



The term sub-clan refers to that segment of a clan which has moved out of the ancestral house or has adopted another name. Consequently, they do not have membership in the *tarawad*.



The *tarawad* comprises of all members of the clan who reside in the *tarawad* house and collectively own property. This is loosely equivalent of a joint family.



- Clan ---
- Sub-clan - - - -
- Tarawad* - - - - -

Fig. 2.2 Organization of kinship among Nairs
(From Shetty in Al Sayyad and Bourdier, 1989)

tarawads are invariably histories of estates; *tarawad* histories often have rich references to their origins and past traditions.

While *tarawad* was the largest matrilineal unit there was a smaller unit within it. This was called the *tavazhi*. A *tavazhi* was a segment of the *tarawad* and could only be defined relative to the *tarawad*. It refers to a segment of the joint family headed by one of the elder women, and including herself, her children, her daughter's children and so on (Fuller, 1976: p. 52, 53). While, after the turn of a few generations the kin-network of a *tarawad* became labyrinthine and indistinct, the members of a *tavazhi* related to each other well since they were bound by a more immediate relationship. In such cases, the *tavazhi* was the functioning family unit, having bonds of ritual pollution and clan exogamy with the other *tavazhis* of the same *tarawad* (Rao, 1957: p. 24).

There were three important structural principles involved in the *tarawad* lineage system. They were matrilineal descent, clan exogamy and impartibility.

Matriliny: The lineage of a member of a *tarawad* was traced through his/her female ancestors. The issues of the male members of a *tarawad* did not belong to that *tarawad*. Thus, in its simplest form, the *tarawad* consisted of a mother and her children living at her maternal house with her brother or maternal uncle as the *karanavan* or head of the family. More complex *tarawads* consisted of a mother, her sons and daughters, the children of the daughters and their descendants, to any number of generations, in the female line. Earlier in this century, instances of *tarawads* with as many as two hundred members were not rare. The control or management of this institution rested on the senior most male member of the family, called *karanavan*.

In principle, no affines lived in the *tarawad* house, except the wife of the *karanavan*. The husbands of the women of a *tarawad* stayed at their own *tarawad* and visited their wives at night. This earned them the sobriquet "visiting husband". Nevertheless, variations to this pattern were not uncommon, especially in northern Malabar where the residence was patrilocal. However, in such cases the wife had to leave her husband's *tarawad* as soon as her husband died, never to return (Rao, 1957: p. 103; Moore, 1988: p. 267).

The Role of *Karanavan*: As mentioned earlier, the senior-most male member of a *tarawad* was entrusted with the responsibility of the management of the *tarawad* and his honorific title was *karanavan*, meaning literally, man with responsibility (Fuller, 1976: p. 58). In theory, the property of a *tarawad* was vested with its female members but, in practice, its authority and management rested with the *karanavan*. He was the only member allowed to have his family - wife and children - with him, at his *tarawad*.



Fig. 2.3 A Nair *karanavan*
(From Fuller, 1976)

Since the *tarawad* was home to large numbers of matrilineally related units, its smooth operation was dependent on a strict hierarchy and careful management of the resources. To ensure this the *tarawad* was constituted on the basis of strict discipline and obedience. As the man overseeing the functioning of the *tarawad*, it was vested in the *karanavan* extensive powers. He was the representative and mouthpiece of the *tarawad* in all its collective social and economic operations. He maintained the finances and was not accountable to anybody on a day-to-day basis. His signature alone could be taken for any exigencies of the family. All the members of the *tarawad*, including women, children and other men had to pay compliance to his dictates.

Although such was the case, the role of the *karanavan* was strictly that of an agent or representative. Management of the property was vested in him for common good. Beyond this he enjoyed no individual rights or privileges over the property. The duties of the *karanavan* were of temporal and spiritual nature. In the former role, he was the manager of the family properties, the guardian of women and children, and the representative of the *tarawad* in all its transactions. In the latter capacity, he performed or oversaw all the religious and ritualistic duties that were incumbent on the *tarawad*.

When there arose occasions where there was no male member in a senior role to shoulder the responsibilities of the *karanavan*, the senior most female member of the *tarawad*, called the *taravatilamma*, assumed the role of the manager and was called *karanavathi*. In such an instance there was no reason to believe that her powers were any lesser than that of a male *karanavan* (Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 40, 41).

Clan Exogamy: The rule of clan exogamy was inviolable. Marriage between two members of a *tarawad*, however distantly related, was inadmissible on the same grounds. Gopala Pannikar attributes this to a feeling of the physiological evils of in-breeding that the Nairs perhaps had (Pannikar, 1983: p. 31). This inviolable precept was mirrored in the strict codes of interaction and avoidance between the male and female members. Rao notes that, "adult members of the opposite sex when they were of about the same age, might not talk to one another face to face" (Rao, 1957: p. 79). The complex and tenuous nature of kin-relations necessitated this. As we have seen, after a few generations the

relationship between the various kin members of a *tarawad* became nebulous. Consequently, there was a tacit fear of incest. Gough goes to the extreme of declaring that Nair suffered from an exaggerated fear of incest because, with the minimization of the father exogamy itself was on the verge of collapse (Gough, 1952b; 1955).

However, cross-cousin marriages were accepted and often considered ideal since, the affine did not belong the ego's *tarawad* by the principle of matrilineal lineage. This meant that a man could marry his maternal uncle's daughter or his paternal aunt's daughter, though the former was more favored. The inherent advantage of this was twofold: one, possible conflict between the uncles and nephews were avoided and, two, the resources of the *tarawad* remained within the confines of an immediate kin network.

The concept of clan exogamy was just a minor corollary of a wider concept of kinship. The kin-members of a *tarawad* observed *pula* or ritual pollution on occasions of births, deaths and certain other ritualistic observances in the family; this relation between those members bound by the community of pollution was known as *pula sambandham*. Observance of *pula* cut off *tarawad* members from participation in the social and religious functions of the caste. Gopala Pannikar, describing the various rites of pollution, observes that the rites of *pula* were stricter for death than birth (Pannikar, 1983: p. 28).

Impartibility of the Tarawad: The traditional Nair *tarawad* was very similar to a corporate body. The *tarawad* as a corporation was impartible. This was one of the basic structural principles binding the various *tavazhis* or segments to each other, and this relation thus binding members of a *tarawad* together was called *mudal sambandham*. By this no member, including the *karanavan*, had a right to claim his or her personal share by partition, while all members were entitled to decent maintenance by the *karanavan*. This being so, if a member decided to leave the *tarawad* house, he or she was no longer entitled to maintenance, unless *karanavan* otherwise thought so. This structural principle of the *tarawad* was also recognized the Marumakkathayam Law that governed the Nair *tarawads* (Balakrishnan, 1981; Moore, 1905). Nevertheless, a person was at liberty to transfer his or her self-acquired properties to any person of his or her will. However, such wealth reverted back to the *tarawad* in the event of his death intestate.

Melinda Moore ascribes this impartibility to the “holistic and ritually-significant” character of the unit. The “house-and-land unit”, as she calls it, had ramifications extending beyond a narrow economic sense of a corporate entity but, in a broad ritual sense, as something intricately connected with the life cycle of its occupants. All major events in a person’s life-cycle had to typically occur in and around the house itself, in the differentiated areas appropriate to them. That is to say, from conception and birth, to cremation and deification as an ancestor, a person had to stay in the house-and-land unit of which he or she was a member of (Moore, 1985). This naturally rendered it impartible. Besides, the extended nature of the *tarawad* organization and kin network would have certainly made any task of partition exceedingly complex, thus, prompting the adoption of impartibility as a basic tenet of the system.

Male



Female



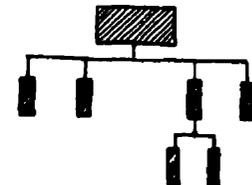
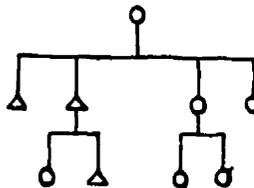
Deceased members



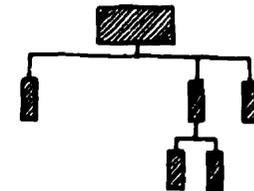
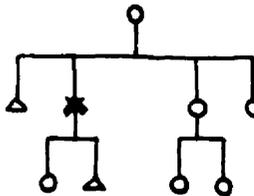
Property units



All sons and daughters receive an equal share of the property. Besides, children of daughters are also entitled to the same share of the property, while children of sons are not. Here, a woman with two sons and two daughters, with one son and one daughter having two children each, will have her property divided into six.



If one of the sons were to be dead, the property is divided into five parts.



If the daughter with two children were to be dead the property will still be divided into five equal parts, implying that the children of the dead daughter are entitled to their shares of the property.

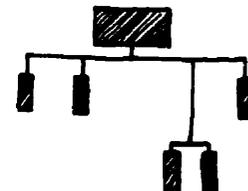
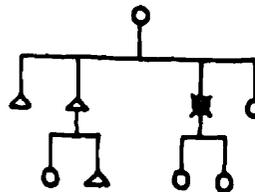


Fig. 2.4 System of property division within a tarawad
(From Shetty in Al Sayyad and Bourdier, 1989)

The insistence on impartibility and common residency naturally became unwieldy beyond a certain point of time due to the increased number of members and dwindling resources of the *tarawads*. Moreover, with each passing generation, the component of direct relationship was getting fainter and fainter. This was further exacerbated by increased litigations by members for partition of *tarawad* properties. Thus, there came a period when partitions became inevitable. Maine notes that the “female group system of property” has an inherent tendency to change into individual property (Maine quoted in Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 173).

When partitions were first effected, they were stirpital, that is to say, based on *tavazhis*, rather than individuals (Moore, L., 1905: p. 12; Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 174). Fuller identifies three periods during which the nature of the *tarawad* property underwent changes: the Old Order, till 1920s; the Interregnum, between 1920 and 1940, when the squabbles and litigations for partitions began taking place; and the New Order, since 1940, when nuclear families replaced the *tarawad* organization and the common holdings were partitioned among the newly established nuclear families (Fuller, 1976: pp. 56-72). Partitions and subsequent disintegration of the quintessential Nair *tarawad* have been a painful chapter in Kerala’s social milieu.

2.2.5 Marriage And Other Related Rites Among Nairs

Paradigmatic among other world societies for its extreme matrilineal character, few societies have succeeded in capturing anthropological imagination as much as the Nairs, for their marriage rituals. Moore cites three reasons for this. The first of these concerns the definition of marriage; there were two ceremonies, the *talikettu kalyanam* and *sambandham* rite, that could be called marriage. The second is polyandry, a subject of continued controversy and extensive research, yet never wholly resolved. And finally, the inter-*varna* hypergamy, i.e., marrying across caste lines, a custom rarely practiced by Hindus elsewhere in the sub-continent and therefore, of particular interest to South Asianists (Moore, 1988: p. 254, 255).

Dr. Balakrishnan observes that on the whole there was a preponderance of women-oriented celebrations in Malabar, especially among Nairs (Balakrishnan, 1981: p. 94). Pre-nuptial rites like, the *tirandukuli kalyanam*; mock marriage and marriage ceremonies, the *talikettu kalyanam* and the *sambandham* and; the pre-natal ritual, the *pulikudi*, were only a few of these. The most important of these were the pre-nuptial rites, the *talikettu kalyanam* and *tirandukuli* and the marriage ceremony, the *sambandham*.

Talikettu kalyanam: *Talikettu kalyanam* was a pre-puberty ritual for girls. Kathleen Gough writes about it, as a grand ceremony held in a *tarawad* every ten or twelve years, at which time all the pre-puberty girls of a lineage of one generation were ritually married by men of *inangar* group. *Inangars* were, “members of a community of *tarawads*, which may inter-dine or inter-marry and are bound to assist one another” (Rao, 1957) or, “a collectivity of men of appropriate caste” (Gough 1959b). Couples thus married were left in seclusion for three days. On the fourth day, the bridegroom departed with no further obligations to each other. While Gough suggests that sexual relations were possible if the girls were mature enough (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 328) certain native scholars like, Dr. Aiyappan vehemently disagree on this (Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 38).

The rites associated with *talikettu kalyanam* were numerous. Choosing the befitting *tali*-tier was an important prelude; one, he had to be of either, the *inangar* group or, a higher caste person, and two, his horoscope had to be agreeable with the girl's. The entire episode was invested with several rites spread over three days, from the first day when, accompanied by many rituals and symbols associated with a *mangalyam* (a state of auspiciousness), the girl was tied with a *tali* (a small gold plate), to the fourth day when the brief relationship was summarily and forever torn apart.

The ritual acts comprising the *talikettu kalyanam* centered around three main symbolic themes. The first of these was female fertility and *mangalyam* (state of auspicious marriedness); the second was the connection of the girl and her *tarawad* with the Goddess Bhagavati and; the third was the assertion of the prestige and place of her *tarawad* in the society, (Moore, 1988: p. 257, 258). The ritual significance of this

ceremony remains intriguing to anthropologists and historians. K.M. Pannikar and M.D. Raghavan, among others, declare that the rites accompanying *talikettu kalyanam* were indicative of it being the real marriage; however, others, notably A. Aiyappan, assert that it had nothing to do with the real marriage that took place much later (Rao, 1957: p. 96). Kathleen Gough interprets it as a rite that involved powerful and transformative ritual actions that established a tie between the bride and the bridegroom that was permanent in a ritual sense (Gough, 1955: p. 50). Melinda Moore relates it to her “house-and-land unit” rationale and goes on to add that it was primarily a means of transforming the state of a girl into a condition of auspiciousness, *mangalyam*, which enabled her to benefit the whole house (Moore, 1985: p. 535).

Besides these scholars, several others have deliberated over the meaning and symbol of *talikettu kalyanam*, among them Dumont, Yalman and Fuller, analyzing it using comparative South Asian ethnography and correlating it with other pan-Indian cultural paradigms (Dumont, 1953; Yalman, 1963; and Fuller, 1976).

Tirandukuli: *Tirandukuli* or *tirandu kalyanam*, meaning, puberty bath or puberty ceremony, was another pre-nuptial ceremony, whence a girl on attaining puberty had to go through a transformative and purifying rite. *Tiraluka* means to unfold, like a flower. Behind this ceremony lies the metaphoric equation of mature girls with flowers in full bloom; they fill their houses like a fragrant flower, attracting attention and seeking, in the process, suitable alliances (Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 54). The celebration and communication of a girl’s maturity were what the rite effected, to be let it known that the girl was mature.

During this period she was considered ritually polluted and kept in seclusion for three days. On the fourth day, amidst festivities, the girl was ceremoniously taken for a bath by her female relatives. After the bath she wore new clothes called *matu* (change) which were specially brought for the occasion by the *mannan* and *mannathi* (washer man and woman). This was followed by a feast for the relatives, other caste-fellows and village elders (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961; Puthenkalam, 1977; Balakrishnan, 1981).

Tirandukuli, like *talikettu kalyanam*, has a strong rite-of-passage quality, marking a permanent and irreversible transformation in the girl's status, but differs from *talikettu kalyanam* in the manner it emphasizes change. Moore describes the latter as symbolic of a woman's fertility and household prosperity, while the former was an expression of her sexuality and need for protection. "The protective aspect is most pronounced when the girl is menstruating: the girl is immediately secluded in the house and measures are taken to ward off dangers (such as, placing an iron rod or knife beside her)". The festivities that followed the bath and *mattu* on the fourth day are concerned with female sexuality (Moore, 1988: p. 263). Besides these, Moore further elaborates that the celebration of both, *talikettu kalyanam* and *tirandukuli* had a quality of femaleness per se, as well as solidarity of the female gender. Unlike, for example, a man's birthday feast, here the precedence extends to a whole gender, implying that these rituals were much more than one person's rites of passage. Interestingly enough there were no rites or celebrations that celebrated maleness per se (ibid.: p. 264)

Except for stray instances both *talikettu kalyanam* and *tirandukuli* ceased to be celebrated since late 19th century. That they were important rituals in their time becomes evident from the fact that sometimes families faced communal ostracization for not observing it.

Sambandham: The traditional Nair marriage was regarded as exotic by many anthropologists. Within the community there were considerable differences in the nature and structure of this rite, from North Malabar to South Travancore. *Sambandham* was the traditional, socially recognized alliance constituting matrimony among Nairs. It meant alliance or binding together. Though known by several other names such as, *uzham porukkal*, *vidaram kayaruka*, *kidakkara kalyanam*, *pudamuri*, and so on, in different parts of the region, the principle underlying it was the same, that is, alliance for consummation.

In marked contrast to the *talikettu kalyanam*, *sambandham* was preceded or succeeded by little ceremony or religious rites. Proposals came through friends or elders of the prospective partners. An alliance was cemented if the *karanavans* of the two *tarawads* consented and if there was an agreeability of horoscopes and caste status.

Thereupon the astrologers were asked to fix an auspicious date and time for the ceremony. On the day the bridegroom and a few elders and caste-fellows of his family went in a procession to the bride's house where they were received and treated to sumptuous meal. Thereafter, the marriage was solemnized at the auspicious hour, before two lit lamps, when the bridegroom presented the bride with a *pudava* (or cloth - see Fig. 2.5). After the ceremony the couple sought the blessings of the *karanavans* and gave money to the attending Brahmins, who also conferred their blessings on the couple.

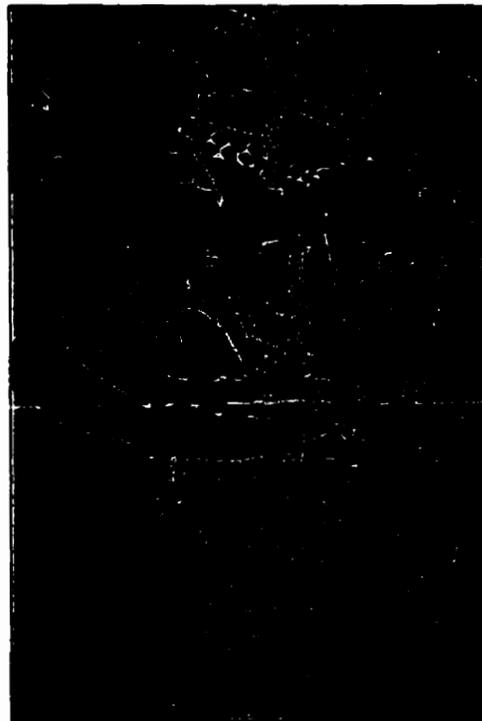


Fig. 2.5 A Nair sambandham (as depicted in an old Malayalam movie)

(From Fuller, 1976)

The husband spent the night at the wife's place and before leaving next morning he left some money under the pillow. Thus the marriage was formalized. Where patrilocality was in practice, as in parts of northern Malabar, some ladies from the groom's *tarawad* went over to the bride's *tarawad* on the day following the *pudamuri* or any other appointed day, to welcome the bride to her new home (Rao, 1957: p. 89).

There were a few restrictions on a woman's choice of her *sambandham* partner. First of all, was the rule of clan exogamy, barring a woman from marrying somebody from her own *tarawad* or matrilineal descent group. Nevertheless, cross-cousin marriages, as explained earlier, were permissible and often considered ideal. Neither was a man or woman allowed to contract *sambandham* with two women or men of the same household. The key to the union lay in the caste status of the woman and man, which in sum stated that a woman was allowed to marry somebody from her own caste or a superior caste. This aspect of marrying across caste lines was unique among Hindus, to the Nair marriage system. If this were to be violated excommunication of the family resulted. Besides these, in parts of northern Malabar there were territorial restrictions on the choice of a groom.

The *sambandham* partner usually visited the woman at night and returned to his *tarawad* next morning. He carried no economic rights or obligations towards his wife's *tarawad*. His only contributions were in the form of a few token gifts such as clothes, bathing-oil, or betel nut at each of the three principal Malayali festivals, *Onam*, *Vishu* and *Tiruvathira* (Fuller, 1976: p. 108). Both the parties could terminate the relationship at their free will.

Analyzed from a ritualistic point of view, unlike the two rites earlier described, *sambandham* necessarily implied sexual intercourse. Another factor that marked it from other rites was that, as Melinda Moore points out, certain ritual acts of the *sambandham* rite parallel in their concern with men, as did the other rites with women (Moore, 1988: p. 265). Thurston (1909: p. 330) and Puthenkalam (1977: p. 97, 98) point out the elaborate and ritually active role of the groom during *sambandham* was reminiscent of what a girl went through during her *tali* rite. "Only *sambandham* was treated as an expected rite in the life-cycle of men, as well as women: in other rites men were participants as representatives of their *tarawads*, paid officiants, and such" (Moore, 1988: p. 269). Finally, in the *sambandham* rite a relationship was established between the *tarawad* an outsider - a groom and his *tarawad*, that were not necessarily connected to it in any previously established manner. This was distinctly different from the *tali* rite where the relation was perpetuated with an *inangan tarawad*.

This aspect of *sambandham* was consequential in some other ways also. It meant that non-members had to cross boundaries and mix their substance with members, possibly creating a permanent connection that crossed house boundaries with the procreation of children (Moore, 1985: p. 535, 536). Since the groom was of equal or higher rank, in matrilineal *tarawads* he was received with treatment appropriate to a guest, without having to be concerned about aspects of pollution. However, in patrilineal *tarawads* this entailed a ritual purification of the bride on entering her new house. Although not as rich as the *tali* rite, *sambandham* was a constitutive part of the overall ritualistic and institutional framework on which the *tarawad* institution and its members rested.

The nature of *sambandham* relationship has been greatly debated among sociologists and anthropologists. The explicitly loose nature of the liaison implied both polyandry and polygyny, although the latter was rare (Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 86). This also suited the Nambudiris who entered into such loose liaisons with Nair and lower caste women. Several early visitors to Kerala have made references to this practice in their travelogues. Duarte Barbosa deprecated *sambandham* as mere concubinage. Mysore King Tippu Sultan's (1788) indictment of *sambandham* is well known:

"And since it is the practice with you for one woman to associate with ten men, and you leave your mothers and sisters unconstrained in their obscene practices and are thence born in adultery... I order you to forsake all these practices..." (quoted in Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 5).

Sixteenth century Portuguese traveler Fernando Lopez De Castenheda's account of the domestic life of Nairs mentions about their polyandrous customs (Kerr, 1811: p. 353). Some Nairs themselves have described *sambandhams* as 'loose liaisons' or 'loose consortiums' (Thampi in Census Report of Travancore quoted in Puthenkalam, 1977: p. 74). There is little doubt that *sambandham* with Nambudiris, as it existed till the 19th century, was certainly a form of concubinage.

However, if all this implied promiscuity Kathleen Gough emphatically disagrees with such an assumption, stating that with regard to the *sambandham* institution, sex-relations were certainly not promiscuous (Gough in Schneider and Gough eds., 1961: p. 362). Fawcett also questions this assumption by noting that the institution of marriage was very sacrosanct (Fawcett, 1985: p. 228, 237). Lewis Moore describes *sambandham* as more of a "quasi-marriage contract based on mutual consent and dissoluble at will" (Moore, L., 1905: p. 58).

Polyandrous customs began to die out among Nairs during the 19th century. Within the community, there was an uproar against polyandrous practices, as well as *sambandham* with Nambudiris. Chandu Menon, the author of the first novel in Malayalam and prominent spokesperson of the community, was one such. While testifying before the Malabar Marriage Commission in 1891, he insisted that polyandry was not found among Nairs at least in the 19th century and that if it had existed

previously, then it was a monstrous innovation due to the baneful Nambudiri influence (The Malabar Marriage Commission, 1891 quoted in Fuller, 1976: p. 109). Interestingly, his first novel, *Indulekha*, is the story of progressive, young Nair lady who rejects an alliance with a Nambudiri, to marry a man of her own choice (Menon, 1965). Another leading social historian of the late 19th C. and early 20th C., K.M. Pannikar, went to the extent of denying its existence during his period (Fuller, 1976; Rao, 1957).

Towards late 19th century, as a reaction to the community's uproar, there came a series of legislations that attempted to give *sambandham* a dab of legitimacy. The first Malabar Marriage Bill was proposed by Sir C. Shankaran Nair in 1893 and was passed in 1896. This act recommended the voluntary registration on the part of the *sambandhees* or the people who have undertaken *sambandham*, so that they were entitled to the legal benefits of a marriage such as, maintenance, inheritance, and so on. However, the community's participation was hesitant. The Act also did not bring under its purview Nair-Nambudiri *sambandhams* and this was a matter of great disappointment to the sponsors of the Bill. (Menon, K.P.P., 1926; Puthenkalam, 1977; Balakrishnan, 1981).

The first Nair Regulation Act of 1912 went further from the previous Bill to declare that any form of *sambandham* was a legal conjugal union and that polyandry was illegal. These were followed by further legislation like, the Cochin Regulation XIII of 1920, enshrining inheritance rights of children to their father's (Nair or Nambudiri) property and prohibiting polygamy also; the Nair Regulation (Travancore) of 1925 and; the Marumakkathayam Act of 1933. These legislation were also, in part, steps slowly leading to the dissolution of the *marumakkathayam* joint family in Kerala.

Whatever were its merits and demerits, structure of the institution of marriage up to the last century did give Nair women considerable latitude in deciding their partners. This was a major advancement in the conditions of women compared to their counterparts elsewhere in many parts of the world at that time.

2.2.6 Status of Nair Women in Malabar

Researchers on matriliney have invariably encountered questions on the status of women in such communities. Matrilineal communities *per se* pay greater attention to women, so runs the argument. Most researchers start on this premise and proceed with their interpretations along this line. Often comparative ethnographical analyzes with other societies -- patrilineal and patriarchal -- form the basis of such studies. This is true of literature on matriliney and Nair women also. Study of gender-related issues in such societies will have to necessarily examine several layers - daily cycle, larger temporal cycle, ritualistic, economic, political, and so forth, to arrive at meaningful conclusions. Thus examined, few earlier studies have attempted, let alone succeeded, in critically investigating the position of women in such societies.

Historical, as well as, relatively recent (19th and 20th C.) literature, mostly accounts of foreign travelers and early English and native scholars, who had an interest in studying the 'deviant', provide us with a cursory, nevertheless, overall picture on the status of Nair women. The comparatively advanced status of Nair women is something on which all early literature concurs. Logan's encyclopedic commentary on Malabar, The Malabar Manual, points out that, "women enjoyed large measure of liberty and mixed freely in public assemblies" (Logan, 1981: p. 163). The 1901 Census of Cochin records that,

"...the condition of women in this complicated system requires to be specially noticed. The two sexes are nearly on a par as to inheritance of property. Again, conjugal freedom also being all not on one side, the relation of sexes appear to be more rational than amongst most other communities, as man does not enjoy any exclusive privilege of asserting or abusing his natural superiority. Further the women are free to enjoy the pleasures of social life, as it seldom falls to her lot to be worried with the miseries of domestic seclusion." (quoted in Fuller, 1976: p. 6)

Fawcett, writing in 1901, regards the system highly since,

"Equality of sexes in all sexual matters, the man and the woman being on terms of equality, having equal freedom, is certainly an uncommon merit in the *Marumakkathayam* system. Either party may terminate the union -

even after one night of hymeneal bliss; and those who are unsuited to each other sexually, or in the way of temperament, in fact in any way, may put and end to their union and turn towards other partners." (Fawcett, 1985: p. 237).

J.H. Hutton too, while commenting on the caste system in India, takes note of this comparatively better position of the women in Malabar. He comments that "the family system of Nairs naturally tended to preserve much greater freedom for women than is common elsewhere in India, and female education has gone much further than in most other parts." (Hutton, 1969: p. 14). Duarte Barbosa, an early 16th century Portuguese traveler remarks that,

"The Nayar women of good birth are very independent, and dispose of themselves as they please with Bramenes and Nayres, but they do not sleep with men of caste lower than their own under pain of death. When they reach the age of twelve their mothers hold a great ceremony." (Barbosa, 1921: p. 40)

However, this relative sexual latitude was not always well appreciated. The remarks of some early European visitors were testimony to this. Thomas Herbert was scandalized by the polygamous conditions, "they commonly exchange their Wives one for another, nor seeme the Women angry at it; Polygamy is sufferable; but in this they differ from the libidinous Lawgivers; as men have many wives, so one woman many have many husbands." (Herbert quoted in Fuller, 1976: p. 4). Francis Day also proclaimed his views clearly enough, "Until a change in this system occurs India can hardly be said to be advancing in civilization" (Day quoted in Fuller, 1976: p. 4).

Although these early European itinerants comment on the loose nature of marital ties, Fawcett questions this, based on his own observations. On the permanency of marriage, he asserts that, "mere arbitrary divorce is very rare. Permanent attachment is the rule" (Fawcett, 1985: p. 237), and,

"But it must not be imagined that Goddess Lubricity reigns supreme in Malabar. It seems perhaps to have been indicated she does. Such is however not the case.... Nowhere else is the marriage more jealously guarded, and its breaches more savagely avenged." (ibid.: p. 228)

From a selection of the reading one gathers that women did enjoy certain latitude in sexual and social life. However, this was not to be mistaken for loose marital ties. The marriage was certainly sacrosanct, but provided the partners with adequate room for divorce or parting, should they find themselves unsuitable to each other.

On matters of property and inheritance, as noted earlier, by the principles of *marumakkathayam* the rights of the landed property were vested, in theory, with the women. Their daily management was however, entrusted with the *karanavan*. Moreover, neither men nor women had any right to alienate the common *tarawad* property without the unanimous consent of all the adult members of a *tarawad*. When partitions were first initiated they were along the lines of *tavazhis*, rather than individual women.

It becomes difficult at this stage, to be categorical about the exact nature of economic latitude Nair women enjoyed. Dr. K.K.N. Kurup, at the Department of History, Calicut University, dismisses the added importance attached to the principle of property rights being vested in women, as a product of Western romanticism. He sees this as an attempt to conjure up the idyllic, and, in the process distorting the fact that, in practice, the management of the *tarawad* and its resources lay with the *karanavan*. The importance ascribed to the position of the *karanavan* in the *tarawad* set up, perhaps indicates this. He was more than a day-to-day manager, instead, elevated to the status of a protector on whose benign reign rested the *tarawad* institution and the well being of its residents.

Ritual treatment of women has been greatly emphasized in previous interpretations. Firstly, there was a preponderance of women-oriented rite and rituals in the Nair scheme of life. The themes of female sexuality, fertility, purity, eroticism and beauty were recurrent in all the female-oriented rites and rituals. Their accent shifted from the complex of symbolism centered around of female fertility and association with household prosperity, in the *talikettu kalyanam*; to the concern for purity and protection, along with a sense of auspiciousness in the *tirandukuli* rite; and female sexuality in the *sambandham* rite. These associations were only natural in the matrilineal set up of a community, that was at the same time feudal, agrarian and martial, and whose institutions rested on perpetuating the ritualistic and the ceremonial, from time to time.

On the other hand, during *sambandham* the woman was always seen marrying somebody of a caste higher than hers, thus entailing a ritualistic purification. Examined from the man's side, his marriage did not require a ritualistic cleansing or elevation of status since he was marrying somebody lower in the hierarchy. This ran contrary to the notions of exalted female status in the matrilineal set up of the Nairs. Such a hierarchical precedence of men was more in concurrence with the general South Asian gender paradigms. However, this is not to ignore the fact that Nair women certainly enjoyed far greater social liberty and economic authority than women of other communities of their period.

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3. THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF SPACE

3.1 BACKGROUND

Disciplines of geography, sociology and architecture have increasingly begun to recognize landscapes and built environments as important vehicles through which cultures express traditional life styles and group values. In interpreting the cultural meaning behind spatial relationships, these disciplines draw extensively on anthropological and ethnographic information about spatial patterns.

Traditionally, geographers have been the most ardent advocates of integration of space into social theories. Sack remarks that it is irrational to separate social and spatial processes because to explain why something occurs is to explain where it does (Sack quoted in Spain, 1992: p. 5). Harvey proposed that space and social relations are so intricately linked that the two concepts should be considered complimentary, instead of mutually exclusive (Harvey quoted in Spain, 1992: p. 6). Part of the difficulty in establishing a common language, noted Daphne Spain, is the tendency to think in causal terms: do spatial arrangements cause certain social outcomes, or do social processes create spatial differentiation (Spain, 1992: p. 6).

Buildings are the most omnipresent artifacts of everyday life. They have a peculiar property that sets them apart from other artifacts. They are not merely objects, but transformations of space through objects. This ordering of space in buildings is really about the ordering of relations between people. Because this is so, Hillier and Hanson say, society enters into the very nature and form of buildings (Hillier and Hanson, 1984: p. 2).

In architecture, space is the main theoretical concern. But this problem of space is not confined to architecture alone. In anthropology, for example, it exists as an empirical problem. Long years of study of a very large number of societies has left the anthropologist with a substantial body of evidence about architectural forms and spatial patterns which ought to be of considerable relevance to the development of a theory of space and its social context. Louis Henry Morgan's pioneering study, Houses and House

Life of American Aborigines, is regarded as an anthropological classic. Walter Goldschmidt notes, "Morgan understood more than many others who followed him, that the study of housing should be sociological not technological" (Goldschmidt in Prussin, 1969: p. vii).

But the matter is far from over. The anthropology of architecture still remains very much primitive. This is what led Claude Levi-Strauss to comment that there have been practically no attempts to correlate the spatial configurations with the formal properties of the other aspects of social life. Taking cues from Durkheim and Mauss, he saw in space an opportunity to study the social and mental processes through objective and crystallized external projections. Thus, in his description of the Bororo of the Amazon, Levi-Strauss gave attention to the village plan (Levi-Strauss, 1964). Later, Fred Eggan showed how architecture reflected the social system of the western Pueblos; Marcel Griaule and Germaine Deiterlen explained how it expressed the cosmogenic view of the Dogon. Thus, there exists now small, but growing literature on space.

Individuals, as active users and explorers of space, perceive it through their senses and give it meaning. In addition, people's membership in various small groups, families, institutions, subcultures and cultures affect their roles. The relative importance of and ways of coping with communication, social networks, kinship systems, values and many other group characteristics of humans greatly affect decisions about the form of the environment and might, in turn, be affected by the built environment. This is especially true of traditional communities. As Lawrence notes, traditional architecture has a pragmatic meaning and therefore encodes cultural and social rules and conventions (Lawrence in Low and Chambers eds., 1989: p. 89, 90).

Some cues for a more diversified and holistic re-interpretation of dwelling environments have been published by scholars in different disciplines. For example, some social anthropologists, like Hugh C. Jones (1979), present vivid ethnographies which show that, although the spatial characteristics of domestic architecture in non-industrialized societies can be described according to the orientation, relative position and demarcation of spaces and objects in dwellings, such a description cannot account for the

social meaning of household space unless other diverse practices associated with the production and consumption of food, kinship and other social rules are understood. Social historians analyze how changes in morphology, furnishings and use of dwellings cannot be dissociated from variations in the social meaning of domestic space and household life which engender changes in the residents relation to their home. Sociologists (for example Bourdieu, 1977) discuss how the personalization of dwelling unit varies with respect to economic, social, gender, cultural and political factors that impinge upon the lifestyle of residents. In sum, these confirm that the morphology and meaning of dwellings are intimately connected to a range of cultural, social, demographic and other dimensions.

The household is the primary arena for age and sex roles, for forging kin solidarity, for socialization and economic cooperation. It is therefore, apparent that, beyond possibilities offered by the design and furnishing of rooms for the spatial and temporal ordering of domestic activities, the way different households organize household chores, both routine and ceremonial, is related to gender, age, socio-economic status and kinship structure of the inhabitants and their interpretation of roles, routines and rituals. The household's choice in turn, is circumscribed by the larger external socio-economic order. This is then manifested in the overall settlement morphology.

Of all the variables earlier noted, the two most crucial to the dynamics of intra-household and intra-settlement order (spatial as well as temporal) are gender and kinship. While the first one forms the fundamental physical distinction within the household, the second serves to be the basic organizational structure. We shall now examine a variety of examples of dwellings and settlements, from a medley of contexts, where these two issues have been critical in spatial orchestration - sometimes physically, sometimes symbolically, sometimes ephemerally, sometimes intrinsically. These examples range from pre-industrial tribal communities, to early industrial societies, communities from the far west, to the far east, communities motivated by strong religious ideologies as well as communities activated by economic solidarities.

3.2 GENDER AND SPACE

3.2.1 The Gabras of West Africa

The Gabras of West Africa are one of the many nomadic and semi-nomadic transhumants dotting the vast African landscape. Gabra houses are called *man dasse*. They are domical, temporary structures made of framed acacia branches and covered with camel or cow skins. Myth and reality reinforce each other in their dwelling pattern. The fences of the Gabra *kraal* define the male domain and are left behind with each move. However, the *man dasse* and all its furnishings - the female domain - is always transported to a new site.

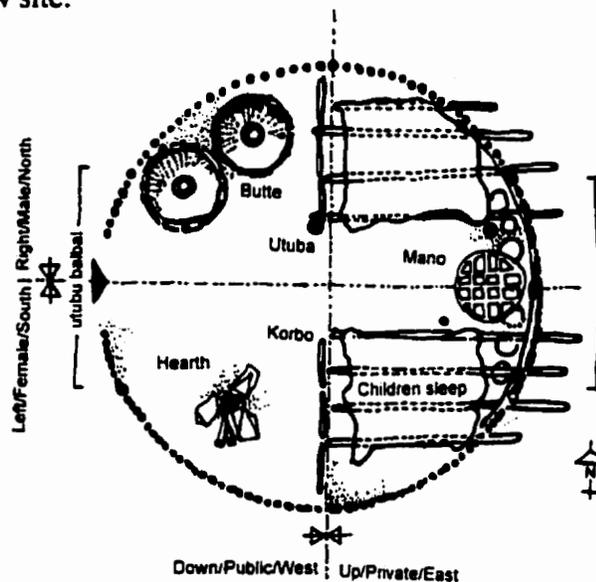


Fig. 3.1 Typical Man Dasse

(From Prussin in Low and Chambers eds., 1985 : p. 63)

Within the dwelling is an undivided open space divided into four quadrants, symbolically. The northern side (also the right side, since Gabras always orient their house towards west) is the male quadrant and the southern side the female quadrant, the eastern side is the private domain and the western side, the public domain (Prussin in Low and Chambers eds., 1985: p. 151). This order recalls a suggestion by Leach (1976: p. 54) that, the more featureless the context of territorial space is, the more tightly prescribed the model of behavior categories.

Like in many nomadic cultures, women are traditionally associated with erecting, maintaining and striking the domicile. She also spends most of her working time of the day near to the house, unless she is moving with the community as a whole. All her activities are carried out exclusively in the company of other women, in and around her *man dassé*. It is therefore, no wonder to think that a woman's whole personality is involved in the creation of the dwelling. Prussin notes that the Gabra *mana* is the ultimate expression of identity with the woman's body and her primary procreative role. This is exemplified by the Gabra proverb, " A man without a wife is a man without a house" (Prussin in Low and Chambers eds., 1985 : p. 152, 153).

Critical to this female role are the aspects of control and continuity, externalized by maintenance of the house by the woman. The *mana* provides the woman with maximum freedom to manipulate her own domestic environment. Prussin compares this freedom with the almost exclusive control by men of the external environment, cattle and their patterns of transhumance - the real property investment of the social unit and the balance within the gender realm (ibid., 1985: p. 153).

The maintenance has, in this case, a larger dimension than in many other transhuman communities. The transportation and reconstruction at each stage of transhuman migration involves the creative act anew. Each time a Gabra woman re-erects the poles and the bent frames of her *man dassé*, she renews through tactile stimuli, the social and biological events of her existence. The maintenance through repetitive behavior is also closely related to memory. When a Gabra woman arrives at a new site, she uses a reconstruction strategy in which her architectural and artifactual components serve as mnemonic devices to recreate the place she has just dismantled. These cognitive structures involved in maintenance and recurrent behaviors are further reinforced by associated ritual behaviors involved in birth, marriage and death - all staged within the small expanse of the *man dassé* (ibid., 1985: p. 155).

3.2.2 Dogons of Mali

Yet another example of pre-industrial society where a gender scheme is writ large in the conceptual layout of the idealized village is that of the Dogons, of Mali. The ideal settlement lies north-south, like a man on his back. The smithy and the council-house (*toguna*) are the man's head - where decisions are taken. The hands are symbolized by menstrual lodges on the east and west, which are round like wombs. The patriarchal *ginna* houses are the chest and belly; the oil crushing stones and foundation altar represent the male and female sexual parts respectively. At the south of the village are the communal altars, the reclining man's feet.

The belief also extends to their tiny, quadrangular adobe houses. The internal square is the main room. On each side of this room are adjoining rectangular store rooms. The north facing vestibule represents the male, with the outer door being his sexual organ. The female genitals are symbolized by the door between the entrance and the central room, the woman's domain. The ground floor of the house is regarded as a woman lying on her back, ready for sexual intercourse. The man is thought of as the ceiling, his skeleton the beams, and the four posts the couple's arms (Duly, 1979: pp. 38-41).

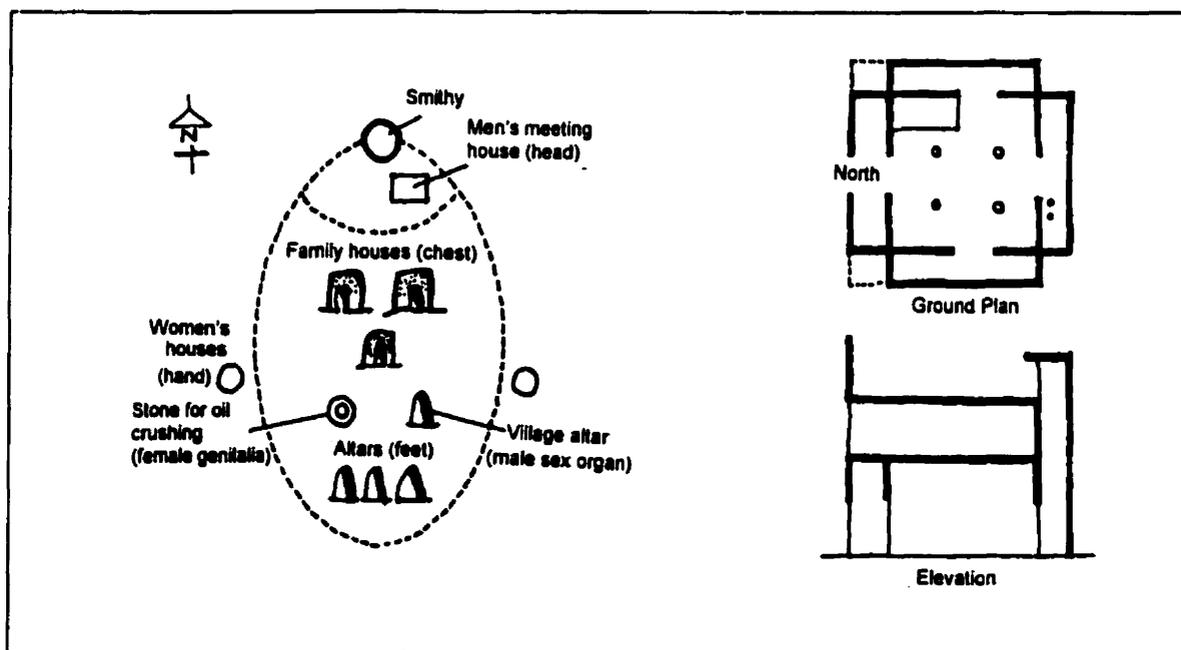


Fig. 3.2 Gender Association in the Layout of the Ideal Village and Dwelling Unit

(From Duly, 1979: p. 40)

In the two cases illustrated earlier, the gender-based spatial ordering is more symbolic by nature. However, in many societies there exists a physical segregation of dwelling space based on gender. Such gender stratification existed in both pre-industrial societies and industrial societies. A pre-industrial society where such physical distinction of the male and female domains exists is the Panare of Venezuela (ibid.: pp. 65-69).

3.2.3 Panare of Venezuela

Panare is characterized by scattered communities of extended families living in large communal houses called *malocas*. *Malocas* are either, large and conical, or rectangular in plan with a bay at each end, resembling on the whole, an upturned ship's hull. There is a strict division of labor - men and women have their particular crops, which they plant and harvest. This division finds physical expression in the gender-based separation of the *maloca*. The front door of the long-house is associated with men and their public life, and the rear door with women and their domestic chores. Around the sides, towards the female end are stalls for each nuclear family. The external precincts of the long house are also sexually segregated as male and female domains.

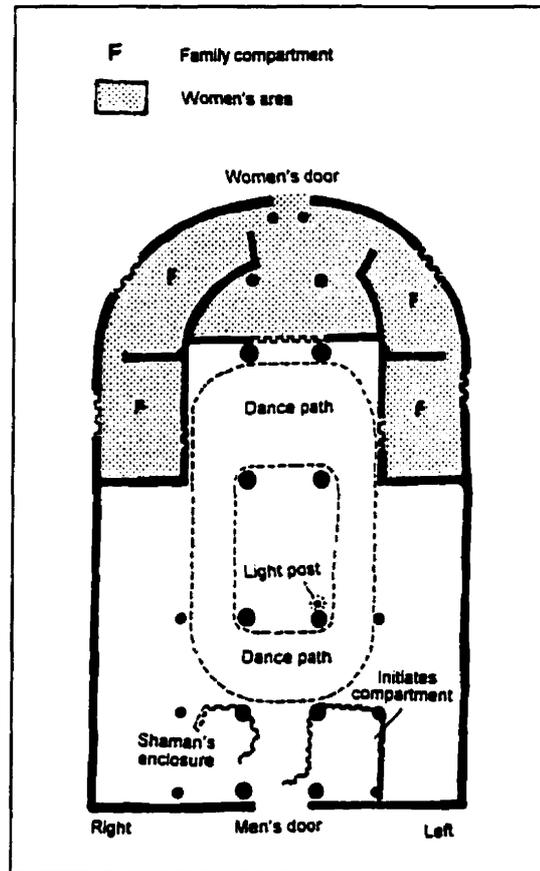


Fig. 3.3 Plan of a Typical *Maloca*
(From Hugh-Jones in Spain, 1992: p. 44)

In fact, Spain goes on to add that, women never occupy important positions that would give them access to either knowledge or power, such as dancers, chanters or shamans (Spain, 1992: p. 45). Sometimes this physical separation is carried further, to the extent of sleeping separately, as in the case of the Mundurucu of Brazil, with all men sleeping apart from their wives, in the men's house (Duly, 1979: p. 69).

3.2.4 Islamic Societies

It is not that such gender stratification only occurs in tribal or pre-industrial societies. Religion is sometimes a major influence in creating such divisions. Islamic societies follow religious strictures about the positions of men and women that fit with the Islamic view of world. The codes of *Purdah* and *Shari' ah* are to Muslims a strict moral way of life. Housing has been a very visible product of Islamic societal structure. The seclusion of women from certain categories of men is an important factor in the use of household space and layout of dwellings. Chowdhury notes that, as a rule, men and women have two separate and distinct domains (Chowdhury, 1992: p. 7). This is true of Islamic dwellings, from the minimal tents of the *Tauregs* or the *Bedouins* to the elaborate courtyard dwellings of *Baghdad* or *Bangladesh*. The strict code of public and private realms of the settlement and the individual dwelling enforce this. This has ramifications on the total social order, including the division of labor. *Torvald Faerge* writes about the spatial distinction:

"There is always a division between the men's and the women's sides of the tent. The lines between the sides may be quite strict as in Arab cultures where there is a dividing curtain and where no male but the husband ever enters the women's side..... This division of tent also constitutes a separation of work for which each sex is responsible, so the looms, churn and the utensils are kept and used on the women's side while the harness and weapons are kept on the men's side" (Faegre, 1979: p. 7).

Most often, the women have a larger space since they do more work than men in tents. Beliefs extend to orientations, too. For example, in the *Bedouin* tents men's side is towards the east. This distinction extends through all Muslim lands, from *Indonesia* in the far-east, to *Western Africa*.

In *South Asia*, the practice of seclusion and veiling of women is known as *purdah*. *Purdah* literally means a curtain. In broader terms it has connotations of beliefs and values about the behavior of women, restrictions on their movements and the requirements for their respectful and differential demeanor. Many parts of *Pakistan*, *India* and *Bangladesh* strictly subscribe to this. The typical Muslim courtyard dwelling of *South Asia* idealizes the system of *purdah*. The house presents a closed facade from the

street. Within, the rooms open to a courtyard. Chowdhury notes that this housing form is organized on the principle of gender segregation of space (Chowdhury, 1992: p. 24). About this practice David Mandelbaum writes:

"Within the household men and women often live for the greater part, in separate places. they sleep in separate rooms or on separate sides of the hut; relieve themselves in separate fields or locations; sit apart at all religious or social occasions." (Mandelbaum quoted in Chowdhury, 1992: p. 24)

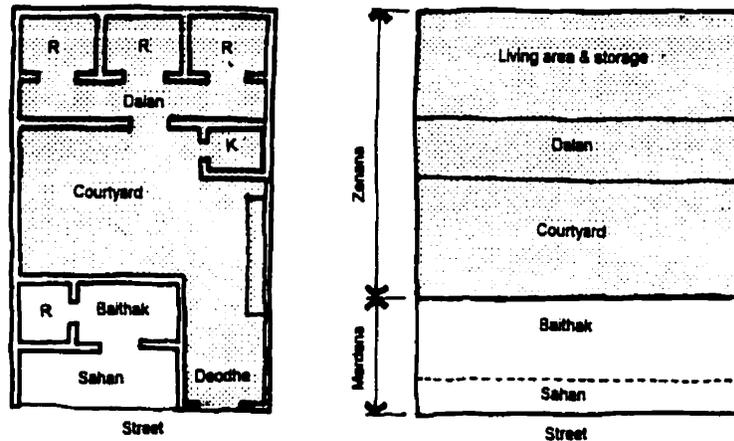


Fig. 3.4 Generic Plan of Typical Muslim Dwelling from S. Asia
(From Chowdhury, 1992: p. 25)

From Fig. 3.4 it is evident that the divisions are clearly demarcated, as are the activities that take place there. The zone adjoining to the street, called *mardana*, is the male domain, while the zone towards the rear, called *zenana* is the female domain. The *mardana* usually consists of *baithak* - a room where men relax, sleep or receive guests and *sahan*, a transitional open space between the house and the street. The *zenana*, towards the rear, has a number of rooms cloistered around an internal courtyard. Chowdhury also notes that, in some villages of Punjab and Baluchistan there are sometimes separate 'men's houses' where men spend their time (Chowdhury, 1992: p. 26).

The very morphology of the house appears to emphasize gender stratification. As *zenana* is associated with women, it is used for all domestic chores. Within this structured ordering, the courtyard becomes a setting for socializing by women. The flat terraces are also used by the women for domestic activities, and for visual and verbal contact with neighbors.

Settlement Pattern: Sinha notes that in rural areas of North India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, social relations of a village shape its housing pattern and settlement form (Sinha quoted in Chowdhury, 1992: p. 30). The neighborhoods are usually kinship clusters and display a close congruence between kinship ties and spatial distribution of houses. While kin ties structure the village, the distinction between public and private realms also becomes the indirect distinction between male and female domains. From her field research of a village in Bangladesh, Chowdhury concludes that the main roads and market places are out of bounds for women (Chowdhury, 1992: p. 30). In fact, the degree of publicness of a space becomes a scale for the degree of use or avoidance by the women. To overcome this, women develop their own private paths and networks that are removed from the public glare. However, in all these there is also an added temporal dimension to this spatial dynamics. User pattern is also dictated by the time of the day.

Many of the attributes subscribed to the Islamic house holds true for regions as geographically dispersed as Western Africa to Indonesia. Religious ideologies can be powerful vehicles in shaping space and can substantially influence the outcome from a gender point of view.

3.2.5 Blacksmiths of Zaghawa

In the preceding case studies, women take a back seat in the social and economic control of the house. This is reflected in the spatial organization also. However, this is not a universal phenomenon. Natalie Tobert cites an example to the contrary in the blacksmiths' community of the Zaghawa in western Sudan (Tobert in Al Sayyad et. al. eds., 1989). The accent is definitely on women here since the residence is mostly matrilocal and women possess the house; they increment it, modify it or even destroy it, to build a new one. The material status of the woman also changes with changes in her marital status. The bride-price is paid by the prospective husband in different stages. Corresponding to each stage of money paid, the woman is allowed to acquire more and more material goods. This includes modifying and incrementing her house also. Figure 3.5 depicts the various stages of incrementality of the house as a consequence of additional installments of bride price paid.

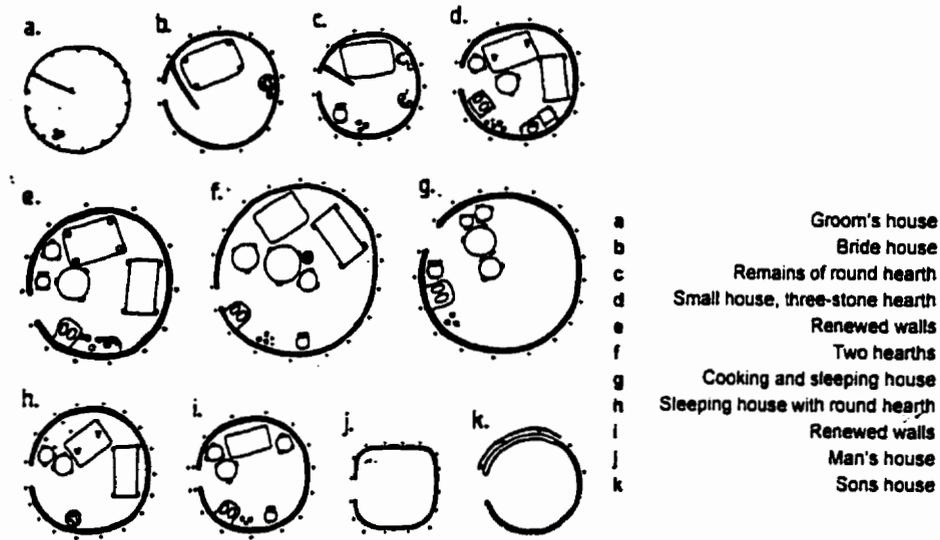


Fig. 3.5 Stages in Home Building - Blacksmiths of Zaghawa

(From Tobert in Al Sayyad and Bourdier, eds., 1989: p. 16)

3.2.6 Summary

The preceding examples illustrated communities where gender differences are implicitly or explicitly manifested in the spatial organization. These communities extend from the eastern end of the world to the western end, from tribal societies to early industrial societies, from religiously-motivated ones to economic solidarities.

This strong correlation can be even analytically established, as Daphne Spain does in her empirical analysis of gender-based spatial order of different communities (Spain, 1992). The inference she draws from her studies is that sexually-segregated dwellings are most strongly associated with women's power in kinship networks. Societies lacking segregated dwellings are those in which women have the greatest kinship power. She also draws a relation between segregated dwellings and the inheritance of property, inferring that, women in sexually-segregated dwellings stand a lesser chance of a fair inheritance. As a final measure of understanding this relation, Spain surprisingly finds a positive association between women's control of labor and sexually-segregated societies. That is, women's control of labor is greatest in societies with segregated dwellings. They may not remove women from knowledge of economic activities to the same extent as other types of segregation (*ibid.*: pp. 61-63).

3.3 KINSHIP AND SPACE

In many tribal societies kinship networks of the tribe are closely allied to the patterns of domestic space. Disposition of compounds in many cases, can almost be projected from a genealogical chart of the village inhabitants.

3.3.1 Tiv of Nigeria

An example to this effect is the Tiv of Nigeria, given by Colin Duly in The Houses of Mankind (1979: p. 22). The structural arrangement very much reflects the proximity of immediate kin. A typical homestead is shared by those belonging to the same lineage, tracing their roots to the same ancestors.

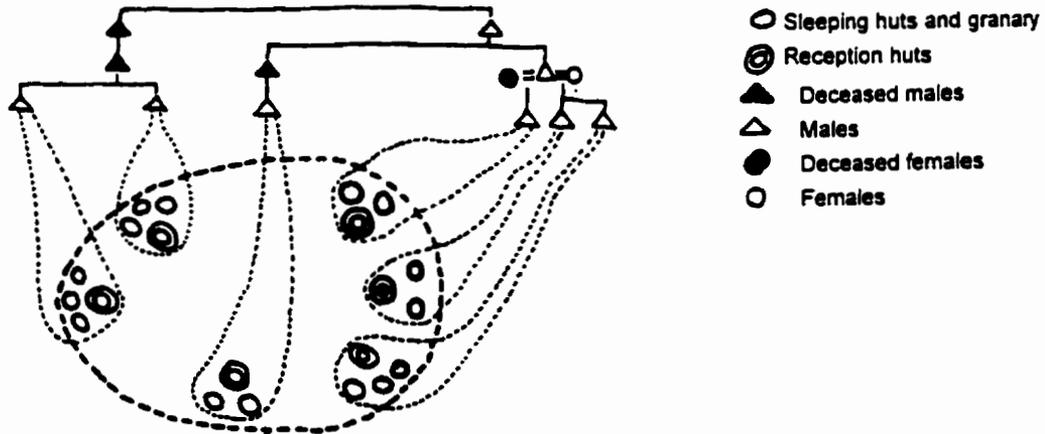


Fig. 3.6 Homestead of the Tiv of Nigeria

(From Duly, 1979: p.22)

3.3.2 Bororo of Brazil

Another example is the Bororo of Amazonia. Figure 3.7 shows how kinship linkages assume spatial dimensions in housing. The house is bound up with the kinship network, which, in turn orders the settlement layout. The structure is prescribed through this strict code of culture.

Labelle Prussin's study of the architecture of six communities of Northern Ghana is very revealing in terms of how kinship structures order a certain spatial disposition (Prussin, 1969). While most studies of the architecture of tribal and other less advanced

communities tend to base on a kind of environmental determinism, they often fail to take into account the intrinsic dynamics of social processes that have been very crucial in creating that morphology. Prussin's study is more holistic and comprehensive in this sense. Her training as both an architect and anthropologist seems to have helped her uncover some of the more subtle structural factors that might have otherwise been overlooked or disregarded.

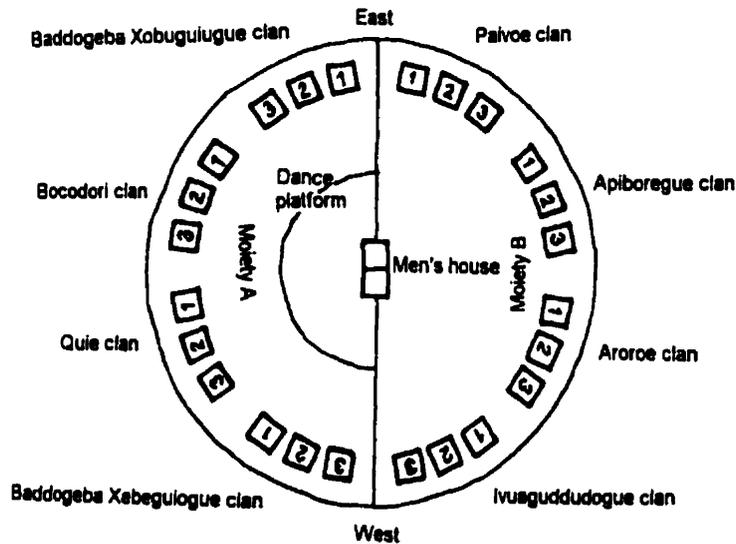


Fig. 3.7 Bororo Settlement from Amazonia

(From Duly, 1979: p.23).

3.3.3 Communities of Northern Ghana

The study area of Prussin, northern Ghana, is home to a residential mosaic of three large, geographically expansive tribes, and many other smaller tribes. Although they hail from the same general geographic area, significant variations occur between them in the functions carried out by the kinship domain. This kin network is major factor in the location of houses within a village, as well as the siting of the entire village within a tribal domain. A village or settlement consists of tribal clan, and within its boundaries each quarter or hamlet comprises an expanded lineage.

This direct projection of consanguineous ties on to the land is modified only when a differentiation in social, religious or economic structure appears. For example, in the positioning of compounds the location of a chief's residence or a corn mill may take precedence over a simple kin network. The social cohesion is achieved and maintained by rituals associated with ancestral worship. The rituals establish close conceptual ties with the Earth, the source of fertility. This twin concept of embracing the living and the dead, link people both to their kinspeople and to the patrilineally inherited land on which they dwell (ibid.: p. 16). This ideology finds immediate architectural expression in the conical ancestral shrines, that are an integral sculptural element of many of the family compounds, in the structural unity between a building and the ground it occupies, and in the uniformity of style within the village as a whole.

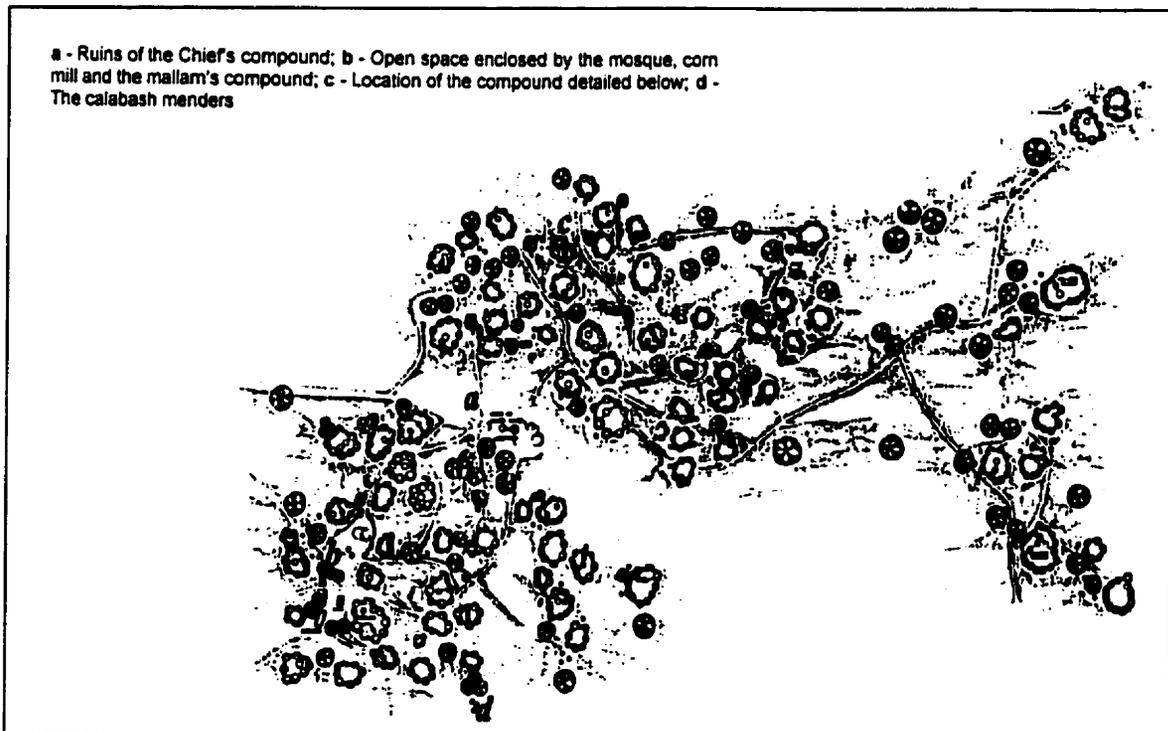


Fig. 3.8 Settlement Plan of Kasuliyili Village

(From Prussin, 1969: p. 24)

Each segment or hamlet within a village represents a unilineal descent group, sheltering a set of extended families, each residing in a separate compound of their own. The family constitutes a core economic unit, and the activity it generates takes place in the homestead -- the compound residence and its farming lands. The family may

comprise of a father, all or some of his sons, married or unmarried, with their families and dependents, or two or more brothers with their wives and offspring, farming together. Although polygyny is accepted, in practice it depends on the wealth, status and age of the man. Each wife is entitled to her own room within the compound, and the extensiveness of the family building complex and the multiplicity of rooms indicates the status of the man and the structure of his family. Within it, the relationship between a wife and her husband, or between co-wives greatly influences the layout and definition of spaces.

Again, within the different tribal groups of the region there are perceptible differences. Since the extended family is continually evolving -- growing, dividing, dispersing or dissolving -- the family compound also undergoes through stages of transformations and transmutations, increments and extensions. This temporal dynamics is very much a reflection of the complexity and importance of the consanguineal ties.

3.3.4 Summary

In summary, there is a growing body of literature that attempts to understand and interpret the personal, social and cultural meaning behind spatial order. Conversely, the significance of architecture in anthropological analysis is also now greatly accredited. There is recognition that the house and the body are intimately linked and the house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect. Bourdieu (1977) description of the house, "as the principle locus for the objectification of generative schemes", and his comparison of it to a book in which is inscribed a vision and structure of society and the world, signifies this. People construct houses in their own image, so also do they use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups, to order relationships, and also to enfold themselves with protective or comforting associations, like family and kin ties.

Despite the early fragmentation linking architecture and anthropology to understand the house and the habitat, there are several recent works written from a more holistic perspective, starting with the pioneering works of Morgan (1965) and Mauss (1979), to the more recent ones of Hodder (1990) and Wilson (199) that give habitat pride of place

for an understanding of the human society, emphasizing the theoretical significance of domestication as an intellectual, political and sociological process which has temporal and logical precedence over technical aspects. Finally, authors such as Cuisenier (1991), Gudeman and Rivera (1990), Kuper (1993) and Sabeau (1990) all give weight to the house and habitat as crucial practical and conceptual units in the economies, kinship systems, and political organization of widely different societies.

3.4 END NOTES

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4. MATRILINY AND DOMESTIC MORPHOLOGY

4.1 BACKGROUND

Late Stella Kamrisch, a noted scholar of the traditional and vernacular architecture of Kerala, in the book Arts and Crafts of Kerala, writes:

“Temples, palaces and houses built in the indigenous, truly original manner of Malabar are intimate structures. They hold their wealth within. This reticence of displaying to the outside what is so richly held within, preserves to the temple and palace alike, the humility of man. It is embraced by the beauty of the country, is close to its earth and water and cannot be alienated from them.” (Kramrisch, 1970: p. 35)

This architecture was a compound of several influences: climatic, geographic, geological, religious and canonical, and social. This study examines the social dimension, particularly the matrilineal system of the Nair community, and its influence on the domestic morphology on the traditional Nair house form. Nevertheless, a perusal of all the other influences is pertinent, since they form the larger backdrop against which the architecture was overlaid. Of the various influences, apart from the social causatives, the canonical principles of the traditional texts are more relevant from the point of view of this study since, at times it conjoins, and at times, it contradicts the social causatives. The following discussion is a brief and synoptical review of these.

4.2 INFLUENCES ON TRADITIONAL AND VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

4.2.1 Geographical

Landwardly, Kerala was isolated from rest of the sub-continent by the imposing Western Ghats. Thus sub-continental influences were not pronounced as they were probably in the rest of the country. The sub-continental influences were largely from the neighboring Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, mostly as a rich and complex repertoire of religious, and to a lesser extent, some exemplary examples of domestic architecture. The basis of this was the principles of traditional Hindu sciences of architecture, interpreted to suit local conditions.

Adventurous sea-farers -- the Romans, Chinese, Greek, Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs and the Western Europeans -- had extensive maritime contacts with Malabar. This contact went beyond mere trade, to encompass several areas, one of which was certainly architecture. Thus, one finds a subtle syncretic of Jewish, Moorish, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and English influences overlaid on the native vernacular. These influences by no means obscured the mainstream indigenous architecture, instead, further enriched it.

4.2.2 Climate

Climate of Kerala is hot-humid sub-tropical, dominated, for most part, by two seasons: the hot and the wet. Rains are all pervading for over five months of the year. They come as the north-east monsoon or the *edavapathi* and south-west monsoon or the *tulavarsham*. Rest of the year is uniformly hot and humid. These extremes left their ineffaceable imprint on the vernacular and traditional architecture. Thus, the settlement pattern assumed a non-nucleated character. External openings, courtyards and permeable roofs -- thatch or tiles -- became the natural vernacular response to facilitate constant cross-ventilation. Deep roofs, ventilated gables, verandahs, large overhanging eaves and cool reflective colors dominate the facades.

4.2.3 Geological and Geomorphological

The linear strip that Kerala is, can be broadly divided into three geological categories: the coastal plains, the largely clayey and lateritic middle-lands, and the rocky highlands. These, combined with the sub-tropical climatic paradigm, dictated the availability of the various building materials. Thus, within the overall vocabulary regional variances appear, depending on geological differences and material availability.

Rock, wood, laterite, and to some extent, metal became the predominant building materials. Granite was chiefly used in temples, especially for the *adisthanas* or the plinths, and sometimes for walls. Laterite was more common in the north; northern Malabar in fact boasts of some of the finest examples of lateritic architecture. Wood was plentiful all over the state, though its nature varied from the coast to the highlands. The most commonly used were teak, rosewood, jackfruit. Wooden architecture finds extreme

refinement in the traditional and vernacular architecture of Kerala, especially of southern Kerala. They can be safely stated to be among the finest examples of wooden architecture anywhere in the world. Use of metal on a larger scale was mostly limited to the roofs of temples. However, metallic craft was refined in other artifacts and smaller building components (Poduval in Kramrisch, 1970). The other aspect was the variances due to the geological and geomorphological differences; thus coastal dwellings and midland dwellings were different in their form.

4.2.4 *Vastusastra*

Traditional Hindu architecture all over the sub-continent was governed by the *Vastusastra* or the 'science of *Vastu*'. The scope of *vastusastras* is large. However, I will only briefly dwell upon a few pertinent aspects essential to this canonical foundation.

According to Hindu philosophy, *Brahmandam* or Universe is an all encompassing and immeasurable entity whose minutest element *pindandam* also expresses the same attributes as the Universe itself, and manifests itself as a representative of the 'Whole'. Accordingly in *Vastusastra*, space is considered as the Universe and the built space, its representation at micro level, having all the attributes of the space itself. All the elements of the built form are related to each other and to the whole by this philosophy (Thampuran, 1994: p. 30).

The Universe as Space: The Universe, according to traditional texts, is conceived as a spherical whole protected by 10 Gods, occupying cardinal positions on its periphery . The line joining *Brahma* at the zenith and *Anantha* at the nadir forms the axis of the sphere. The octahedron formed by joining the zenith and the nadir to the four sides of the horizontal plane (considered square for practical purposes), passing through the center of the axis, is considered as the universal space. By principle, any built space should be confined within this universal space. Based on this concept more detailed principles are laid out, governing all stages, from site-selection to landscaping, from materials to construction techniques, and so on.

Mandala: A *mandala* is defined in *Vastusastra* as a two dimensional space with defined boundaries, yet representing three dimensional space. The general form of *mandala* is square; however other forms of *mandala*, the rectangular, the circular, the hexagonal and so on, are also mentioned in the texts.

Vastu and Vastupurusha: The term *Vastu* is interpreted in many ways. Earliest of the Hindu scriptures, Rig Veda interprets it as a site or building or both (Thampuran, 1995: p.31). *Vastu* means a place where living beings reside. *Vastusastra* is thus defined as an all encompassing science of built space and its environs. *Vastupurusha*, according to *Vastusastra*, is the spirit that forms the essence of the universal space, as well as the designed space, and is graphically portrayed as a man confined in the square *mandala*, with his head at the north-east corner and feet at the south-west corner. The *mandala* with the *vastupurusha* together form an organism, where the *mandala* is the *sthula sariram* or the physical body and *vastupurusha*, the *sushma sariram* or the life sustaining energy.

Sutrams and Marmams: *Sutrams* are a series of orthogonal and diagonal referral lines traversing the *mandala*. Points where more than two lines intersect each other are called *marmams* or nerve centers. The *vastupurushan* is inscribed within the square of the *mandala* in a manner that the *marmams* coincide with the vital points of the human body.

Padam and Padavinyasam: For purposes of planning the *mandala* is divided into sectors known as *padams*. The module of a *padam* can vary, according to the texts, from 1x1 to 32x32; these modules are called *padavinyasams*. The *padams* and *padavinyasams* form the elemental scale for the planning process. Thus, a smaller *padam* with say, a *padavinyasam* of 1x1 is used in the fire altar; larger *padams* of 18x18, and so on are used in the planning of houses, palaces, and even, entire settlements.

Positioning of Devas and Veethis: *Veethi* is a continuous horizontal arrangement and consists of a number of *padams* arranged in a circumferential manner around the central point. Four such *veethis* are present; these are the *Brahma veethi*, *Deva veethi*, *Manushya veethi* and *Pisacha veethi*. The inner-most *veethi* is left open as courtyard and the outer-most as setback. The built space is confined within the other two *veethis*. This automatically restricts the coverage to maximum of 50%.

4.2.5 Basic Forms of Residential Architecture

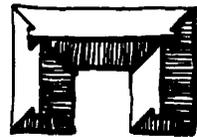
Nalukettu: *Nalukettu*, meaning an assemblage of four blocks or an edifice of four halls, is the Malayalam version of the Sanskrit word *chatussala*. The four blocks are individually called as *dikshalas*, each oriented to a cardinal direction. They join together, enclosing a central courtyard or *ankanam* or *nadumuttam* (in Malayalam), to form a *nalukettu*. The position of the *ankanam* and the *dikshalas*, with respect to the site, are laid down in the canons of traditional texts. Thus, conceptually, a *nalukettu* is a representation of an exterior space and an interior space (the *nadumuttam*) with the built space as the interface. A fully developed *nalukettu* has all the four *dikshalas* and four *vidikshalas* (corner blocks) forming a continuous built space encircling the courtyard (Thampuran and Prabhu, 1993: p. 2).



EKASHALA



DWISHALA



TRISHALA

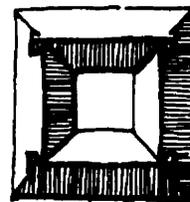
CHATUSSALA OR
NALUKETTU

Fig. 4.1 Basic Forms of Residential Architecture

Although the *nalukettu* represents the most complete form a house can take, it is preceded by the *ekashala* (a single block unit), the *dwishala* (an assemblage of two blocks), or *trishala* (three blocks) and succeeded by assemblages of more than one *nalukettu*, called the *ettukettu* (8-block house with two courtyards), the *patinarukettu* (16-block house with four courtyards), and so on.

The different blocks constituting the *nalukettu*, oriented to different cardinal directions are the *kizhakkini* (east-oriented), *thekkini* (west-oriented), *vadakkini* (north-oriented), and the *padinjattini* (south-oriented). The *kizhakkini* and the *vadakkini* are designated for religious and ritualistic functions, and the *padinjattini* and the *thekkini* for

domestic functions such as, storage and sleeping (Thampuran, 1994). This being so, *ekashalas* constructed for residential use are mostly, *thekkini* or *padinjattini*, for purely utilitarian purposes. Additions or extensions to a *nalukettu* occurs in two ways: horizontally or vertically. In cases of vertical extensions, normally only *theckinis* and *padinjattinis* are raised. Horizontal developments are mostly towards the eastern or northern sides. The basic geometry of the *nalukettu* has been interpreted by different communities to suit their special needs. Thus Nambudiri houses were dominated by religious and ritualistic spaces, and Nair houses by sets of bedroom spaces. Vertical extensions were common among Nairs, more than other communities, since Nair houses demanded the provision greater number of bedrooms.

Although a *nalukettu* was regarded as the most complete house form in traditional architecture, among Nairs, in practice a majority of the Nair houses, especially those of less resourceful *tarawads* were *ekashalas*. However this study devotes to the analysis of *nalukettus* in particular because “only in a *nalukettu* can all the ceremonial be observed in orthodox fashion” (Fawcett quoted in Padmanabha Menon, 1937, iv: p. 132).

4.3 MATRILINY AND THE SPATIAL MORPHOLOGY OF THE NALUKETTUS

The second chapter discussed the matrilineal system of kinship and descent of the Nairs and its various ramifications. This system had a number of direct and indirect implications on the structuring of the built environment as well as the organization of the settlement pattern. On the whole, the geometry of the *nalukettu* was a graphic metaphor of the Hindu way of life, as interpreted by the Nairs, overlaid on the social and behavioral patterns of the community.

First of all, as Shetty notes, *tarawad* as a residential unit was the physical symbol of the family origin point (Shetty in Al Sayyad and Bourdier, eds., 1992: p. 36). This meant that, for all the members of a matrilineal clan, irrespective of their place of immediate residence, the *tarawad* house was sacrosanct. It became the pivot for reinforcing kin ties between members, and the physical setting for all major ceremonial and ritualistic gatherings of the entire clan. Thus the residential unit as a physical entity

had to respond and cater to a range of uses and users, both in its daily cycle and in the larger temporal cycle. This complex requirement is evident in the physical structuring and temporal dynamics of the house.

At the settlement level, asserting their corporate status, each Nair *tarawad* stood as a separate physical entity (meaning, non-nucleated). At the outer boundary was the gate-house delineating the public from the private. Within the complex, the essential elements were the main *tarawad* house and other dwelling units if they were present, the *sarpa kavu* or serpent grove, the family shrine, wells for potable water and ponds or tanks for bathing. Besides these, Moore cites three other essential features namely, the sacred basil tree, cowshed and the family cremation ground (Moore in Marriott ed., 1989: p. 175). However, from my case studies, I believe that cremation grounds and cowsheds were found only in larger *tarawads*. Larger *tarawad* complexes also had other features such as temples, separate kitchen-cum-dining halls called *oottupuras*, *kalaris* or gymnasiums, and *pattayams* or granaries.

Shetty identifies two distinct structural identities of the *marumakkathayam* joint family: the clan as an integrated corporate group and individual descent groups or households headed by senior women, within clan's overall structure (Shetty in Al Sayyad and Bourdier, eds., 1992). The social character of these two identities have been already examined in the second chapter. The spatial implications of this were several.

The corporate identity necessitated a cohesiveness in the distribution of spaces. Certain functions had to be controlled centrally, such as the *adukala* or common kitchen, the *oottupura* or the common dining area, and the *nilavara (ara)* or the store where essential grains, as well as family heirlooms were kept. The control of these areas rested largely with the *karanavan* and the eldest female member of the family, the *taravatilamma*. In *tarawads* where additional space requirements resulted in the construction of new *nalukettus* adjacent to the main *tarawad*, kitchens, dining areas and granaries were conspicuous by their absence. However, it must be added that in large *tarawads*, some subsequent dwelling units were found to have these functions. This came at a stage when these joint families had become too extensive to be catered centrally.

Besides these central functions, the *tarawad* house had a hierarchy of living spaces that, in their larger temporal cycle, also doubled up as ritualistic and ceremonial spaces. These spaces were central to the complex cosmology and ritualistic expression of the family. Important functions involving the *tarawad* and all its members, such as *tirandukuli kalyanam*, *talikettu kalyanam*, or *sambandham*, were held here. That these spaces were central to the erstwhile mentioned singular corporate identity of the clan becomes evident, when one finds that such spaces were found absent in subsequent units or additions.

Attached to the main *tarawad*, and often in its close proximity was a shrine or temple of the family deity. The temple and the institution of the family deity was a constitutive part of the *tarawad* set up and its operation as a corporate entity. The temple was the venue for important religious and communal events concerning the clan. The religious and ritualistic gatherings associated with it were crucial to the sustenance and bolstering of the kin network. The members of the *tarawad* gathered at the temple for all important functions associated with the temple. This remains true of some Nair *tarawads* even today.

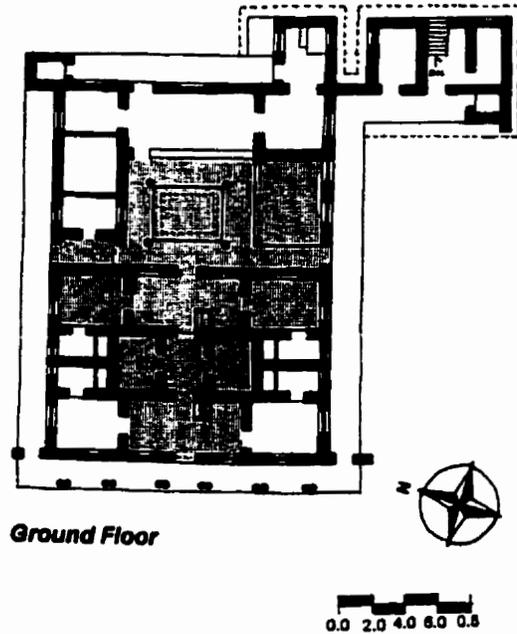


Fig. 4.2 The Ritualistic and Religious Core of a Nair Tarawad

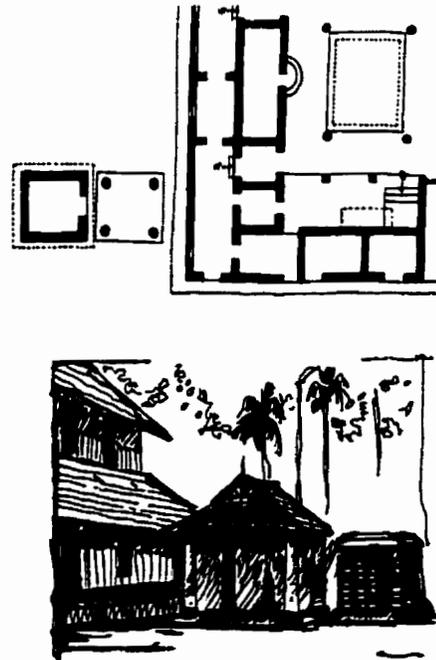
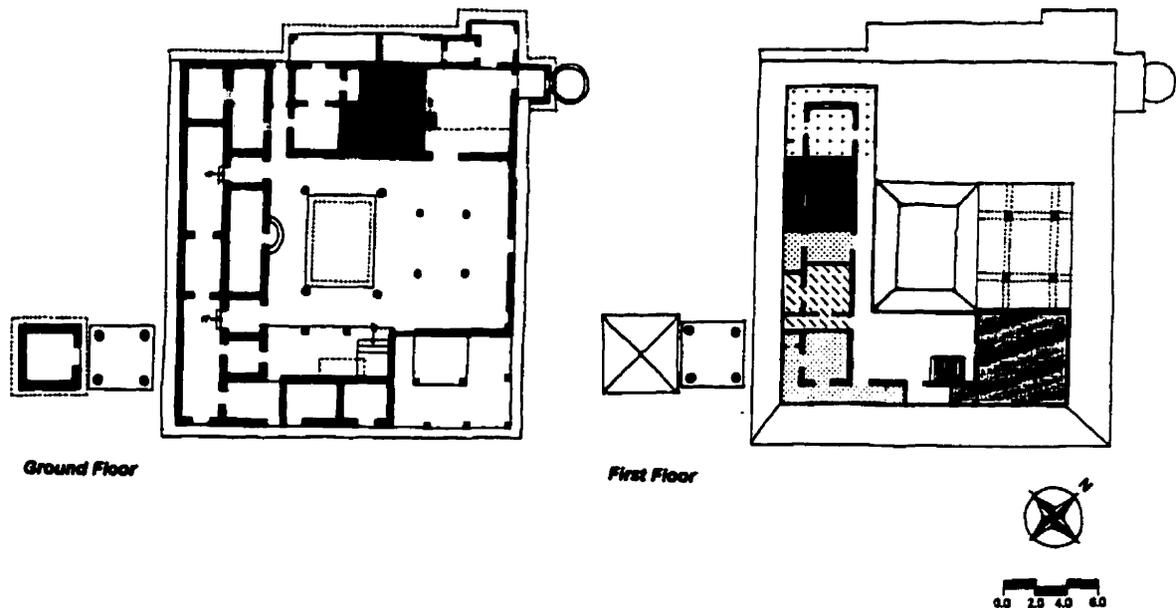


Fig. 4.3 Family Shrine Close to the Main Tarawad house - Palliam Tarawad

Thus the physical setting of the *tarawad* can be seen as crucial for the expression of kin solidarity and corporateness of the clan. The spatial organization naturally reflected this. This physical expression of the corporateness of a *tarawad* is in line with Moore's definition of it, as a "holistic and ritually-significant corporate unit" (Moore, 1985).

The second structural identity was that of individual households within the joint family. Each individual household was headed by a married woman and composed of her most immediate descendants. In some cases these households coincided with the *tavazhis*. Although operating within the corporateness of the *tarawad*, these households held a distinct identity of their own. Each individual household was allocated a set of self-contained living spaces: bedrooms, living areas, storage areas, verandahs or balconies, and in some cases, bathrooms. Separating them from the public and semi-public spaces of the *nalukettu* were transitional spaces. This private domain of an individual household, although within the corporate identity of the *tarawad* and physically part of the residential unit, had a visible distinctiveness and was accorded appropriate privacy.



**Fig. 4.4 Spaces Associated With Distinct Women-headed Households -
Pallam Main Tarawad**
(Each distinct pattern refers to an area occupied by a specific household)

The system of marriage of women along with the rules of inheritance of a Nair *tarawad* find categorical spatial manifestation. These codes worked in tandem with the earlier mentioned structural identities of the *tarawad*. The rules of marriage required women to continue to reside at their *tarawad* after marriage. Their husbands visited them there. The rules of inheritance were biased in favor of women to facilitate this.

The spatial ramifications of this were many. First of all, married women headed households. These women were allocated a set of self-contained living and sleeping spaces, as explained earlier. Men of the family were relegated to common bachelor rooms or sleeping rooms (see fig. 4.4). The only exception was the *karanavan*. His special status entitled him to keep his family with him. At least in some Nair *tarawads* the *karanavan* had the luxury of a set of rooms to himself and his family within the main *tarawad*.

The position of men perhaps need to be elaborated further, in this context. With the exception of the *karanavan*, the men of the traditional matrilineal Nair joint families had little to engage themselves during day time. At night married men visited their wives at their *tarawad*. This idiosyncrasy of the system was mirrored in the spatial construction of the dwellings also. The men's rooms provided little more than a mere physical space for sleeping. Their positioning in relation to the rest of the *nalukettu* deserves special mention. Unlike the women's bedrooms, these were approached either from outside, or through a direct passage from the public realms, with minimal connectivity to the rest of the house. Thus, they had only nominal connection to the daily cycle of the house. Kanipayyur Sankaran Namboodiri notes that in many Nair *tarawads* originally, men's sleeping rooms were separate structures removed from the main *tarawad* house (personal discussion). It is noteworthy that, while there was a preponderance of female-oriented spaces, only very few exclusive male-oriented areas were present. The bias in favor of women in matters of inheritance meant that women who headed households were designated their spaces almost as a matter of right.

With increased numbers of married women in a *tarawad* additional rooms had to be built to accommodate all the households. This was done in two ways: either by additions and increments to the existing *nalukettu*, or by building new units. The extent

and periodicity of this depended on the number of women, the occurrence of their marriage and the resources of the *tarawad*. The additions were invariably bedroom spaces. While the core *nalukettu* followed the *thatchusastras* rigorously, subsequent transformations and increments did not always follow these principles precisely.

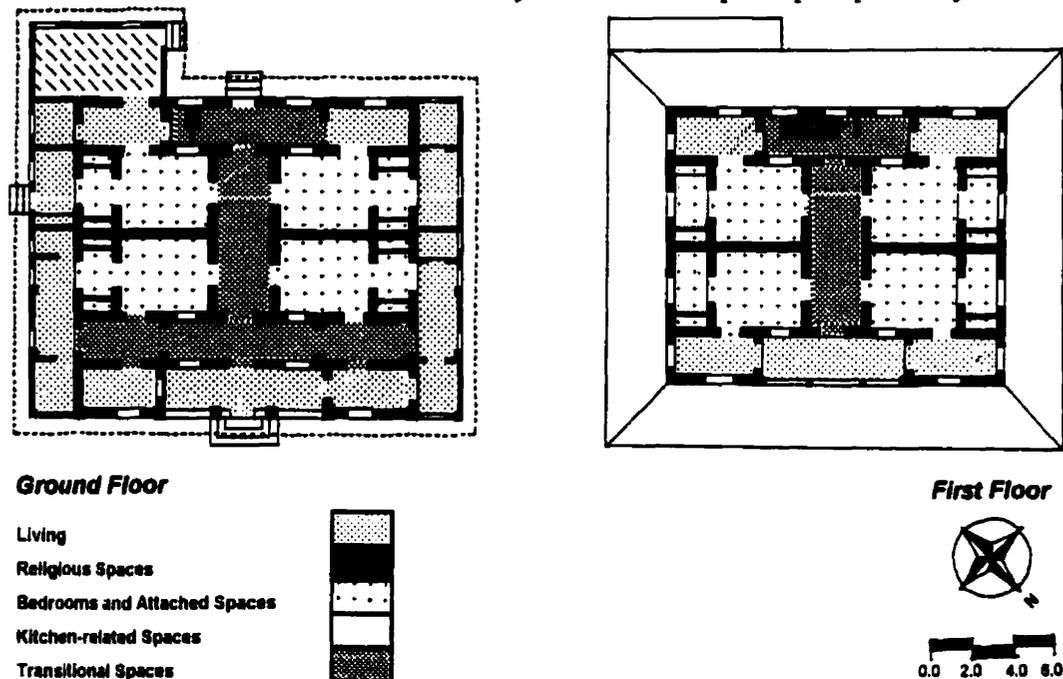


Fig. 4.5 Spatial Organization of a Typical Addition - Puthen Bungalow, Paliam

(Note that these are mostly bedroom spaces)

The spatial organization of a new unit was very different from that of the parent *tarawad*. The new unit consisted almost entirely of sets of bedrooms and related living spaces. Other functional spaces, such as common living areas, kitchens, and ceremonial and ritualistic spaces, were absent, or inconsequential when present (see fig. 4.5). The front verandah led to a number of bedrooms and living spaces attached to the bedrooms through a series of transitional and circulatory spaces. What is noteworthy from a gender point of view is that the new units were, by and large, women-oriented. Men of the family, including the *karanavan* had little control over these spaces.

An analysis of areas commonly used by men and women in their daily cycle illustrate the disposition in favor of women in the schematization of spaces within the *nalukettu*. The front verandah and sometimes, the living space immediately backing it were by and large, male domains. Beyond it, within the house, the living spaces,

courtyard, and the religious and ritualistic spaces were largely female domains, though some of these spaces were not excluded to men. The bedrooms, the storage room, and the *pooja* room were female domains. The kitchen, sometimes a large separate structure by itself, was controlled by senior female members, though it was not unusual to have male servants working there. Besides this, wealthier *tarawads* had separate bathing ponds for men and women. The men's quarters or sleeping rooms were the only exclusive male domain within the dwelling units. Outside it, *kalaris*, when present, were male domains.

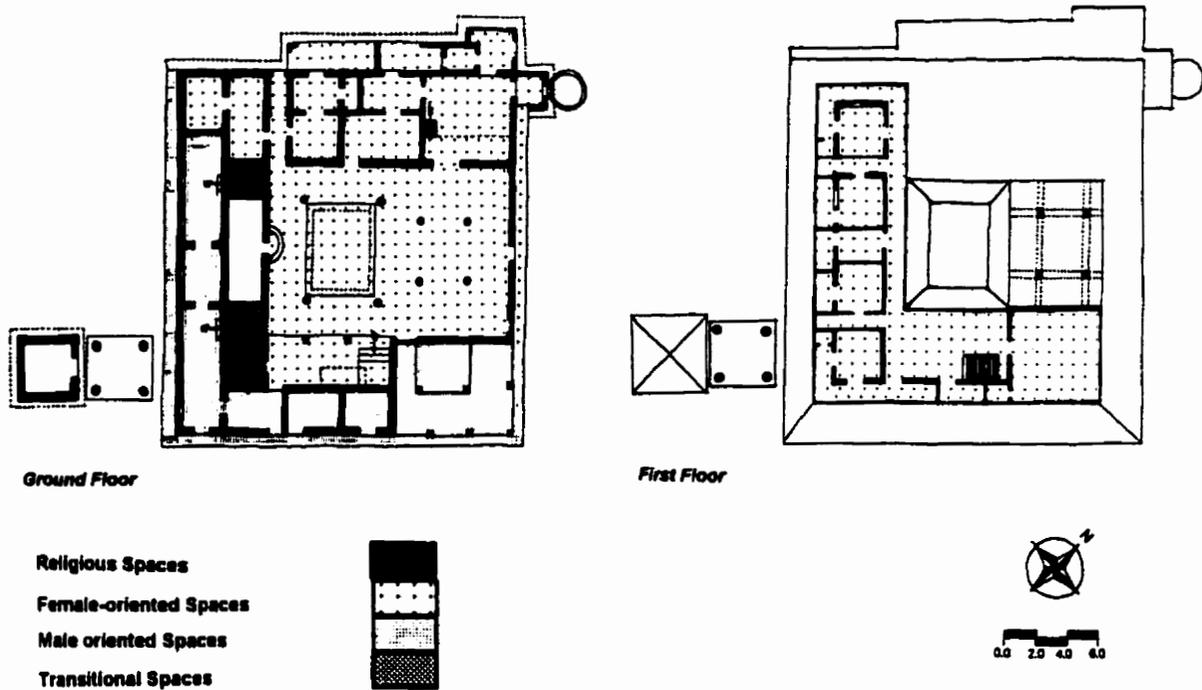


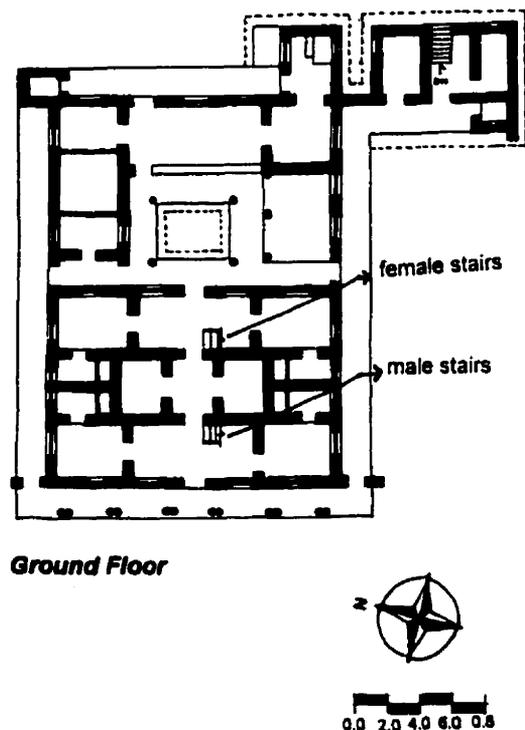
Fig. 4.6 Gender-segregation of Spaces Within the House – Paliam Main Tarawad

Observed in terms of the different *shalas*, Rao notes that, the *vadakkini* was used by unmarried girls and menstruating women, and the *padinjattini* by senior female members (Rao, 1957: p 76). However, Melinda Moore comments that, apart from meal times, during both day and night, males tended to remain in the southern half of the house and females in the northern half (Moore in Marriott ed., 1989: p. 178). The gender segregation of spaces, although not always a matter of hard and fast rule, was adhered to by tradition, and was also an expression in some ways, of the rules of interaction and avoidance that characterized the system. This aspect is examined later.

The post-marital duolocal residence, as well as status of women influenced the location of egresses, and the structuring of circulation and transitional spaces within the *nalukettu*. The main entry was from the front verandah, usually located in the *vadakkini* or *kizhakkini*. This verandah was some times backed up by a second verandah and succeeded by a hierarchy of other living spaces. Beyond the living spaces, the bedrooms were located in the *thekkini* and *padinjattini*. They were approached from the main entry through a series of transitional and circulatory spaces. This was organized in a manner that the visiting husbands were limited access to other quarters of the house. In case of vertical expansion, Kanipayyur Sankaran Namboodiri observes that, normally only the *thekkini* and *padinjattini* were raised in Nair *nalukettus*.

The staircase leading to women's bedrooms was strategically located, either close to the main entry or in an adjoining room. This was to limit the access of "visiting husbands". However, in many *nalukettus* one finds more than one staircase and in such cases, the second staircase was positioned in the interior of the house, and was used by the women only. This pattern was repeated in subsequent dwelling units that housed largely women's bedrooms, where the privacy of the different households was spatially ensured.

It becomes difficult at this stage, to be categorical about the relative latitude Nair women enjoyed and the spatial manifestation of this. The apparent preponderance of women-oriented spaces within the house presents a dichotomy in itself. On the one hand, men were relegated to relatively inconsequential spaces within the *nalukettu*, but, on the other hand, perhaps was this gender stratification a way of limiting the women largely to



Ground Floor

Fig. 4.7 Strategic Positioning of Stairs - Kunnath Tarawad

interior realms of the house? This becomes plausible when one comes to think of the importance ascribed to the position of *karanavan*; he was more than a day-to-day manager, instead, elevated to the status of a protector on whose benign reign rested the institution of the *tarawad* and the well-being of its residents. The control of the external spaces, as well as key resources were with him. On the other hand, there was also an apparent paradox between the position of the *karanavan* and other male members, and between the male and female members. Observed from a socio-spatial point of view, male members were neither in control of key resources, nor spaces. A question to ponder at this juncture is: was the matrilineal system of the Nairs as discriminatory to men, as several patrilineal systems were/are to women? I believe, it is difficult to be unequivocal about this also. These queries can have their answers only in further detailed research on gender roles, in relation to factors such as control of resources, division of labor, procreation and so forth.

The complex and extended nature of the *tarawad* necessitated a number of rules of authority, interaction and avoidance. The social ramifications of these were discussed earlier. In the spatial context there were two categorizations that formed the basis of this: male, female, and kin, non-kin. From the gamut of the morphology of the dwelling unit the factors that were crucial to this were:

- the residence of several descent groups within the same ancestral house,
- the rule of clan exogamy,
- the complex and often, tenuous nature of kin network,
- the unusual system of marriage and visiting husbands, and
- certain rituals and ceremonies that formed part of the religious and cultural body.

Since the *tarawad* was impartible, it was shared by several households originating from a common ancestress. This meant that, after the turn of a few generations households that were not bound by an immediate and intimate relationship shared the spaces. At the turn of the century, many Nair *tarawads* had often, 50 to 100 members, and in some instances more, sharing a dwelling unit (Fuller, 1976; Panikkar, 1983).

This called for a great deal of adjustments and many tacit codes of interaction and avoidance. The common functions were many; the needs of the individual households also had to be met. Here, the aspect of public, private and transitional zones acquire special significance. Public areas were used by both kin and non-kin members; semi-public areas were limited to kin members and selected non-kin members, like in-marrying affines; and private areas were user-specific and restricted in nature.

Public, semi-public, private and transitional areas were clearly demarcated by an unwritten code of customs and practices. The realms of public space were two: the first was the gate house, and the second was the front verandah and the living space immediately backing it, depending on the status of the visitor concerned. The living spaces beyond the front verandah were semi-public, in that, only kin-members and in-marrying affines had access to these spaces. However, in their temporal cycle, during certain ceremonies and rituals some of the living spaces assumed a public dimension. Other semi-public spaces included the *sarpa kavu*, bathing ponds and the *kalari*. The private spaces of the *tarawad* -- bedrooms, the granary and the kitchen -- were user specific. For example, the set of rooms identified with one household or descent group were not normally frequented or used by other households. This was important to guarantee the privacy of the different households. Connecting the private and the public realms were a series of circulatory and transitional spaces -- verandahs, passages, anti-rooms, staircases and so forth. These spaces regulated the level of publicness, creating a hierarchy or order that was at once discernible.

The usage of common spaces, such as living spaces, religious spaces, kitchen, granary, and bathing ponds, were also regulated by tacit codes and a clear delegation of authority. The *karanavan* was the representative and manager of all that the *tarawad* stood for. In actual practice, his domains were largely external, managing the resources of the *tarawad* and representing it during religious and public occasions. The *karanavan* was followed by the *karanavathi*. She managed the internal resources of the family, including the kitchen and granary. This was followed by other senior, married women heading their own households, and finally, by the other men of the family.

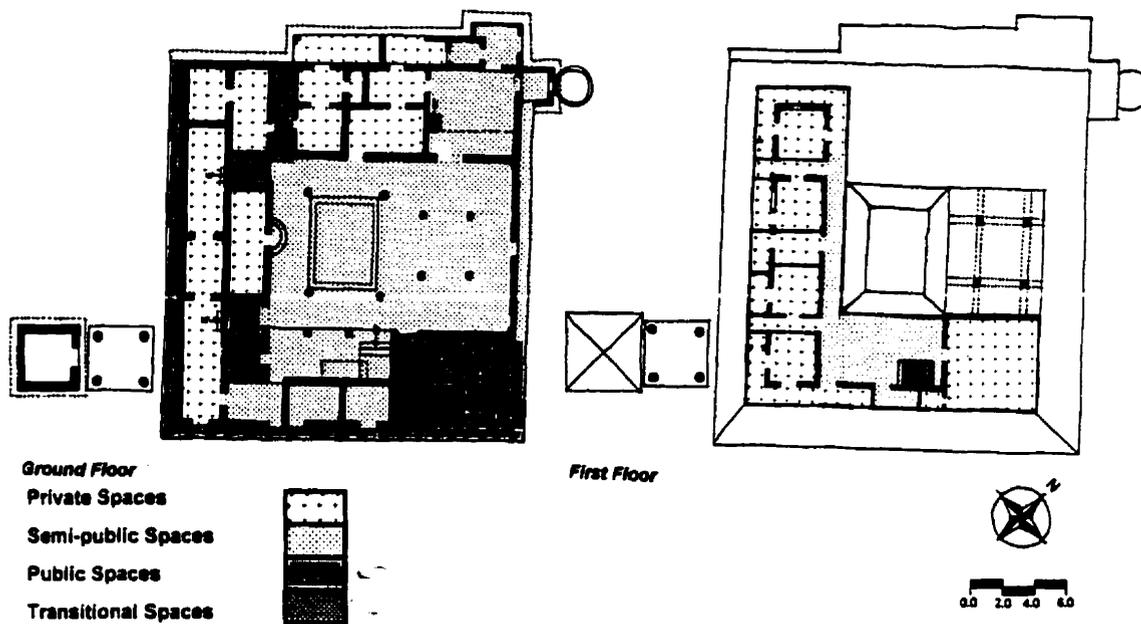


Fig. 4.8 Level of Publicness of Spaces - Pallam Main Tarawad

Control over spaces by and large, followed this hierarchy. While the *karanavan* was the preeminent authority over the land holdings, temples and other external spaces of the family, the *karanavathi* was in control within and around the house. Senior women of the family had their own territories within the house.

The inviolable rule of clan exogamy has to be seen in association with the residence of several descent groups within the same ancestral house and the tenuous nature of kin-network. As we have seen earlier, marriage or any kind of sexual association between members of the same matrilineal clan was strictly forbidden. In a large joint family, this naturally necessitated strict rules of interaction and avoidance among the male and female members of the family.

Architecture became a vehicle to secure this. Men's sleeping rooms were thus spatially separated from women's living areas and bedrooms. Where spaces were common to both men and women, separation was effected temporally. This included common functional spaces such as dining areas and bathing ponds. Unlike wealthier *tarawads* with independent bathing ponds for men and women, modest *tarawads* with one bathing pond had separate bathing quarters for men and women.

The other crucial factor was the unusual marriage system, *sambandham*. Visiting husbands were non-kin and therefore, outsiders. Given the strict rules of avoidance between kin and non-kin members, and male and female members of different households, the visiting husband was allowed only limited access to the *tarawad* house. His access within his wife's *tarawad* was restricted to the spaces allocated to his household. From the front verandah or the main living area, a series of circulatory and transitional spaces led directly to spaces allocated to individual households, without having to go through other parts of the house. Where there was more than one storey, at least one staircase leading to the bedrooms in the upper floors was positioned close to the entrance of the house. The exception to this restriction was during certain rituals and ceremonies, when selected non-kin members had access to these spaces.

The various rituals accompanying the rites of passage and the cultural and religious cosmology of the family and the community -- birth, death, *tirandukuli*, *talikettu kalyanam*, *sambandham*, *sraddham* and the state of pollution during periods -- prescribed their own codes of interaction and avoidance, with tangible consequences on the spatial structuring. These are examined in the context of rituals and ceremonies.

The rituals associated with a Nair *tarawad* were many. Observed from a socio-spatial point of view, *tarawad* as a residential unit provided the physical setting for the ceremonies and rituals that formed the nucleus of the religious and cultural collective of the institution *tarawad*. This entailed the provision and location of specific spaces within the main *tarawad* unit. Shetty, examining this, identifies two aspects related to rituals that has a direct bearing on the dwelling morphology: firstly, the dynamics of the rituals itself, that concerns an individual member of a kin-group, and secondly, the communal celebration by all the kin-members as a way of symbolizing and reinforcing kin bond.

Consider, for instance, the spatial correlates associated with *tirandukuli*. A girl on attaining puberty, was kept in seclusion for four days, in a dark room. At the end of this period of ritual pollution she was ceremoniously taken for a bath, and this followed by a feast for all the kin-members and other important personages. As necessitated by the ritual many Nair *nalukettus* had a dark room that was symbolically conjoined with the

notions of impurity and seclusion. The ceremonial bath was followed by feasting of all the members of the kin group. The act of eating together was central to the collective corporate identity and to bolster kin ties. Catering to this collective gatherings were large rooms, that in their daily cycle functioned as private living spaces. This dichotomy in the identity of spaces was part of the twin identities discussed earlier.

Tirandukuli was but one ritual associated with a Nair *tarawad*. Similarly, menstruating women were considered impure. In fact, menstruation presented a conflict between the need to protect the woman and the need to secure purity of the house and its other residents. Thus menstruating women were kept in seclusion, in a room. They could go out only for defecation, that too, only by the northern door. This exit to the northern side was called *vadakottu vazhiyituka* and was found in most *nalukettus*. Kanipayyur

observes that, while in the state of pollution, a woman were not allowed access to the *nadumuttam* since it was the seat of the sacred. Unlike *tirandukuli*, where the transition from impurity to purity was a ceremonial occasion, in this case there were no ceremonies attached, meaning, the notions of purity and impurity occurred in the larger, ceremonial cycle, as well as in the daily cycle. Similarly, the spatial dynamics of the dwelling unit also alternated between the ceremonial and daily, between the sacred and the profane.

The state of impurity followed by the act of cleansing had wider ritualistic connotations. The act of bathing had a significant place in the order of rituals associated with birth, death, communal and religious events. To illustrate this further, all momentous events such as, journeys, communal and religious events, *sraddhams* were all preceded by bath. Thus bathing ponds or tanks came to be an essential element of Nair *tarawads*.

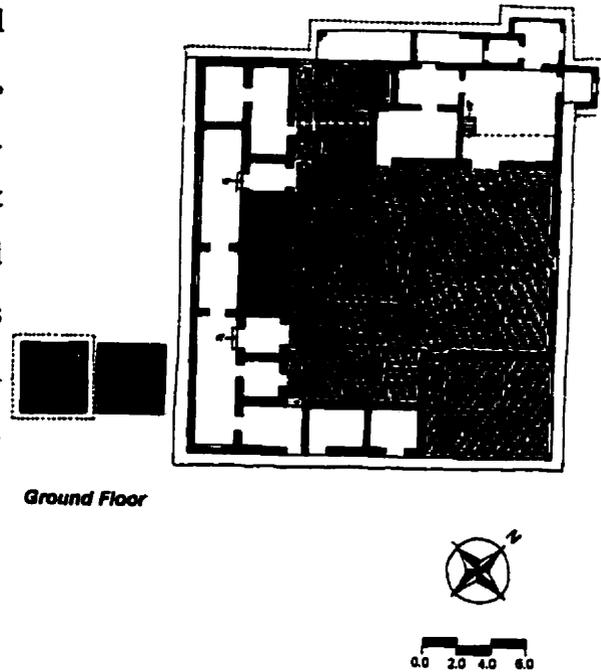


Fig. 4.9 Ritualistic and Religious Core - Pallam Tarawad

Similarly, occasions of birth, death, *sambandham*, religious festivals, harvest gatherings were memorialized with elaborate rituals and kin gatherings. The ritual connection between *tarawad* house and the life-cycles of its members became a microcosmic representation of religious and ritualistic cosmology of the community.

These observations on the relation between the social patterns and the spatial morphology are illustrated through the case studies that follow:

4.4 CASE STUDIES

The observations made in the previous section have their validation on the basis of several case studies conducted in the south Malabar and Cochin region. The case studies were chosen after considerable reconnaissance. In all, this study proceeds to examine in detail four *nalukettus* belonging to three Nair *tarawads*, representative of a large segment of *marumakkathayam* Nair families. The examples were chosen primarily on the following criteria:

- *tarawads* where additions and increments have not occurred to the original *nalukettu*;
- *tarawads* where additions have been made to the main *tarawad* house to accommodate increased family size; and
- *tarawads* where increased number of households have necessitated construction of new units.

This was followed by other considerations, such as:

- socio-economic status of the *tarawad*;
- extent to which the particular family subscribed to the *marumakkathayam* system;
- age of the *tarawad*, based on its family history, as well as the age of the *tarawad* house. This is important since, the age of a *tarawad* correlated with aspects such as, the extensiveness of the *tarawad*, the number of households and the periodicity and nature of additions or secondary units;
- location of the *tarawad*; and

- the spatial morphology of the dwelling unit or units.

Thus, Kunnath *tarawad*, Paliam *tarawad* and Kelamangalath *tarawad* from Shoranur, Chendamangalam and Cochin respectively, are the three main case studies described. The methodology of field research followed was:

- a detailed physical documentation of the dwelling unit or units and the environs;
- a detailed photo-documentation of the same;
- interviews with older members of the household to trace the *tarawad* history and gather information about the *marumakkathayam* set up, as practiced by the family; and
- reference to external literature sources, where they existed, on the *tarawad* histories.

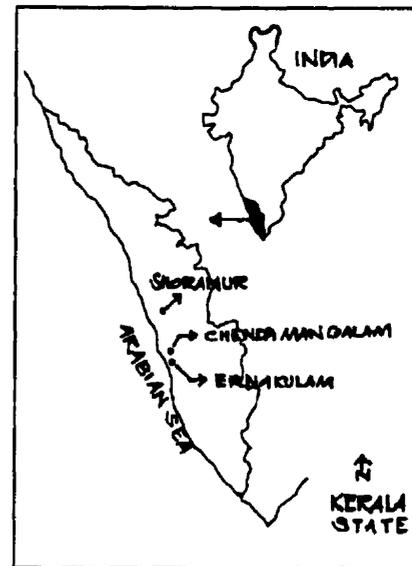


Fig. 4.10 Location of Case Studies

4.4.1 Kunnath *Tarawad*, Shoranur

Kunnath *tarawad* is located in the Valluvanad region of Malabar, approximately 10 kms. from the prominent town of Shoranur. The house is about 150 years old; since then there have been very few additions and extensions. The *tarawad* itself, as related to me by one of its present incumbents, is much older. In the bygone days the *tarawad* was among the prominent ones in the region and owned considerable landed property. Today, most of the agricultural land has been either sold or transferred to the former serfs. The family still owns a few acres of paddy fields and coconut groves, most it adjoining the *tarawad* house. The huge house is presently occupied by three aged people, two brothers and their widowed cousin sister. Architecturally, the house presents the 'ideal' of the traditional architecture of Kerala: a general conformity with the traditional texts, climatic sensibility and elegant craftsmanship.

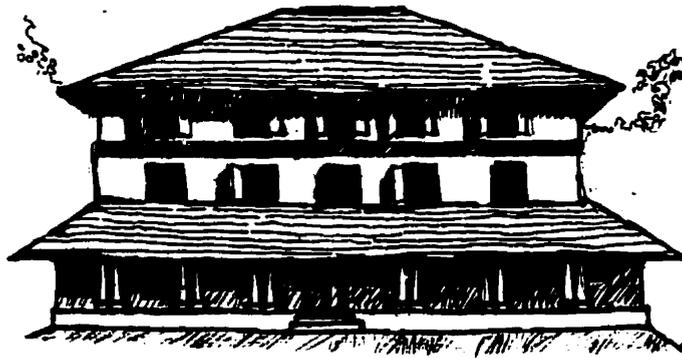
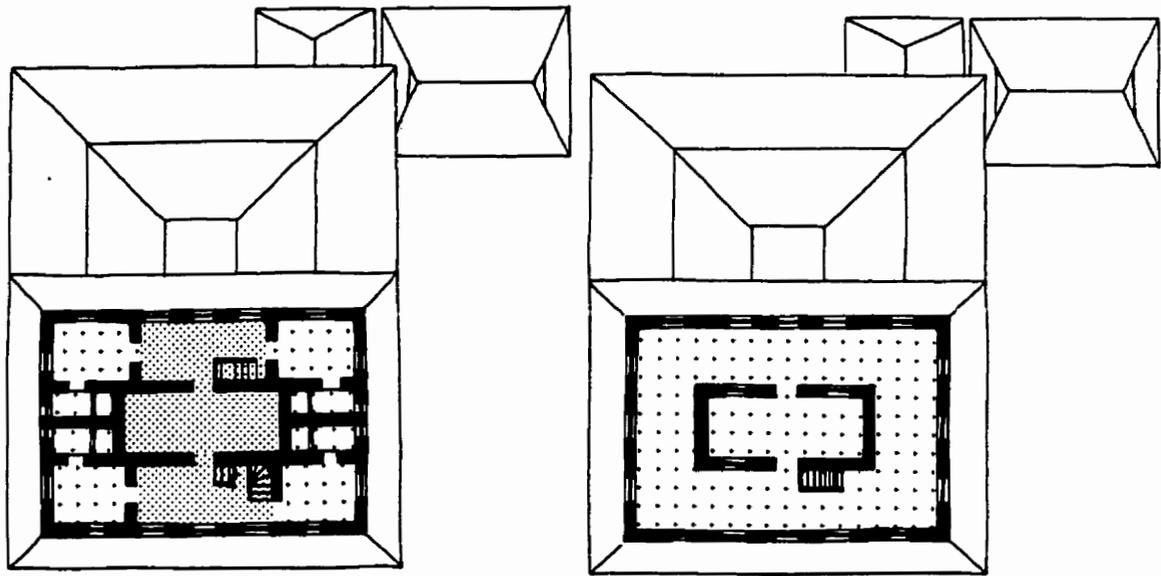


Fig. 4.11 Kunnath Tarawad - Western Facade

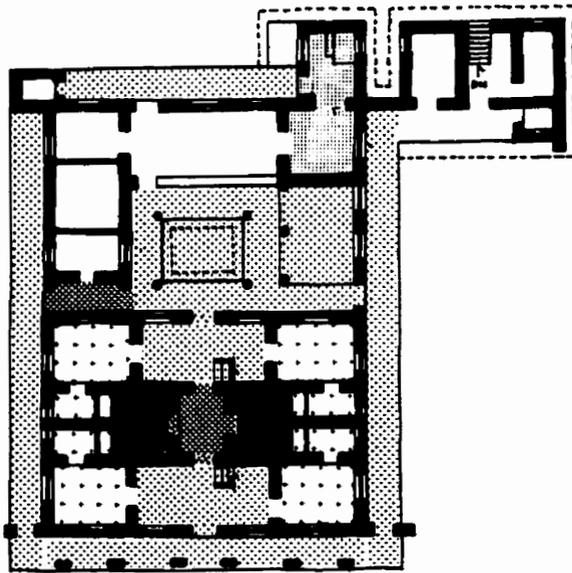
The house is approached from the west, an orientation that was certainly not the most favored according to the *thatchusastras*. The original gate-house, that signified the interface of the public and the private realms, has been replaced in recent years by an ordinary gate. Beyond the gate, a deep fore-court leads to the front verandah. The colonnaded verandah in the front is immediately backed up by a living space. Adjoining the living space are two bedrooms. Proceeding further, one enters a transitory room. Adjacent to this room, along its northern and southern sides are two dark rooms. Beyond the transitory room is yet another living space, adjoined by bedrooms on both sides.

The *nadumuttam* and a vast living space enclosing it follow this living space. The *nadumuttam* is adjoined on the north by the *nilavara* or storage, and on the east, by the dining spaces, kitchen and the well. At the eastern end is the bathing tank for the ladies. The bathing tank is entered from a covered bathing quarters immediately above it. A verandah runs all along the perimeter of the house, broken only at the rear of the house by the kitchen and a bathroom. On the southern side, at a distance from the house is the bathing tank for the men and the paddy fields belonging to the *tarawad*. Other essential features, such as the cow-shed, the family cremation ground and the *sarpa kavu*, no longer exist, though they were present once upon a time. The cow shed was to the rear of the house, and the *sarpa kavu* on the southern side, a little further from the sacred basil plant.



First Floor

Second Floor



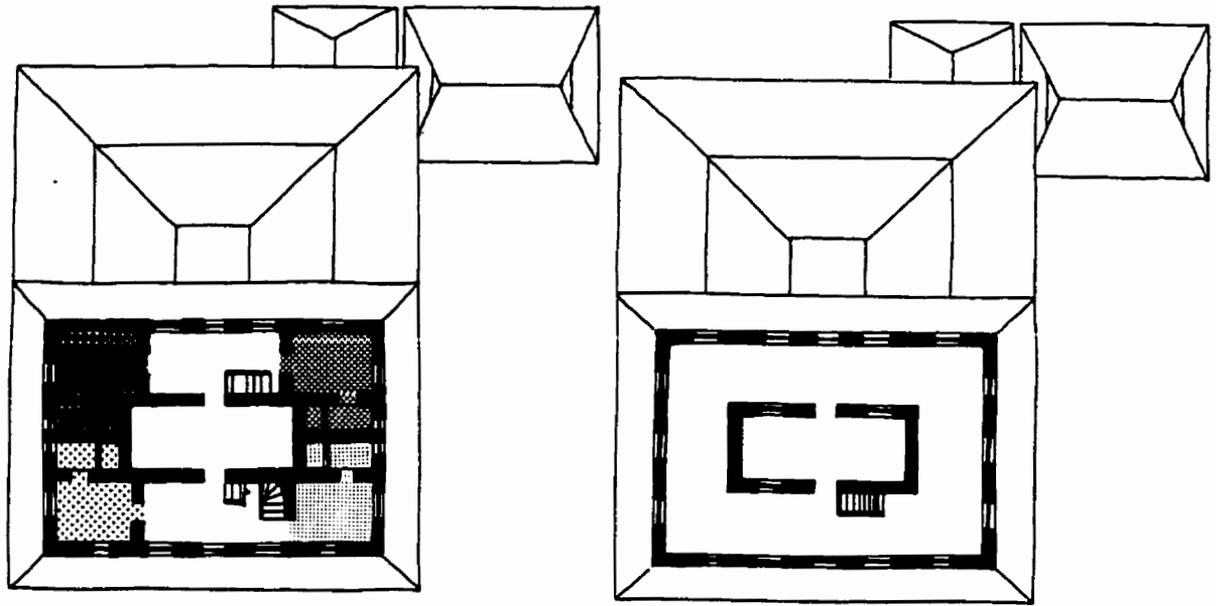
Ground Floor

- Living
- Religious Spaces
- Bedrooms and Attached Spaces
- Kitchen-related Spaces
- Transitional Spaces



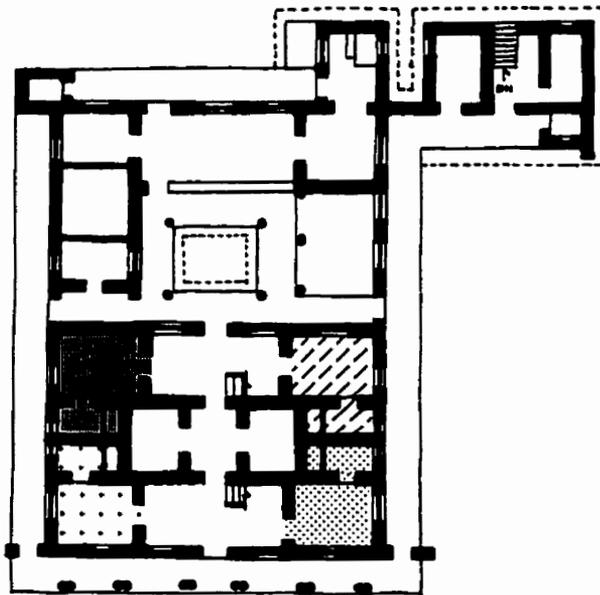
Fig. 4.12 Spatial Organization of Activities

KUNNATH TARAWAD, SHORANUR



First Floor

Second Floor

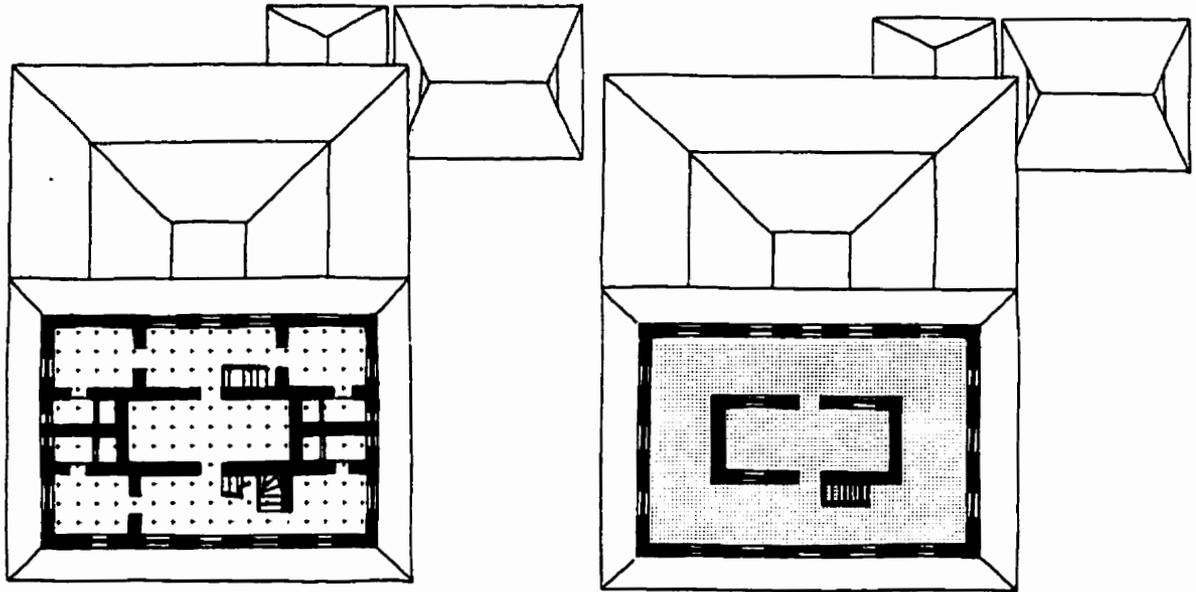


Ground Floor



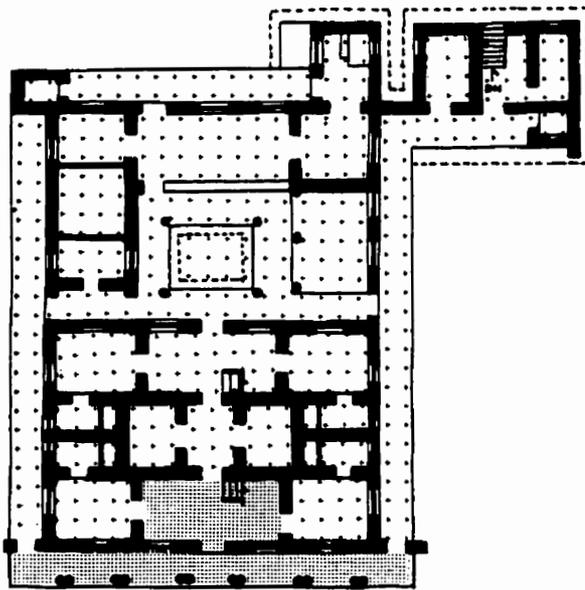
Fig. 4.13 Spaces Associated with Individual Women-headed Households

KUNNATH TARAWAD, SHORANUR



First Floor

Second Floor



Ground Floor

Female-oriented Spaces

Male oriented Spaces



0.0 2.0 4.0 6.0 8.0

Fig. 4.14 Gender Division of Spaces

KUNNATH TARAWAD, SHORANUR

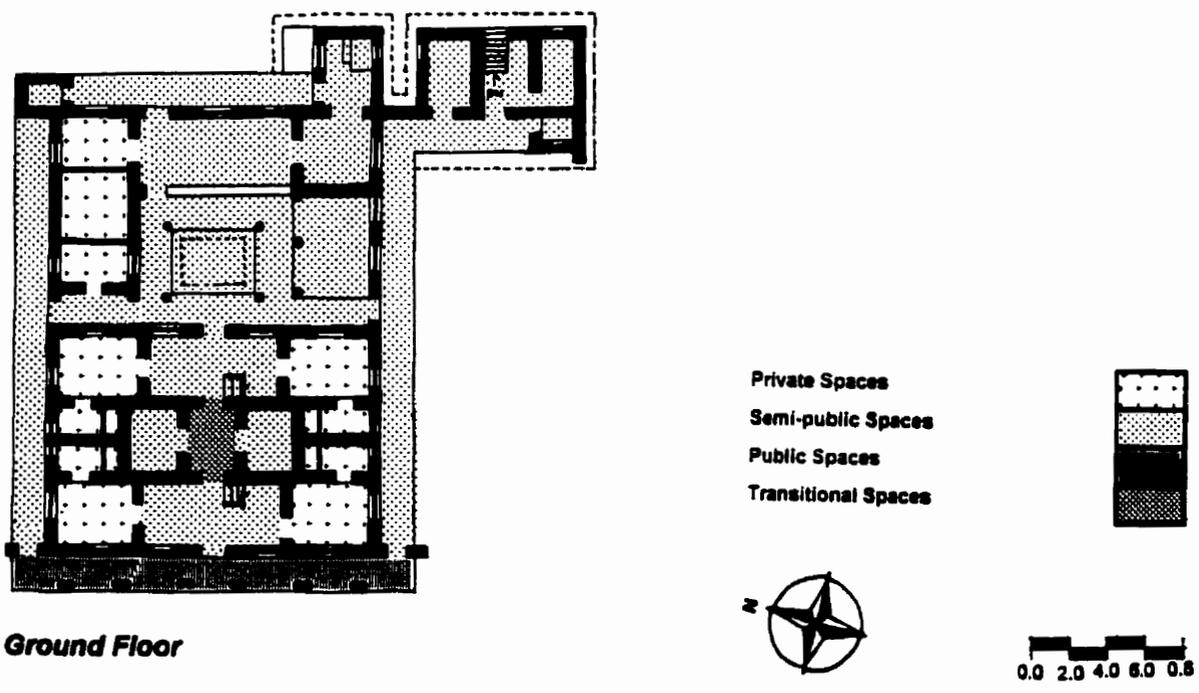
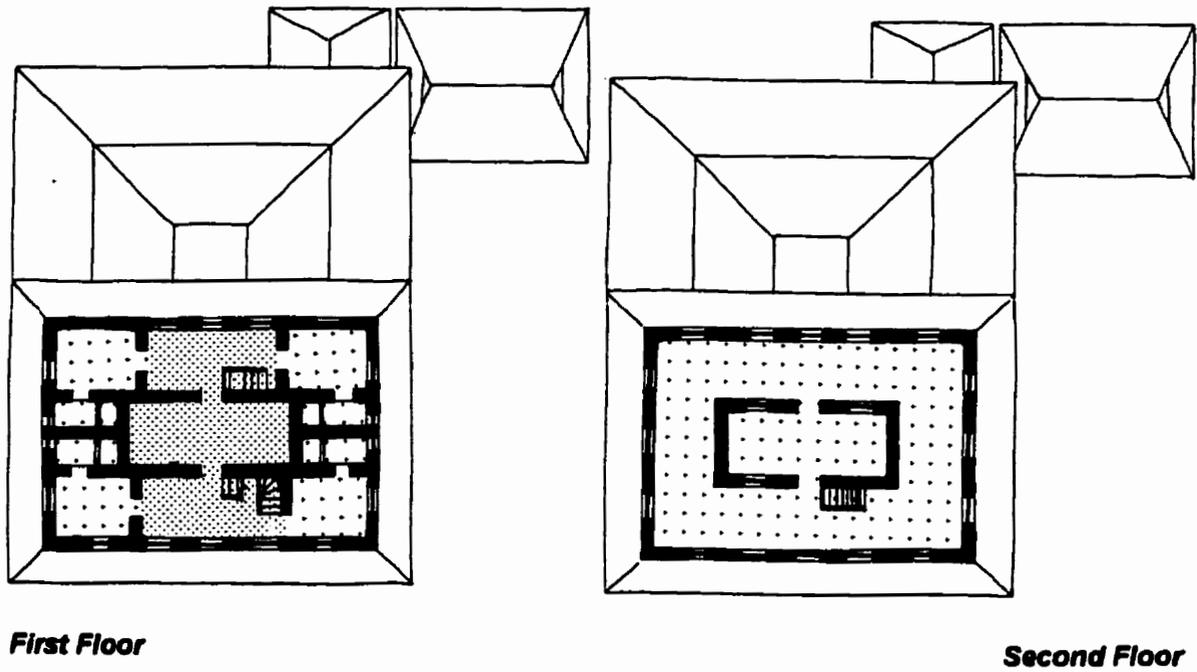


Fig. 4.15 Level of Publicness of Spaces

KUNNATH TARAWAD, SHORANUR

As in many Nairs *nalukettus*, the *padinjattini* has a vertical extension of two floors. The two staircases are located, one at the entrance, and the other deep inside the house. The first floor is similar to the ground, except that the transitory space and the two dark rooms in the ground floor are conjoined to make a large living space. On the northern and southern sides are bedrooms and their attached toilets. Further up, on the second floor is a vast living-cum-sleeping space that encloses a room in the center. From the second floor a makeshift ladder goes to the loft (see Fig. 4. 12).

The Kunnath *tarawad* exemplifies a situation where few additions have occurred to the house over time. The core *nalukettu* still retains its original layout. The spatial totality that complemented the singular corporate identity of the *tarawad* is apparent in the integral nature of the layout. From the gate-house at the western end, to the bathing tank for the women at the eastern extreme, the spaces become one integral whole, connected by living spaces, passages, and verandahs. Almost all the elements typical of a Nair *nalukettu* find representation here.

The bedrooms, numbering eight, accommodated the individual households (refer Fig. 4. 13). These bedrooms were used by the married women of *tarawad*. Attached to the bedrooms were storage spaces that have now been converted into bathrooms. The sleeping quarters of the male members were on the second floor. The distinction between the bedrooms and the men's sleeping quarters is obvious. While the former was distinguished by its exclusivity and private nature, the latter was one undivided common space, providing little beyond a physical space for sleeping (refer Fig. 4. 14).

The spatial organization is that of a typical Nair *nalukettu*, with the inevitable fragmentation and differentiation that was necessitated by the matrilineal system of descent. The positions of the stairs were denotative of the rules of interaction and avoidance. The men's sleeping quarters was reached through the stair at the entrance; this stair also served the "visiting husbands". The second stair was for use by women only. It is noteworthy that this stair goes only up to the first floor. Beyond the front verandah and the living space immediately backing it, the entire ground and first floors were predominantly women-oriented, though, as stated in the previous section, some of these

spaces did not preclude men totally (refer Fig. 4.14). The front verandah and the second floor were men's domains. Further separation was effected in the bathing tanks for men and women. While the women's bathing tank was attached to the house, the men's tank was located at a distance from the house and was approached externally, as shown in the figure below.

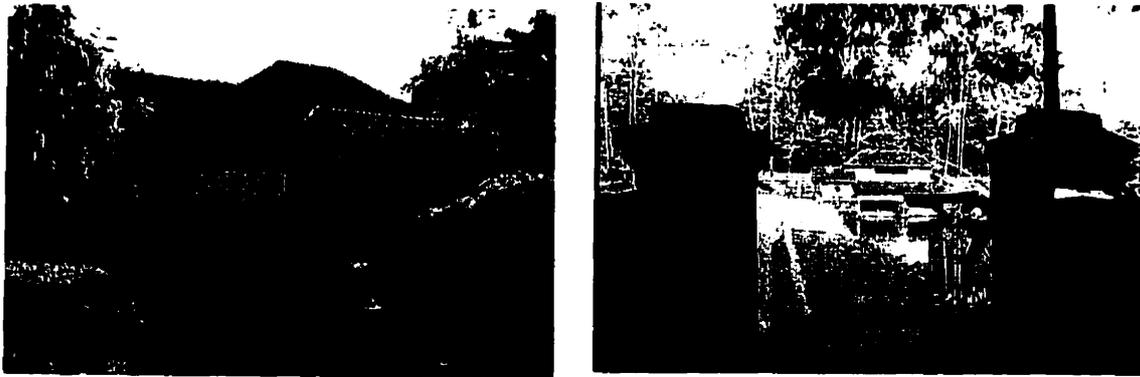
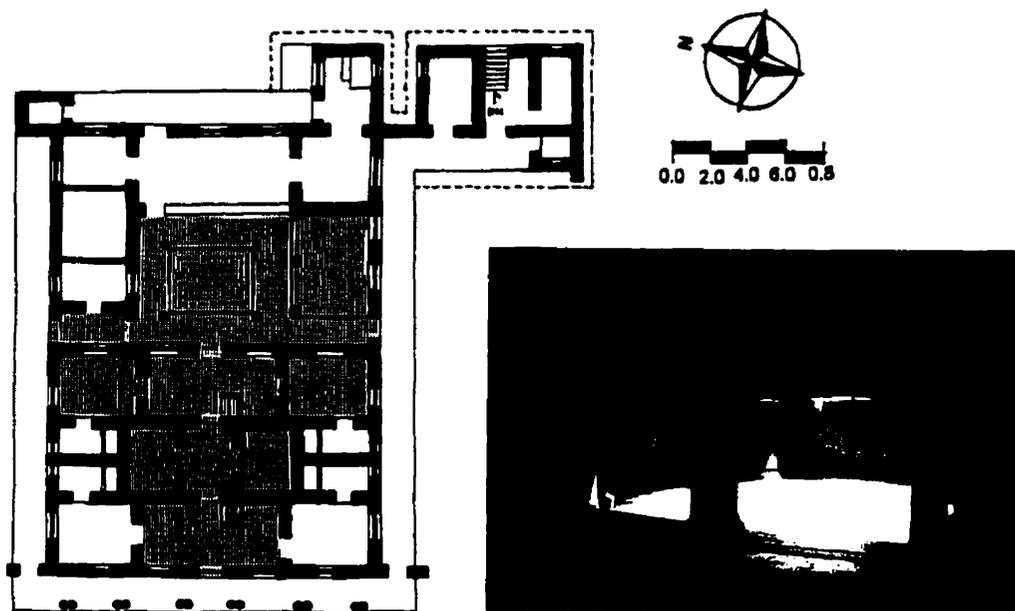


Fig. 4.16 Views of the Female (left) and Male (right) Bathing Ponds

(Notice the female bathing pond is attached to the house unlike the male bathing pond)

The relative positioning of the male and female domains suggest that there was little male control over female areas. The position of the stair for men and the location of the men's sleeping room on the upper-most floor, were indicative of the limited control that was vested in the men of the family over the women-oriented spaces.

The pattern of activities in the spaces shifted between the daily cycle and the larger temporal cycle. This was also intimately connected to the publicness of the space (refer Fig. 4.15). In the daily cycle, living spaces predominated the ground floor, with a hierarchy that shifted from the public to the private, as one moved inward. The first floor has a series of living spaces attached to the bedrooms, and the second floor was the men's sleeping quarters. Just as the hierarchy of spaces move from the public to the private horizontally, vertically too, the order changes from the public and semi-public in the ground floor, to predominantly private spaces in the first and second floors.



Ground Floor

Fig. 4.17 Ceremonial Core and a View of the Courtyard

A series of rooms, starting from the front living space and going up to the large living space enclosing the *nadumuttam*, formed the ceremonial and ritualistic core of the *tarawad* (see Fig. 4.17 above). These living spaces were the physical setting for the ceremonies and rituals. The two dark rooms in the ground floor were the “seclusion rooms” for rituals associated with impurity. Menstruating women were secluded here; these rooms were also associated with birth and death ceremonies. The northward passage from the courtyard room leading to outdoors was used by the menstruating women as egress. The other exit from the courtyard room led southward, to a raised platform where *tulasi* or basil was grown and the sacred lamp was lit every day. On ceremonial occasions involving larger congregations, a temporary pavilion called *pandal* was erected in the forecourt. The courtyard room was the venue for communal and religious ceremonies of the *tarawad*. Along with the sacred platform, the *ara* and the *nadumuttam* were also considered sacred.

4.4.2 Paliam *Tarawad*, Chendamangalam

Paliam presents a complete example of a matrilineal Nair *tarawad*. The seat of the *tarawad* is Chendamangalam, a small town about 35 kms. north of Cochin city. Paliam was, and continues to be, among the preeminent Nair *tarawads* of the region. Traditionally, a senior male member of Paliam *tarawad* was the commander of the armed forces of the King of Cochin, and his titular name was *Paliathachan*. These aspects make its history both interesting and relevant to the socio-spatial dynamics of the *tarawad*.

At the height of its glory the *tarawad* commanded considerable resources and is recorded in history for several of its notable features, the most prominent among them being, the exploits of a *Paliathachan* against the colonial powers that attempted to control Cochin. Till it was taken over by the Government in 1954, the Paliam *tarawad* possessed a manuscript library that was among the finest in India. Besides, the first printing press in India at Vaypilkotta, about two kms. south of the seat of Paliam *tarawad*, was owned by the *tarawad*. At one point of time in the last century the family had over two thousand staff under them; this did not include the battery of soldiers commandeered by *Paliathachan*. The main *kovilakam* or palace building is full of history in the form of derelict historic documents and disintegrating memorabilia.

The original Paliam complex consisted of the *kovilakam*, several temples, houses, administrative buildings, the *oottupura*, sentry posts, bathing tanks or ponds, the *kalari*, family cremation grounds, gate-houses at cardinal points, and even a school. Apart from this, the family had considerable resources beyond the immediate precincts; these included over forty temples, several schools, palaces, *dharmasalas* and so on.

What remains today is only a pale reminder of the glory of the *tarawad*. The sentry posts and *kalari* no longer exist; the gate-houses have been removed or modified to accommodate houses and families; the *oottupura* remains unused. The *kovilakam* building, an elegant architectural syncretic of the traditional architecture of Kerala and colonial influences, is in a state of high attrition. Since partition in 1953 several *tavazhis* have chosen to move out. Thus many of the old *nalukettus* remain, either unused and unattended, or have been demolished and replaced by new houses.

Paliyam was in many ways the quintessential *marumakkathayam* joint family. The *tarawad* was the land-and-property unit, as well as the seat of the ceremonial and the ritualistic concerning all members of the extended family. Correlating with Moore's observations on the inconsequential nature of genealogical lineage in *marumakkathayam* Nair *tarawads*, nothing is known of the original ancestress. Even today Paliyam continues to follow, in many respects, the last vestiges of the matrilineal system, preserving sanctity of rituals, and maintaining kin ties by congregating on religious and communal occasions. Interviews with the members of the family unveiled several interesting highlights of the family, that was crucial in understanding the matrilineal system of descent

Normally, the eldest male member assumed the title of *Paliathachan* and had the name 'Raman Krishnan Govindan Valliathan', where the first three were titular names. He became the commander of the armed forces of Cochin and was also the *karanavan* of the *tarawad*. He was not permitted to marry; however, liaisons in the form of *sambandhams* were permitted. He resided at the main *kovilakam*, to where the entry of women were forbidden. This was attributed, by a member of the family, to the public nature of the *kovilakam*. Although he was by title the *karanavan*, the public disposition of his position, as the Minister and Commander of the King of Cochin, left him with little time to manage the *tarawad* on a day-to-day basis. Thus managers were appointed to assist the *karanavan* in the daily affairs of the *tarawad*.

The family was huge and its needs were catered from the central *tarawad* house. Allowance for individuals came from common management. The daily food was also partaken by all the clan members at the main *tarawad*. Children up to fifteen years had rice gruel as breakfast at six-o'clock in the morning. This was followed by prayers at the family temple and another meal at eight-o'clock. The following meal was served only late in the evening. The routine for the adults was very similar, except that they were served their second meal at ten-o'clock. The resources at the disposal of the *tarawad* were so plentiful that, a member of the *tarawad* recalled, they had three doctors, two *ayurvedic* and one allopathic, attached to the family. In fact, two of them even resided within the complex.

Boys up to fifteen years resided at the main ancestral home. After fifteen they were required to do an year of penance. At this time they were also trained in various martial arts. Thereafter, their stay was at the bachelors quarters. However, they were permitted to come to the *tarawad* for lunch and supper. The unique status of the family combined with the volatile state of political affairs meant that skirmishes and small wars were common. Consequently, many men of the family died early. The management of the house was vested with women, especially the *karanavathi*. However, their involvement in the external transactions of the *tarawad*, including matters of the State, was limited. They were not restricted in matters of education. In fact, there was a school within the Paliam complex that both boys and girls of the family attended. The women of the family were married mostly to higher caste Nambudiris or Thampurans. Every married woman heading a household was assigned two female servants and male servant. Each elder woman was entitled to a monthly share of tobacco from the *tarawad*, and the amount of tobacco was a measure of her status.

Strict rules of interaction and avoidance characterized the relationship between men and women of the family. Boys above fifteen were not only forbidden access inside the *nalukettus* of the women's households, but also observed strict codes of avoidance with the women of the family. However, both men and women went to a common school.

The family attached considerable importance to all religious, ritualistic and communal observances and followed these scrupulously. These occurred on a daily cycle, as well as a larger temporal cycle. Religious observances on a daily cycle included prayers at the family temple, observing fasts on certain auspicious days and so on. Communal and religious events, such as *Onam*, *Vishu* and *Tiruvatira*, were momentous occasions when religious observances were coupled with collective feasting and cultural festivities. Rites relating to wholly religious events, such as the Ramayana month or the *Mandala* month rites, were observed by the entire clan with the solemnity traditionally associated with these occasions.

Rituals such as *talikettu kalyanam* and *tirandukuli* were observed as recently as sixty years ago. In fact, some of the older women of the *tarawad* were able to vividly recollect these rituals from their childhood days. According to an elder lady, *talikettu kalyanam* was an event of great ritual significance. She remembers that the celebrations often lasted twelve days at a stretch, and were memorialized in great pomp and glory with several kin and non-kin members attending. In contrast, *tirandukuli kalyanam* was a totally kin affair, although celebrations were no less in splendor. During the third day of the ceremony the girl was served a porridge of rice and milk, and on the fourth day, marking the end of the period of ritual pollution and transition to a new stage in life, the girl was bathed by other senior women of the family and taken in a procession.

Partition of the *tarawad* was effected in 1953, with the women of the family becoming custodians of the properties. Despite partition, even today the Paliyam maintains semblance of a traditional *marumakkathayam* family, with members congregating for important rituals and ceremonies. The management of common resources of the *tarawads* is now under a trust, called the Paliyam Trust, headed by a senior male member.

The Paliyam complex and the *nalukettus*: As stated earlier, the joint family was large and commanded considerable resources. The seat of the *tarawad* was a testimony to this. The whole *tarawad* complex spread over several acres, and comprising of the parent *tarawad* house, several other secondary units, the *kovilakam* or the residence of the *Paliathachan*, the family temple, administrative buildings, a large *oottupura* or dining hall, gate houses at cardinal entry points, family cremation ground, several bathing tanks, *kavus* or serpent groves, a school and a small garrison or military post, was an elaborate set up, very much in a corporate mold. Not all these exist today. Several *nalukettus* have been pulled down and replaced by ubiquitous 'modern houses'; the sentry outposts and the school no longer exist, so too some of the gate houses; many houses and gate houses have had additions from the last three decades; most of the bathing tanks have been filled. However, what exists today gives an insight into the scale of operation of a typical aristocratic Nair joint family in the past.

Approaching from the town of Chendamangalam, one encounters the main family temple first. A labyrinth of narrow roads and pedestrian lanes lead us to the seat of the Paliam *tarawad*. Before one approaches the parent *tarawad*, several other houses and establishments of the family dot the landscape. Originally, gatehouses at cardinal points led to the Paliam complex. These gatehouses also housed the sentries guarding the complex. The three most important structures were the main temple, the *kovilakam* where the Paliathachan resided and the main *tarawad*. Around them were administrative buildings, houses, sentry posts, the school, and the family cremation ground.

One reliable way of understanding the landscape would be to analyze the structures by their age. The age of the buildings have been classified into four categories: those more than 400 years old, those 250 to 400 years old, those 100 - 250 years old and finally, those less than 100 years old.

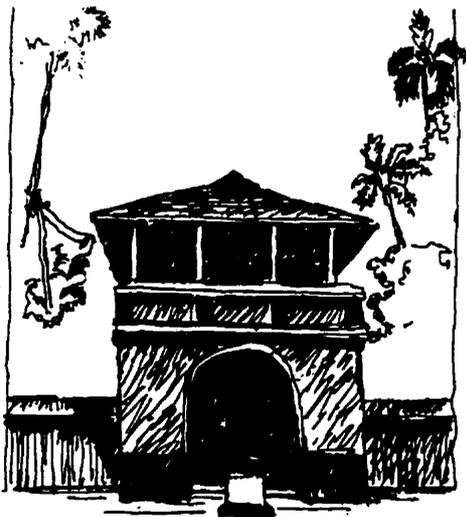


Fig. 4.18 *Kovilakam*



Fig. 4. 19 *Padippura Malika*

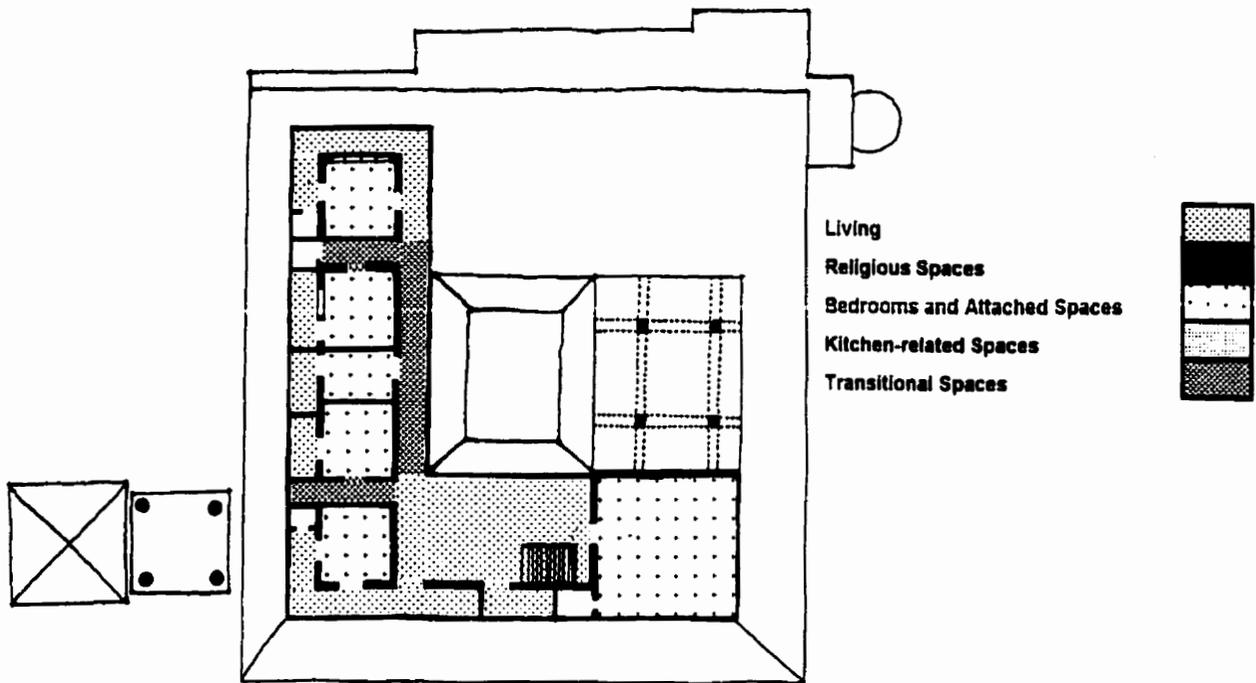
The exact age of the temple cannot be ascertained. The oldest known building is the main *tarawad* house, over 400 years old, lying unused now. This is followed by the *kovilakam*, the *oottupura* and the Puthen Bungalow. Today the *kovilakam* serves as the office of the Paliam trust and the *oottupura* is used as a storage space. The Puthen Bungalow or the New Bungalow, is presently resided by three households. The two existing *padippuras*, called the Padippura Malika and the Padippura Veedu, although originally conceived as gate-houses, were used as houses later. They are between 250 to

100 years old. So too is the main administration building, adjacent to the *kovilakam*. Today, the Padippura Malika lies unused and the Padippura Veedu has had significant additions and transformations in the recent decades, altering its external as well as internal morphology. The other *nalukettus* within the complex are less than a hundred years old. Apart from these, there are several new houses that have come up since the partition.

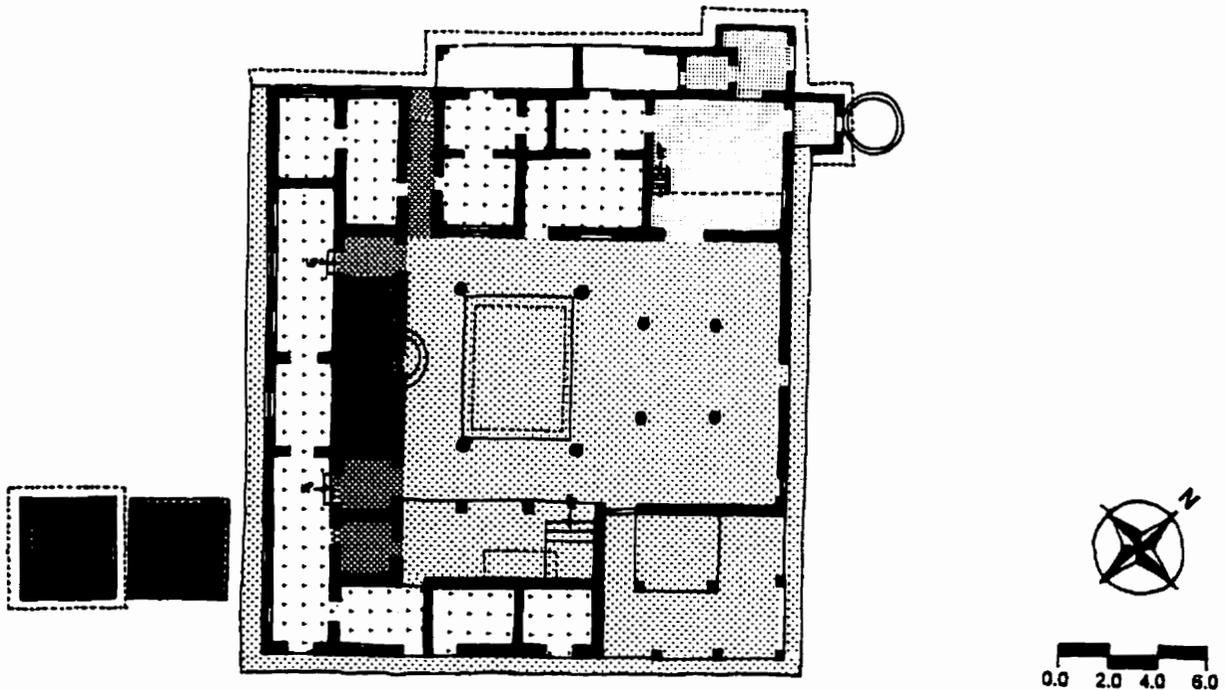
The reasons for some structures lying vacant while several others have undergone additions or transformations lie in the complex property transmission rights that characterized the partition of the *tarawad* properties. The rights of the parent *tarawad nalukettu* have not been ceded to any particular household, and therefore, still belongs to the whole clan. The present heirs of the Padippura Malika reside elsewhere, hence it lies unused. The heirs of the Padippura Veedu are domiciled there and have made substantial changes to the house to accommodate their present day needs. The houses that have come up more recently also follow the same logic.

An analysis by age reveals several aspects relating to the progression of events in a complex *marumakkathayam* family like the Paliam. The parent *tarawad* house is the oldest structure. Additions to the family resulted in the construction of the second unit, the Puthen Bungalow. Given the special status of the family, gate-houses and sentry posts were inevitable. The series of *nalukettus* that follow the Puthen Bungalow were an inevitable concomitant of following the principles of *marumakkathayam* and the significance attached to the institution of *tarawad*. Thus, one finds several subsequent secondary units scattered around the main *tarawad* house and the *kovilakam*.

The internal organization of the various structures, starting with the main *tarawad* house and followed by secondary units, also reveal a pattern similar in logic to the overall layout.



First Floor



Ground Floor

Fig. 4.20 Spatial Organization of Activities

PALIAM MAIN TARAWAD HOUSE, CHENDAMANGALAM

The main *tarawad* structure, by and large is a typical *nalukettu*, as decreed in the *thatchusastras* (see Fig. 4.20). The house was entered from the *thekkini*, from an open and recessed verandah, similar to a *poomukham* that one finds



Fig. 4.21 Main *Tarawad* House

in later *nalukettus*. Adjoining it were three rooms that served as guest bed rooms. Beyond the front verandah, which was also the realms of public space, was a large living space around the *nadumuttam*. This was also the main ceremonial and ritualistic space when the occasion demanded. In the *vadakkini* were the kitchen and related spaces, the ritualistic “seclusion room”, the northern outdoor exit (*vadakottu vazhi*), and some bedrooms. West of the living room, in the *padinjattini*, was the sacred room where the deities were kept, and the men’s sleeping rooms, separated from rest of the house by other transitional rooms. The *thekkini* and *padinjattini* were vertically extended and the stairs immediately adjacent to the main entrance led to the first floor. The first floor contained a number of bedrooms, approached through transitional spaces. Attached to the bedrooms were bathrooms and verandahs.

The internal structure is a classical example of a typical Nair *tarawad* with its quintessential features such as, the prominent living and ritualistic spaces in the ground floor and bedrooms in the first floor, the presence of the dark room and the northern exit immediately adjacent to it. The location of stairs next to the main entrance limited the access of visiting husbands to just the bedrooms on the first floor. The strict separation of male and female domains and the relegation of men’s sleeping quarters to the western edge of the house, were typical of the rules of interaction and avoidance discussed earlier. Its spatial disposition reveal its minimal connectivity to the daily cycle of the house. The predominance of women-oriented spaces underline the position of women in matters of

inheritance and division of labor, as well as the relation between women and the daily cycle of the family, and the female-centered religious and ritualistic cosmology of the community (as seen in Fig. 4. 23). The presence of guest rooms are explained by the special status of the family.

From the set of bedrooms on the first floor, it is easy to assume that five households must have occupied the first floor (refer Fig. 4.22). The bedrooms were fairly self-contained units by themselves, in that, attached to them were living spaces bathrooms and verandahs. The little shrine attached to the house, along with the prayer room were the focus of 'the religious' in the daily cycle. Originally, the kitchen was functional. However, with increased family size, when the *oottupura* was completed the functions of the kitchen were shifted. The level of publicness is immediately discernible. The front verandah was the realm of public space. The living spaces, the guest rooms, the kitchen spaces were semi-public. The men's rooms, the bedrooms, the ritualistic dark room and the prayer room were the user-specific private areas (Fig. 4.24).

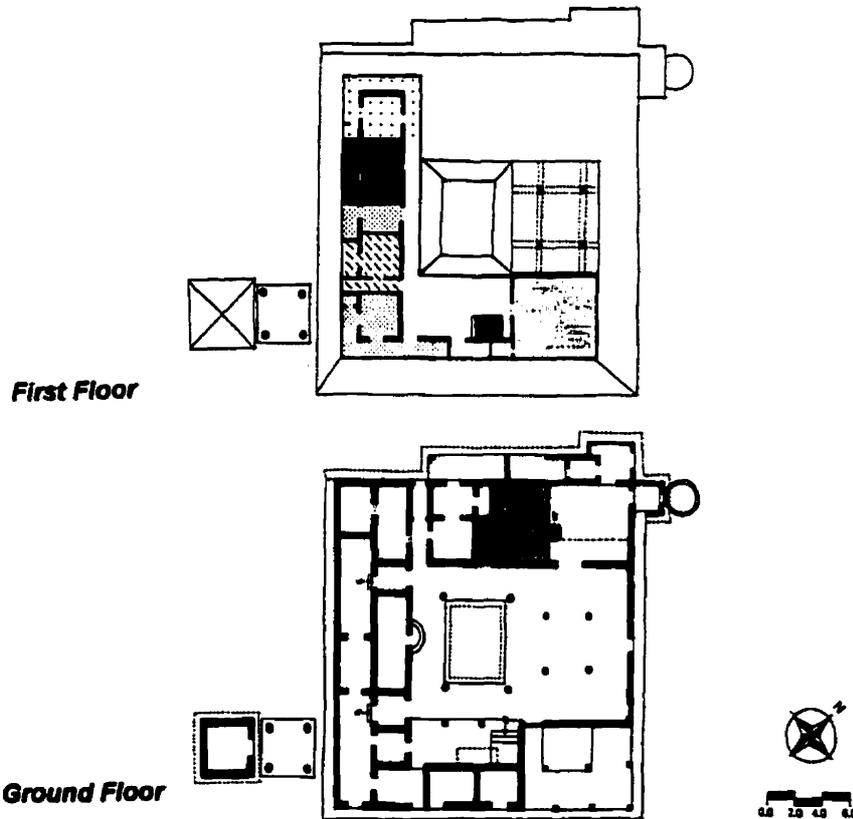
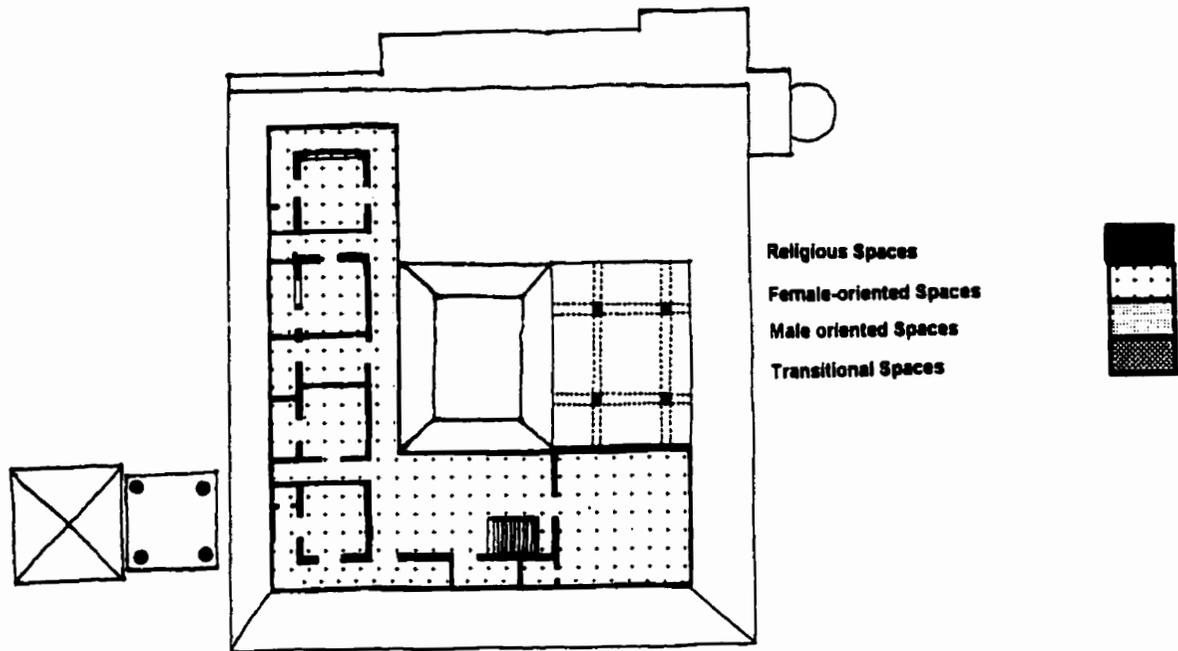
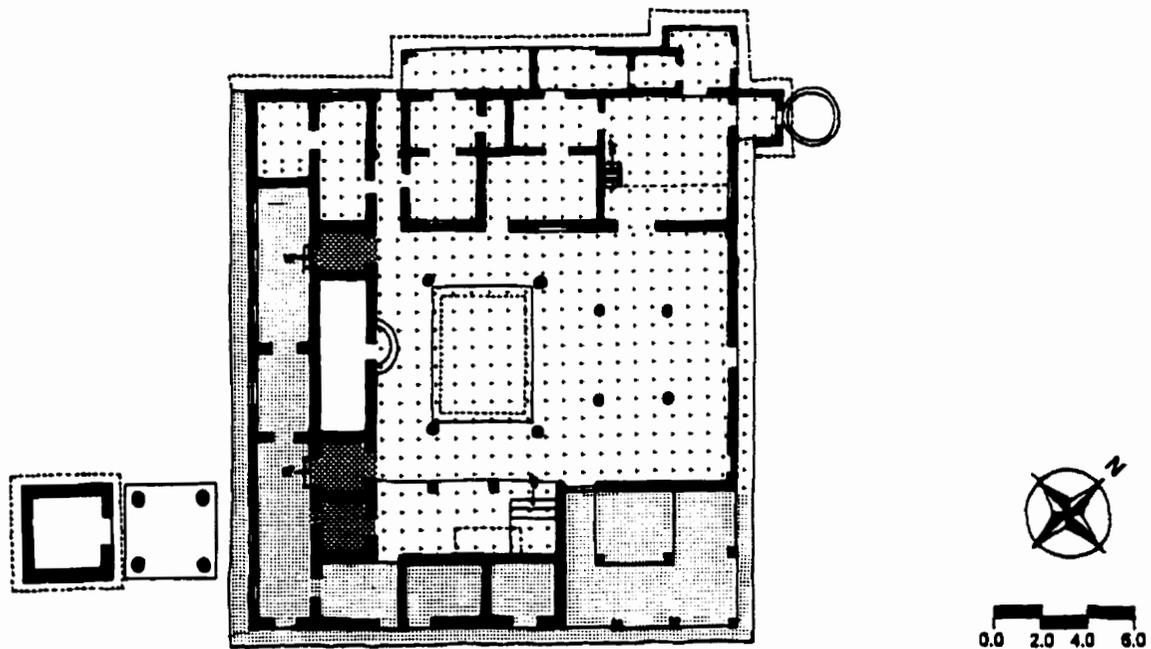


Fig. 4.22 Spaces Associated with Individual Women-headed Households



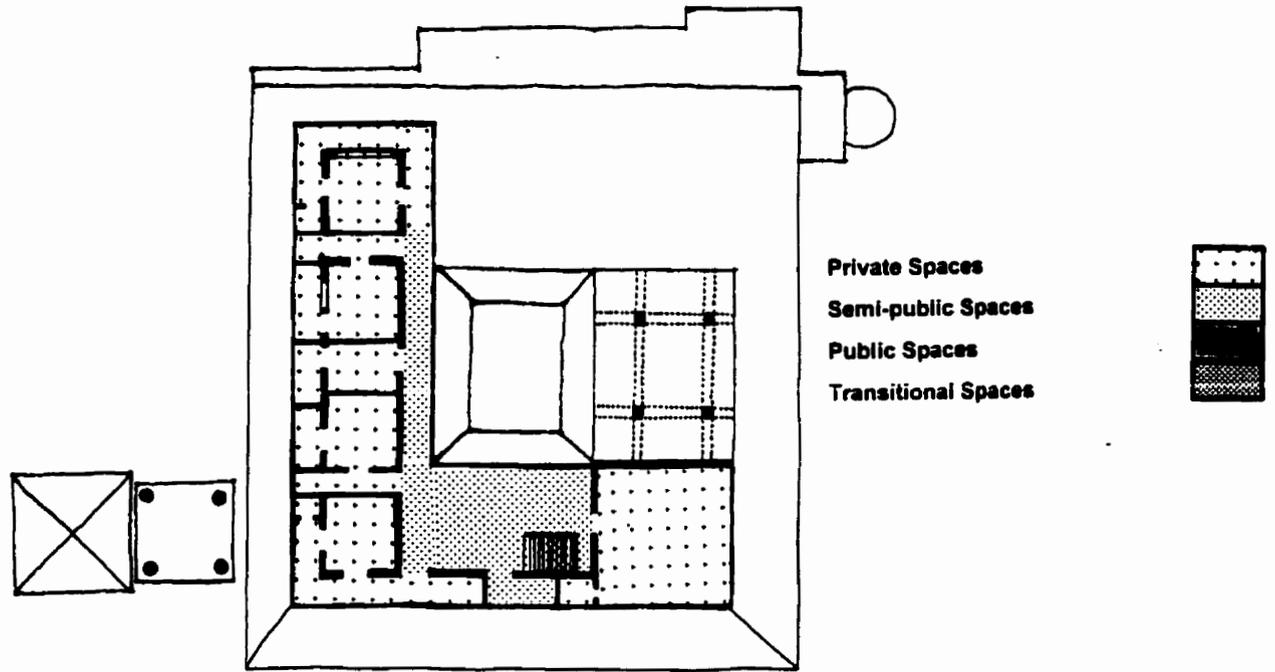
First Floor



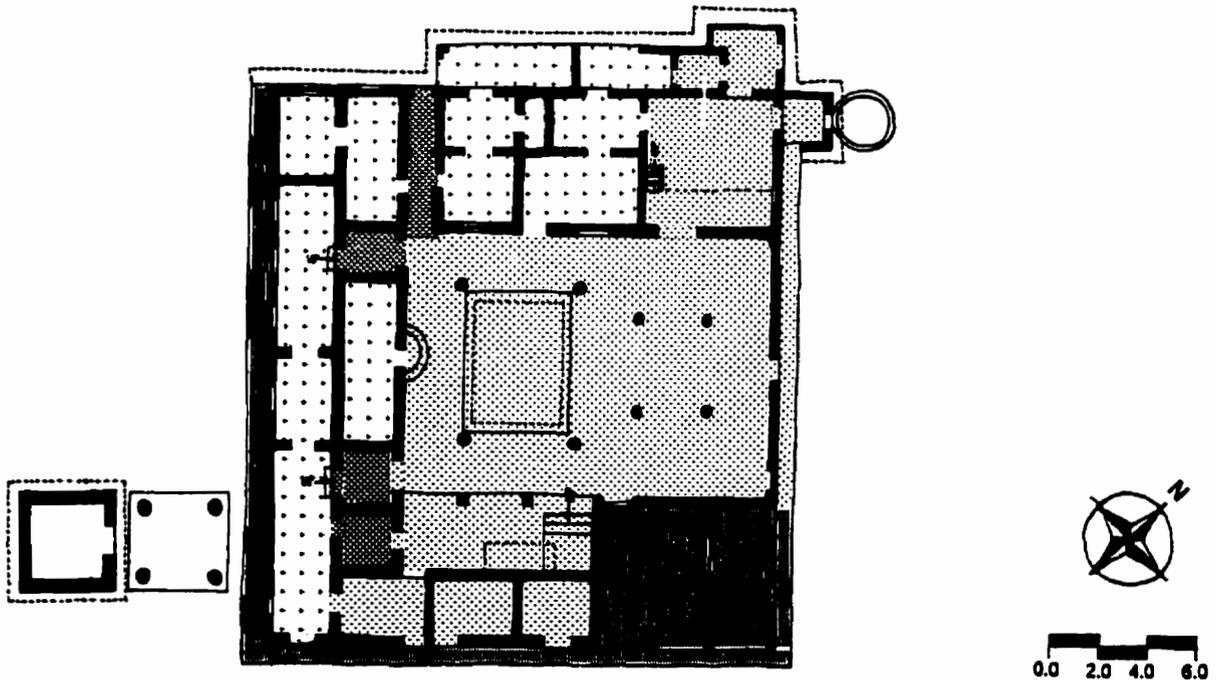
Ground Floor

Fig. 4.23 Gender Division of Spaces

PALIAM MAIN TARAWAD HOUSE, CHENDAMANGALAM



First Floor



Ground Floor

Fig. 4.24 Level of Publicness of Spaces

PALIAM MAIN TARAWAD HOUSE, CHENDAMANGALAM

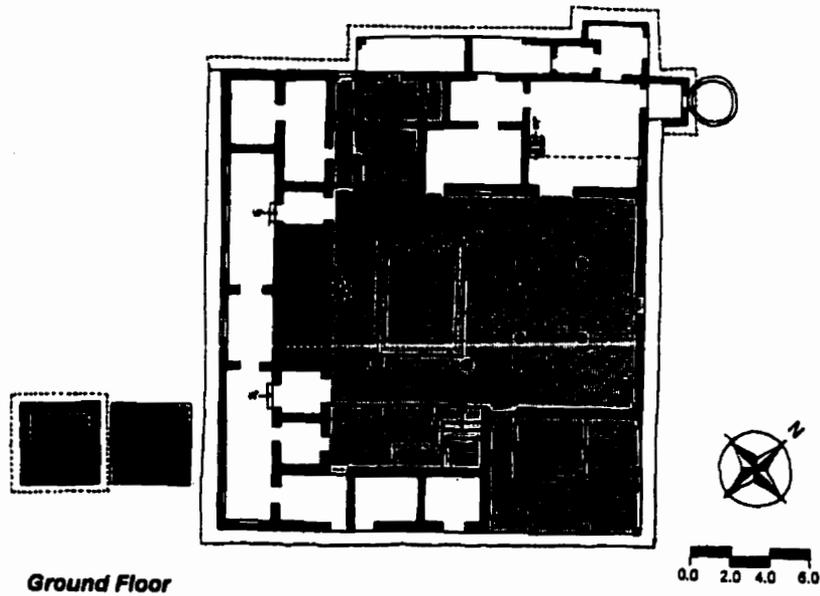


Fig. 4.25 Ceremonial and Ritualistic Core

Puthen Bungalow: The construction of the Puthen Bungalow was a response to the increased number of households. This response, in the form of an entirely new unit, was an due to the considerable resources at the disposal of the *tarawad*. In its morphology, Puthen Bungalow differed from the main *tarawad* house in several



Fig. 4.26 Puthen Bungalow

respects. First of all, the house has the form of an incomplete *nalukettu*, with no courtyard. The spatial dynamic is centered around a number of bedrooms and their accompanying living, storage and transitional spaces. The domains of each descent group or household is easily discernible from the plan (see Fig. 4. 28).

The house faces east and was entered from a front verandah. Succeeding the front verandah were a set of transitional spaces that led to bedrooms, four each on the ground and first floors. A verandah that ran all along the northern and southern sides of the house, was enclosed in the early 1970s by the present residents.

The location of the stair at the rear side of the house has to be seen in conjunction with the location of other egresses. A closer analysis reveals that, according to the original scheme all bedrooms on the ground floor were approachable from outside. The position of the stair adjacent to the exit at the rear thus ensured that visiting husbands access could reach the first floor without affecting the privacy of the households on the ground floor. Unlike the main *tarawad* house, living spaces, ritualistic and religious spaces, kitchen-related spaces and men's rooms are absent, or inconsequential when represented (as depicted in Fig. 4. 27), underlying the importance of the main *tarawad* house in the set up of the institution *tarawad*. The spatial arrangement excluded men of the family from any kind of control of these spaces. The verandah at the main entry was the only public domain (refer Fig. 4. 29).

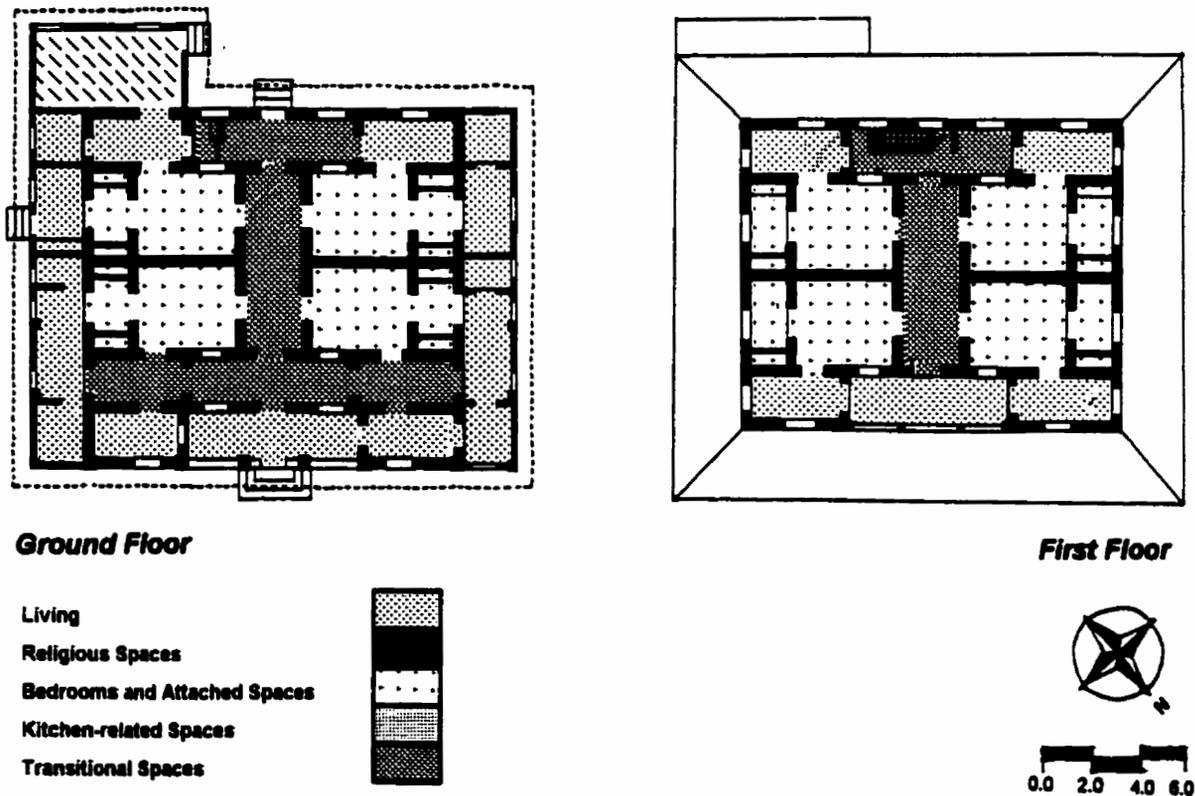
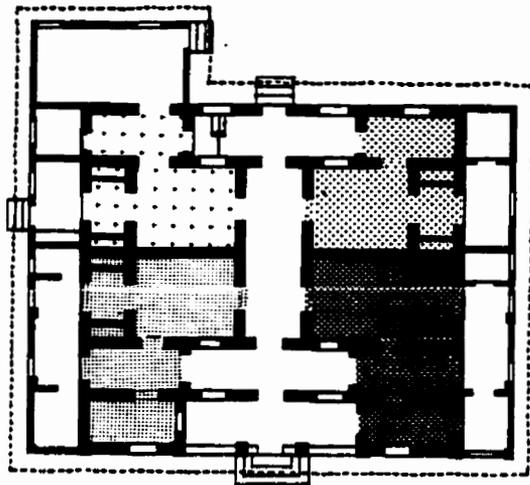
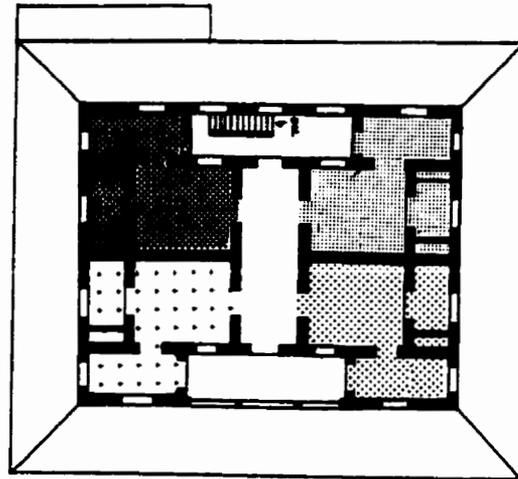


Fig. 4.27 Spatial Organization of Activities



Ground Floor



First Floor

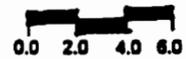
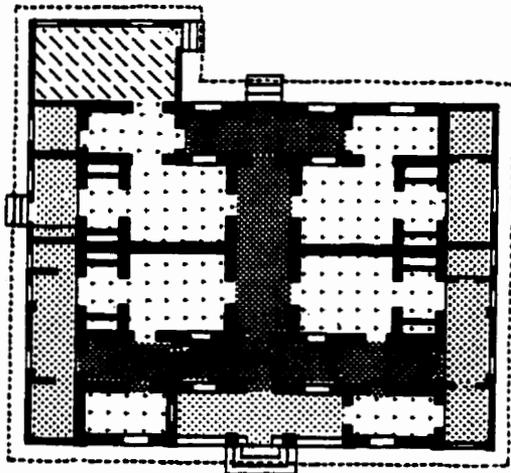
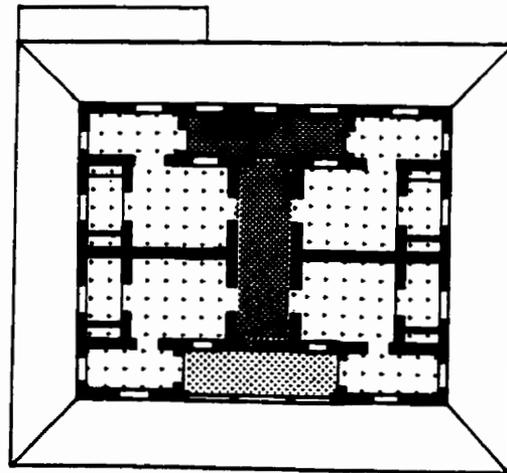


Fig. 4.28 Spaces Associated with Individual Women-headed Households



Ground Floor

- Private Spaces
- Semi-public Spaces
- Public Spaces
- Transitional Spaces



First Floor



Fig. 4.29 Level of Publicness of Spaces

PUTHEN BUNGALOW - PALIAM TARAWAD, CHENDAMANGALAM

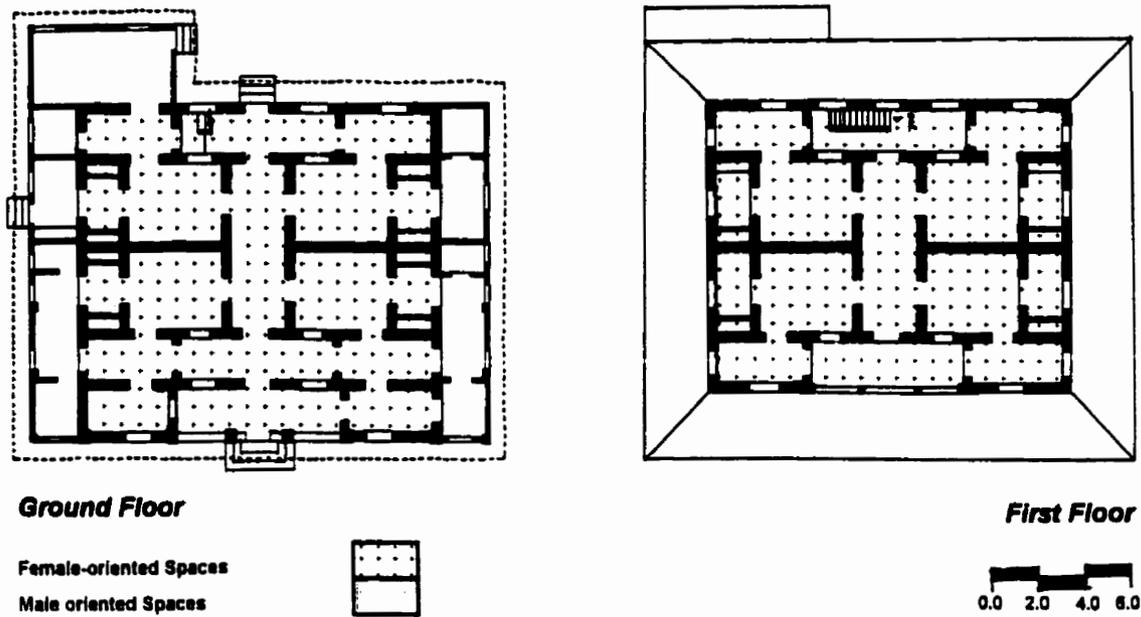


Fig. 4.30 Gender Division of Spaces - Puthen Bungalow

Other later houses at Paliam also follow more or less the same pattern as Puthen Bungalow. The overall scheme was representative of a typical feudal Nair *tarawad*, with considerable resources at its disposal. What makes the pattern interesting was its strict adherence to the matrilineal system and the progression in terms of the expansion of households and housing units, all operating under the umbrella of the *tarawad* set up.

4.4.3 Kelamangalath *Tarawad*, Ernakulam

The Kelamangalath *tarawad* lies in the heart of the Ernakulam, the mainland part of the city of Cochin. Ernakulam was part of the erstwhile princely state of Cochin. The city of Cochin is located roughly south of center in the linear lay of the state of Kerala.

Although not commanding resources at a scale that Paliam possessed, Kelamangalath *tarawad* was nevertheless, in the bygone days, a moderately well-to-do Nair *tarawad*, feudal in character, having its economic base on landed property that was leased to agricultural tenants. The history of the *tarawad* has it that, once upon a time as many as one hundred and fifty people resided in the *tarawad* house. According to the present heir of the *tarawad* house, men of the family never worked; the *tarawad* relied mostly on its landed resources for its sustenance and continuance.

The first wrangles for partition arose early in this century. By the 1920s the relations between the members of the *tarawad* had become so embittered that several of them resorted to litigation for partition of the *tarawad* properties. Thus, at the behest of the court, *tarawad* properties were placed under receiver administration, whereby a court-appointed receiver managed the common properties and discharged the economic obligations of the family. Later, when partition was effected by the courts, most of the landed properties were apportioned to the women of the family, going by the traditionally prevalent practices of *marumakkathayam* system and the principles of Marumakkathayam Law. The present denizens of the *tarawad* came to be in possession of the house by virtue of this court decision. The present residents are a middle-aged lady, two of her three daughters, and their children. The husbands of the two daughters are presently working abroad, this accounting for their present domicile status at their maternal house.

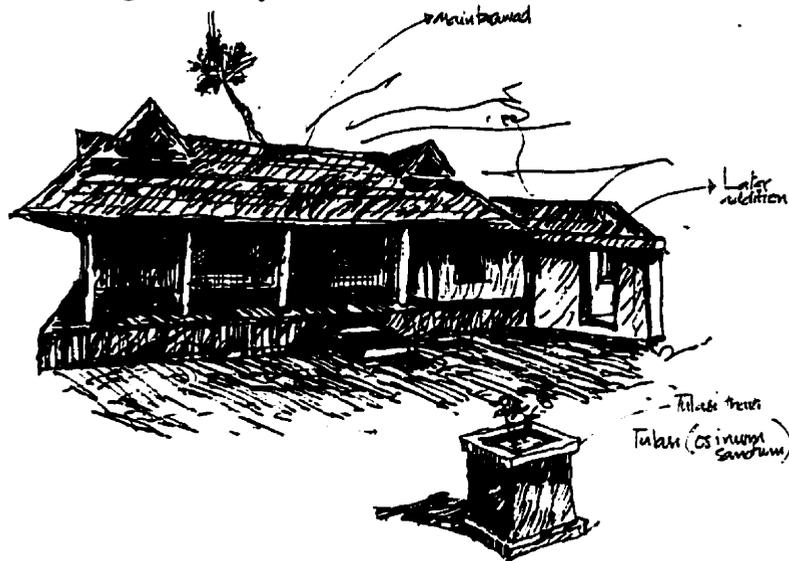


Fig. 4.31 Kelamangalath *Tarawad* - Facade

The core of the *tarawad* house is a *nalukettu*, with all the four *shalas* well-defined. The house is entered from the *vadakkini*. The main living and ceremonial spaces, behind the front verandah, are located in the *vadakkini* and the *kizhakkini*. The bedrooms are located in the *thekkini*, as was the practice in most Nair *nalukettus*. They are entered from the main living space through a transitional passage. Bedrooms have small storage rooms attached to them. The *thekkini* also has the *nilavara* and a prayer room housing the deities. The seclusion room and another bedroom form the *padinjattini* (refer Fig. 4.33).

The pattern so far described is almost generic of Nair houses. However, increases in family size, in this case has elicited a response in the form of additions to the main *tarawad* structure (refer Fig. 4. 32). This increment is towards west of the *padinjattini* and is in the form of three *shalas* enclosing a courtyard. The increment does not follow the principles of *thatchusastras*. A long and open passage, dividing the courtyard into two, leads to the kitchen and related spaces on the western end. The northern and southern *shalas* of the extension were basically sleeping quarters. It is difficult to be unqualified if these were either, women's bedrooms or men's sleeping quarters since, there have been several changes to the original additions over time. However, from the accounts of the present owners of the house, original addition was in the form of men's sleeping rooms along the northern *shala* and women's bedrooms along the southern *shala*. As per this scheme, the men's rooms were approached directly from outside and the bedrooms, from inside, through the core *nalukettu*. Today, both, northern and southern *shalas* have been rented out as separate houses.

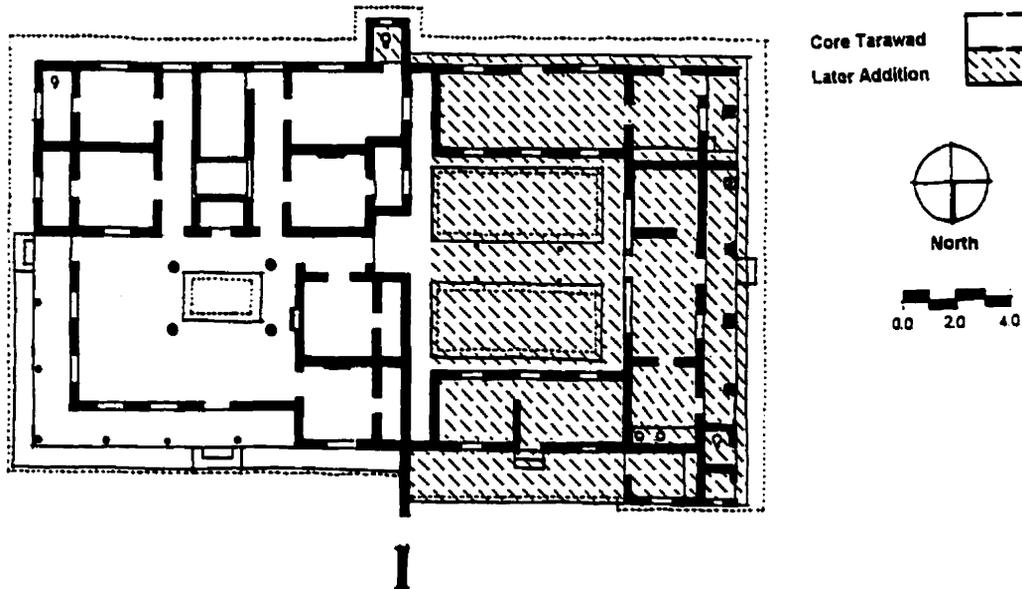


Fig. 4.32 Core *Tarawad* and Later Additions

These additions apart, originally there were other secondary units, a serpent grove, several bathing tanks, and a large and ornate gate-house at the entrance. However, all of them were subsequently pulled down or cleared to make way for new houses.

The spatial morphology embodies the inevitable characteristics associated with matrilineal Nair families: the codes of publicness and privacy, and the dialectics of male and female, and corporate group and individual households categorizations. From the gamut of the response, in the form of an addition to the existing house, certain features are noteworthy. First of all, the extensions were not core living, religious, or ceremonial spaces. Two, they were private in nature. And finally, since the *kizhakkini* and *vadakkini* were religious and ritualistic in character, the extensions were made on the *padinjattini*.

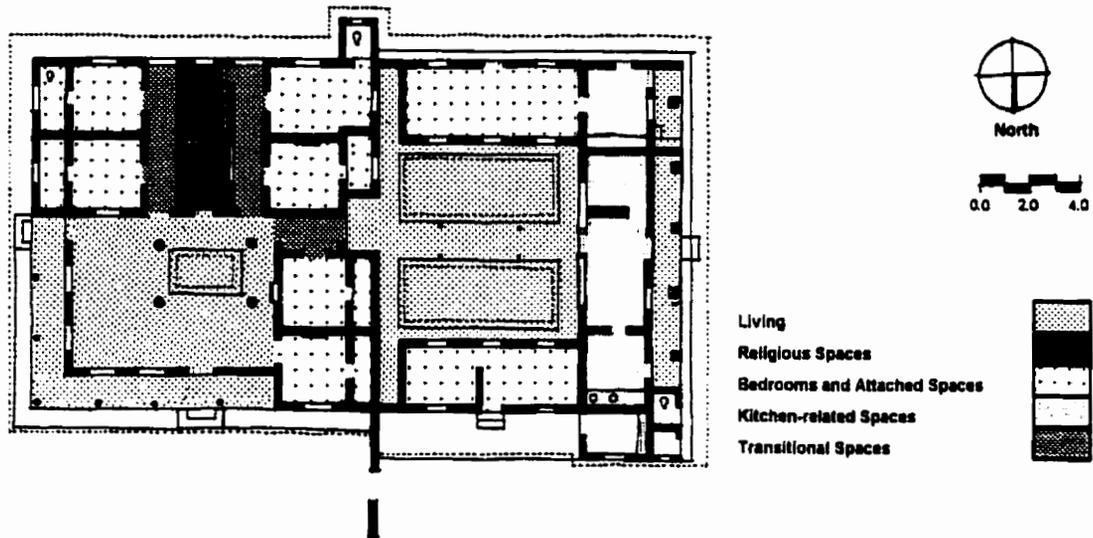


Fig. 4.33 Spatial Organization of Activities

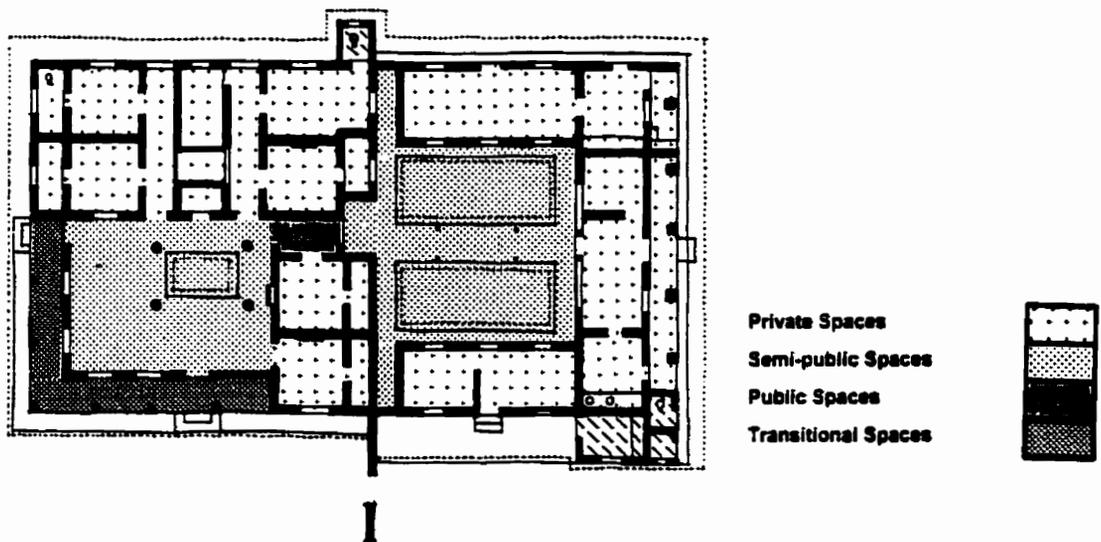


Fig. 4.34 Level of Publicness of Spaces

Other general rules and prescriptions associated with any matrilineal Nair household (and as seen in the earlier case studies) and their spatial correlates find expression in this case also.

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CONCLUSION

The journey of discovery is almost over, a journey that introduced us to a very unique social order and its equally intriguing domestic architecture. It is time now to encapsulate the major conclusions drawn from this study and then point to the directions to look ahead. These conclusions are framed particularly in the background of the research question: “How has the unique matrilineal system of descent and kinship structure influenced the complex house morphology of the Nair *tarawads* of Malabar?”

5.1 KEY CONCLUSIONS

The key conclusion coming from this study is that the spatial organization of the traditional Nair *tarawad* was profoundly influenced by the unique matrilineal system of descent and consanguinity of the Nairs.

First of all, although the rules governing the spatial organization of the Nair *nalukettus* were decreed by the Hindu texts of architecture, the *thatchusastras*, in practice, overlaid on it was the rich and intricate Nair social complex. This is evident from the distinction between the typical Nair *tarawads* and the Namboodiri *illams*, that were also built according to the same canons of *thatchusastras*. The perpetuity of the institution *tarawad* and the lives of its individual members were intertwined with the house and the larger complex within which they lived. The house became the physical place of living in the daily cycle, much like a layer of clothing over the skin. It was also the most enduring personification of the “holistic-and-ritually-significant corporate unit” *tarawad*, and in that role it fulfilled much beyond the functions day-to-day living. This entailed it to encompass certain dual roles, that sometimes appeared to be in contradiction with each other. Yet, this dualism becomes the driving force behind the spatial dynamic of the house. These dual roles, as reflected in the architecture of the typical *marumakkathayam* Nair house, are briefly summed up here:

- a. The ritualistic and ceremonial role, whereby the house became the setting for the elaborate ritualistic and, to a lesser extent, religious cosmology of the community. In fact, the main *tarawad* house was the symbolic ritualistic core.

Conjoined with this role, yet distinct and contrasting to it, was its function of being the physical space for the household members, in their daily cycle of activities, providing the space for living, sleeping, dining, child rearing, and so forth. Both took place in the same milieu and within the same spatial confines, and the spatial organization catered to this;

- b. The *tarawad* house being the physical symbol and providing the backdrop for the unity and corporateness of the institution *tarawad*, as well as the setting and space for the demonstration of clan's kin-solidarity, expressed through its numerous collective celebrations and rituals. At the same time, the privacy of individual households and members were critical, and the strict customs and rules governing this were spatially ensured;
- c. The temporal roles of the house, wherein it catered to the immediate life cycle of its inhabitants, yet transcended beyond that daily cycle, to a larger generational-cycle role, where the house extended from one generation to the next, and over several generations. The incrementalities and progression of spatial events happening to and within the housing complex exemplified this aspect. The latter role was also closely connected to the *tarawad* house being the most enduring physical symbol of the institution *tarawad*;
- d. And finally, catering to the unique gender roles, the house became the first, among materials and objects, to be transferred as inheritance to women of the community. The house also became the primary setting for reinforcing spatially the unique position that women of the community held.

5.2 FURTHER RESEARCH

The study, as mentioned at the outset, does not profess to be exhaustive in its exploration of relationship between kinship and space, and gender and space in the context of the Nair *tarawads* of Malabar. Its intention is to build upon and add to an already growing volume of research and literature in this area. However, it is also

important to follow-up this with further research and investigation in certain key topic areas; these include:

- a. Detailed investigations on the exact nature and extent of latitude that Nair women experienced, in terms division of labor, control of resources, role of procreation and child rearing;
- b. Questions on the relative and absolute control over external spaces, both, those immediate to the house, and the larger domain of the *tarawad* that included farms and other estates;
- c. The first and second questions also impress upon us to the need to investigate in much greater detail the exact position and role of males, particularly of those males that were not in a position of authority or management, and spatial correlates of these positions and roles; and finally
- d. It will also be interesting to study the changes that the houses underwent progressively during the transition from joint families to nuclear families that were followed matrilineal communities.

Thus concludes this study of the domestic architecture of the Nairs of Malabar coast of India.

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