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ONAM
—A FESTIVAL OF KERALA

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FOREWORD

In my general Foreword to the Village Survey series of the 1961 Census publications, I have briefly explained how the idea of the Survey unfolded itself and developed between 1959 and 1961. Towards the end of 1961 several distinguished scholars were invited to write special monographs for the Village Survey series. At the same time, the Social Studies Section of the Registrar General's Office, headed by Dr. B. K. Roy Burman, undertook experiments in various types of social study. Dr. Roy Burman stimulated his colleagues and assistants to go into great depth over specific problems of social change. His object was, apart from striking new lines in methodology and designs of schedules, new methods of tabulation and cross-tabulation, new lines of correlating apparently unrelated fields of social phenomenon, to train his colleagues and assistants rigorously in the science of social investigation. He took a wide range of problems and even a wider geographical distribution of them, throughout India.

This monograph on Onam - A Festival of Kerala, is a testimony to Dr. B. K. Roy Burman's abilities in directing research and to the staunchness and probity with which the investigation was conducted, analysed and reported upon by Shri A. M. Kurup and Shri Baby Jacob. This study has added to our knowledge of certain aspects of the cultural traditions of Kerala and I wish to record my acknowledgements to my colleagues.

New Delhi
November 10, 1966.

Asok Mitra
Registrar General, India.

PREFACE

Charming Kerala, the southernmost State of India has many attractions. One of the most important attractions is the colourful festival of Onam, which is performed in the Malayalam month of Chingam (August-September), by all sections of the people, irrespective of caste or creed.

The festival is related to an ancient myth. Mahabali, an Asura King, is supposed to have ruled over this land in the past. The Devas manoeuvred to oust him from his Kingdom but he was allowed to return once a year and see whether his subjects, were prosperous and happy. During Onam, the people of Kerala, spare no pains to show that they are prosperous and happy, so that their King who loved them so much, may feel happy, when he visits them.

The present State of Kerala consists of (i) ex-princely State of Travancore except Cape Comerin district and Shenkotah Taluk. (The last two areas were transferred to Madras State in 1956) (ii) ex-princely State of Cochin (iii) Malabar district (tranferred from Madras State in 1956) (iv) Kasargod Taluk (transferred from South Kanara district of Mysore in 1956). The people of Kerala speak Malayalam language. But there are certain areas in the borders where Tamil and Kannada are also spoken. Besides, people belonging to different language groups live in the plantation areas of Kerala. Over and above these, there are certain castes and communities in Kerala who have tradition of migration from Tamil areas and who are considered to be Tamilian castes and communities, though they have equal command over Malayalam language.

The traditional social structure of Kerala is marked by different ranges of social distances among the different segments of the population. Even today various institutions including modern political parties, reflect their caste or community background.

Another important aspect of the social situation in Kerala, is the rapid change that is taking place in the family complex. The classical matrilineal joint family organization is now a dying out institution. Not only nuclear family has come to be recognised as the norm, but also the ethos of family organisation has switched over from mother-right principles to father-right principles.

The facts stated above, pose a number of vantage points for observation in connection with the study of Onam.

1. Whether Onam was performed in a uniform manner in all areas which now constitute Kerala? If not, whether at present there is a trend towards uniformity?

2. If Onam was performed in an uniform manner in all areas even before their integration into a socio-political unit, how was that uniformity attained?

3. Whether at present Onam continues to be performed in the same manner as before, in Cape Comorin and Shenkottah, which have been transferred to Madras?

4. Whether Onam is performed in the same manner by different language groups, castes and communities? If not, what are the distinctive features of each? Whether different castes retain their distinctive features even after their conversion to Christianity?

5. Is there a common model which each segment of the population strives to follow? If so, how is this model derived?

6. With change in the ethos of family organisation from mother-right principles to father-right principles, it is likely that there would be some shift of roles of different kins during Onam. What is the nature of such shifts?

The study design was prepared keeping the above questions in view. Interview with the help of schedules, case studies, group discussions, participant observation and library research constituted the tools of the study. A complete set of the schedules canvassed in connection with this study is furnished at appendix III. A statement showing the names of the places where the schedules were canvassed, and names and numbers of the schedules canvassed at each of these places, is furnished at appendix IV.

It is to be noted that for canvassing the family schedule, purposive selection was made to represent (a) Hindus, Muslims and Christians, (b) different castes among the Hindus, (c) Some tribal communities, (d) immigrants from outside the State, (e) various occupations, (f) upper middle and lower economic strata and (g) joint and simple families.

In all 66 families were covered.

The field investigation in Kerala and the library research in connection with this study were made by Sri Kurup. The report is mainly based on the data collected by him. Some supplementary observations in Delhi and Kanpur were made by Sri Jacob. His observations have been included in appendix II.

Most of the photos included in this monograph were supplied by the Kerala Information Department. I am grateful to them for their kind co-operation. I am also grateful to M/s Vaman Bros, Cannanore for helping us with five photos. Five more photos were taken by S/Sri Amar Singh and K. C. Sharma,

the staff photographers of this office. It is a great pleasure to acknowledge their contribution. A separate statement acknowledging the source for each photo has also been furnished.

The office bearers of Onam Celebration Committee, Kerala, particularly its Convenor Sri Prakkulam Bhassy deserve special thanks, for the co-operation that they rendered during the field investigation.

A number of reputed scholars of Kerala helped this investigation by their valuable advice. It is a great privilege for me to particularly mention the names of S/Sri Illumkulam Kunjan Pillai, Mahakavi G. Shankara Kurup, K. P. Kesava Menon, N. V. Krishna Varrier and P. A. Devassy.

Sri M. K. Devassy, Superintendent of Census Operations Kerala, was kind enough to give valuable advice to Sri Kurup during the field investigation. He also placed his vehicle at the disposal of Sri Kurup for some time. I am extremely grateful to him for his kind co-operation.

I am grateful to Shri K. D. Ballal, Central Tabulation Officer, Office of the Registrar General India, for taking special interest for getting the monograph printed in time. Shri Bani Singh, who ably helped him also deserves my thanks.

In the end, it is to be stated that but for the foresight and inspiring guidance of Sri A.Mitra, Registrar General, India, it would not have been possible to undertake study of this type, as an adjunct to the 1961 Census operations. I avail of this opportunity to express my gratefulness to him. I am also grateful to Sri A. Chandrasekhar, Officer on Special Duty, Office of the Registrar General India, for the understanding with which he has followed the progress of this project and given necessary encouragement.

B. K. Roy Burman

X

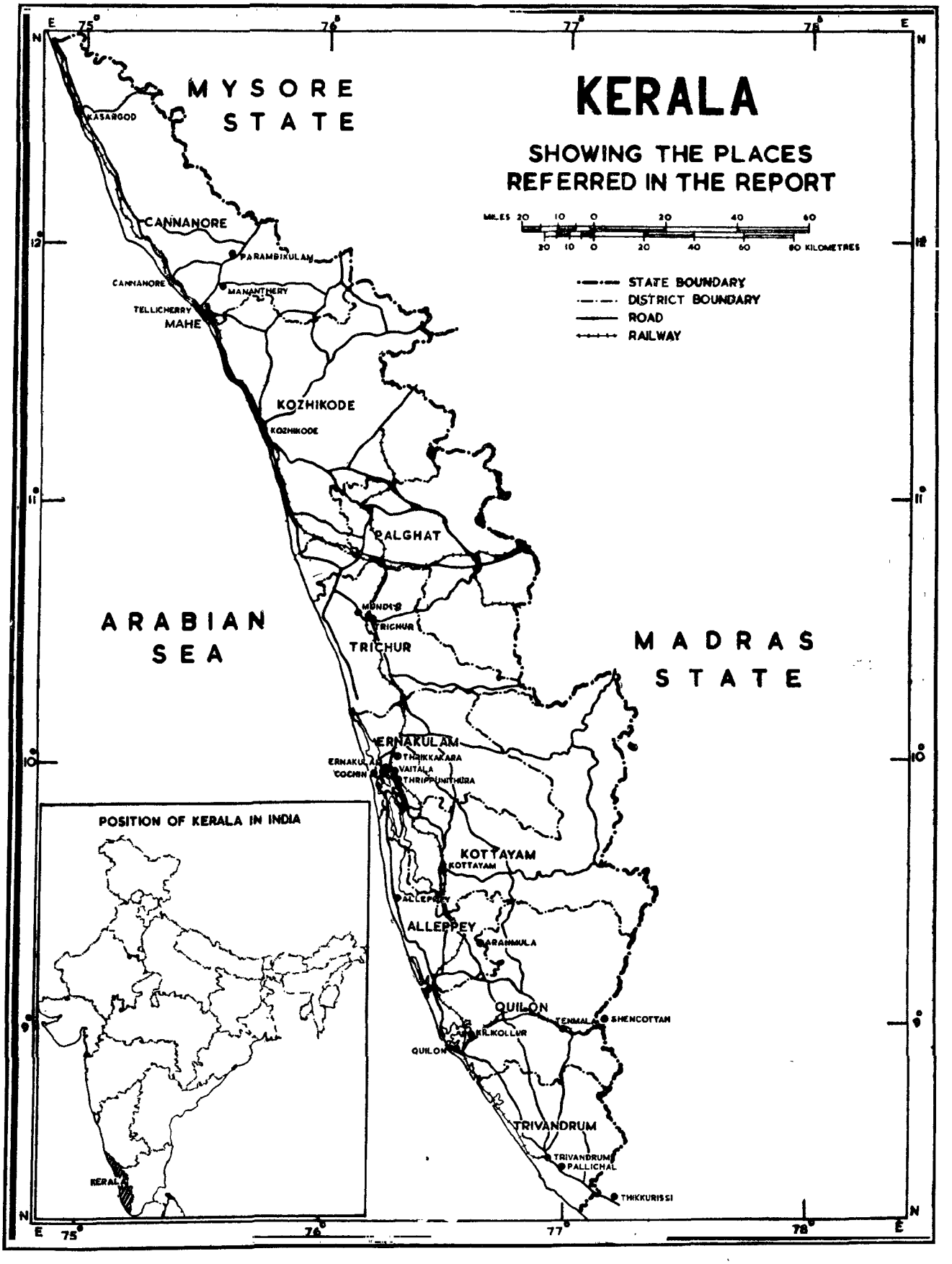
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KERALA
SHOWING THE PLACES REFERRED IN THE REPORT
MYSORE STATE
MADRAS STATE
ARABIAN SEA
MILES 20 10 0 20 40 60
30 10 0 20 40 60 80 KILOMETRES
STATE BOUNDARY
DISTRICT BOUNDARY
ROAD
RAILWAY
KASARGOD
CANNANORE
PARAMBIKULAM
CANNANORE
MANANTHERY
TELLICHERRY
MAHE
KOZHIKODE
KOZHIKODE
PALGHAT
MUNDUR
TRICHUR
TRICHUR
ERNAKULAM
THRIKKAKARA
VAITALA
ERNAKULAM
COCHIN
THRIPPUNITHURA
KOTTAYAM
KOTTAYAM
ALLEPPEY
ALLEPPEY
ARAMMULA
QUILON
TENMALA
SHENCOTTAH
KILIKOLLUR
QUILON
TRIVANDRUM
TRIVANDRUM
PALLICHAL
THIKKURISSI
POSITION OF KERALA IN INDIA
KERALA
E 75°
76°
77°
78° E
N
12°
11°
10°
9°

CHAPTER I

THE PROLOGUE

It was second September 1962. On this day was to be performed the "Atham" celebration, to usher in Onam, the most important festival of Kerala.

Since early morning thousands of persons from far and near were hurriedly proceeding towards Thripunithura—the temple town and the seat of Cochin royal family, to witness the ceremonial handing over of the Onam flag and the Onam torch, by the Governor of the State to the Onam Celebration Committee.

The lighting of the Onam torch marked the beginning of a colourful procession led by over a dozen caprisoned elephants. Behind the elephants was the palace cavalry, followed by units of National Cadet Corps, Auxiliary Cadet Corps., Home Guards, Boy Scouts, Girl guides, and a group of other girls with lighted plates on their hands. They were followed by Navy and Police band parties and other band parties playing musical instruments like Nadaswaram (a type of wind-instrument), Panchavadyam (An orchestra consisting of five musical instruments), Chenda (a kind of drum), Stapa (an indigenous musical instrument) and drums. Behind them was a cultural pageant consisting of 36 tableaus, carried on vehicles of different types, depicting the myths and legends associated with the Onam festival as well as the various aspects of the life and culture of Kerala.

For a fortnight from this day, the people of Kerala would celebrate Onam as a great occasion when everybody should be happy and make others happy, for the sake of an ancient king of legendary past.

The legend* connected with Onam runs as follows. Bali was the grandson of Prahlad. He ruled his kingdom wisely and well to the satisfaction of his people. Subsequently, he decided to expand the jurisdiction of his kingdom and with this end in view he began to perform a great sacrifice. This news worried Indra, the King of the gods, for he feared that Bali would ultimately lay his hands on the celestial kingdom and would drive away the gods from their abodes. Indra consulted his preceptor Brahaspati who confirmed his fears and added that, as Bali's sacrifice had gone too far, nothing could be done to prevent his conquest; the gods therefore would be well advised to leave their kingdom. This was done.

Afterwards Vishnu, one of the high-gods of Hindu trinity, was approached by the gods to come to their rescue. He was moved by their penances and prayers and conceived a device to get rid of Bali. He took birth as the son of Brahaspati (according to a different version he is said to have been born as the son of the sage Kashyapa). The child was 'Vamana' (aeformed dwarf). When he grew to maturity he went to Bali to beg for alms. Bali, famous for his generosity, told Vamana that he could have anything he desired. Vamana asked for three paces of land. His request was granted. Vamana then grew to inconceivable proportions and measured the whole of Bali's kingdom in two paces. There was no more land for the third pace. Bali then showed his head to Vamana and asked him to measure the third pace from his head. Vamana kept his foot on Bali and trampled him to the bowels of the earth.

Bali was so much attached to his subjects that before being trampled to the nether region the only request he made to Vamana, was to be allowed to visit his lost kingdom and his people once in a year. Vamana agreed to this. Onam is considered to be the period when the hapless king visits his people, to gain the succour of life, from the happiness of the latter.

Ten days before Onam the people start making preparations for the reception of Bali. Flower-carpets are laid from the 'Atham' day and on the eve of Onam. 'Onathappan' a symbol of Bali is worshipped. During the Onam days, the people throughout the length and breadth of Kerala go on feasting and merry making, so that their beloved king may feel happy to be with his people.

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* Epics, Myths and Legends of India, Thomas, P—(11th edition) Bombay, pp. 27-28.

Onam takes place in the month of 'Chingom' (August-September), the first month of the Malayalam era. This is the spring season in Kerala, when the ravages of the monsoon are over and the flora are in their full bloom. In many parts of the state harvesting is also over by this time and the people are in a mood of relaxation.

As already noted, in 1962, Atham, the ceremony ushering in of Onam, took place on 2nd September. Actual Onam festival however started on 10th September and lasted upto 15th September. During this period the Government Offices, Educational Institutions, business houses and factories remained closed so that the people could freely participate in the festival.

Before furnishing the details of the festival, it is proposed to describe the Socio-cultural setting of Kerala, with particular reference to Onam, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

SOCIO-CULTURAL SETTING OF KERALA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ONAM

Kerala and its people

Kerala, the smallest state (except Nagaland) in the Indian Union, is situated in the South Western part of the Indian Peninsula, between 8°20′ to 12°50′ North latitude and 74°50′ to 77°24′ East longitude. It has an area of 15002 sq. miles (38,855 sq. KM.) and the total population according to 1961 Census is 16, 903, 715 comprising 8, 361, 927 males and 8, 541, 788 females.[1] So the density of population works out to be 1,127 per square mile. The percentage of literacy in the State is 46.8. For administrative purposes the State is divided into nine districts viz. Cannanore, Kozhikode, Palghat, Trichur, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alleppy, Quilon and Trivandrum. Trivandrum is the capital of the State and Calicut, Alleppy, Ernakulam, Quilon, Mattancherry, Palghat, Trichur and Kottayam are the other important municipal towns of the State. Malayalam is the lingua franca of the State and 95.04%[2] of the total population of the State speak this language. Tamil is spoken by 3.12% of the total population—the concentration of the Tamil speakers being in the areas adjoining the State of Madras. Kannada is spoken by .37% of the people and Kannada speakers are mostly concentrated in the areas adjoining Mysore State. 1.47% of the people speak other languages like Konkini, Tulu etc.

Legend and history about Kerala

There is a myth, current among the people of Kerala, that the land to the west of Western Ghats starting from Gokarnam (present Karwar) to kanya Kumari (Cape Comerin) was regained from Arabian sea, by Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. Parasuram's father Jamadagni was killed by the Kshatriyas. In retaliation Parasuram carried out twenty one expeditions for the extermination of the Kshatriyas. After that, for washing off the sin of killing so many persons, he began to donate large tracts of land to the Brahmins. In course of time there was no land left at his disposal. He then heaved his divine battle axe (Parasu) in the sea, from Gokarnam and it fell at Kanya Kumari. The space in between emerged from the sea and he donated the same to the Brahmins. Roughly this territory comprises the present state of Kerala. Thus to the people of Kerala, their land has got an aura of sacredness around it.

Coming over to the historical period it is found that around first century A. D. Kerala was ruled by 'Chera' dynasty. There were two other major kingdoms in India, south of the Krishna at this time. They are 'Chola' and 'Pandya' kingdoms. In spite of the fact that they were different political entities, there was some amount of cultural unity among these kingdoms. During the early centuries of the Christian era, Tamil was the language of all the three kingdoms; Malayalam as a distinct language had not yet come into existence.

The earliest historic evidences[3] indicate that the first ruler of the kingdom of Kerala was 'Adicheraman Perumal. He belonged to 'Bana' dynasty and his capital was at 'Thrikkarur Kara' or present Thrikkakara. Later on, during the time of 'Cheran the Great, the capital was shifted to Thiruvanjikulam. He had earlier annexed the adjoining territories of Kadanad, Nilgiri, Mysore, Coimbatore, Selem and Konganad to his Kingdom. One of his successors, after his death, broke away and established a separate kingdom comprising 'Konganad' and 'Karnatakam'. With the death of Cheran the Great, the 'Adichera' dynasty was very much weakened. The stone inscriptions clearly indicate that when Magasthanis visited India, he found the Adichera Kingdom in its decay and disintegration.

Gradually the power was vested in the hands of a few royal advisors. Towards the later part of Chera

1 Census of India 1961, Vol. I, India, Pt. II-A (ii) Union Primary Census Abstracts, pp. LVIII.
2 Census of India 1961 Vol. I, India, Part II-C (ii) Language Tables pp. 6-9.
3 Saidu Muhammed, P. A. pp. 6-9.

dynasty, the Kingdom was divided into a number of semi-independent principalities like 'Tulunadu', 'Kolanadu', 'Kottayam', 'Kurubranadu', Eranadu', 'Valluvanadu', Venmalanadu,' 'Odanadu' and Venadu,' which in their turn were administered through innumerable feudal chiefs.

Thrikkakara temple[1], around which revolves the history of Onam, was established by the fortieth Perumal during the early 7th century A. D. The golden era of Chera reign came to a close with Cheraman Perumal, who is believed to have distributed the kingdom among his chieftains, embraced Islam and left for Mecca.[2] The independent chieftains soon developed antagonism against one another and were always at logger heads. In course of time, however, these principalities were consolidated by the strongest among them and thus emerged the Kingdoms of Travancore, Cochin and the dominion of the Zamorin. By this time the English people were also gaining importance in trade as well as in polity in India. It did not take much time for them to have their sovereignity established over the Zamorin's dominion, which they ultimately integrated with Madras Presidency. Cochin and Travancore, though had their rulers, were under the political control of the British Government till the independence of India.

After independence the two princely States of Travancore and Cochin were integrated to form the State of Travancore-Cochin with effect from 1st July 1949.[3] Later on the present State of Kerala was formed under the State Reorganisation Act, 1956. The present State of Kerala, comprises (i) the ex-princely State of Travancore except Cape Comerin district and Shenkota Taluk (ii) the ex-princely State of Cochin (iii) Malabar district (transferred from Madras State) and (iv) Kasargod Taluk (transferred from South Kanara district of Mysore).

Till its integration into the general polity of independent India, the political structure of Kerala was very much feudal in charater. The feudal chiefs enjoyed enormous power under the protection and patronage of the native rulers. They, in their turn, helped the rulers in the collection of revenue, administration of justice and preservation of law and order, in their respective areas. The units of administration were 'Desams' or 'Amsams'. These units almost coincide with the present-day administrative and revenue units of villages.

As mentioned earlier, the lingua-franca of the region during the Chera period was a form of Tamil. But with the diminishing power of the Chera kings the influence of Tamil also waned. Thus began to take shape Malayalam, which is now the language of the land. The immigration of the Nambuthiri Brahmins to the area in the century was greatly responsible for the origin and development of the Malayalam language. Later, the economic developments attracted the Tamil speaking migrants from the neighbouring State of Madras. Tamil speaking people are thus met with in every walk of life, more particularly in the plantation industry. They, no doubt, speak Malayalam as well. A good number of people of the areas adjoining Mysore State speak Kannada.

Castes & Communities

Kerala, from time immemorial, is a land of many castes and communities. The Brahmins are at the top of the social hierarchy among the Hindus. They belong to two distinct segments,—viz. the Tamil Brahmins and the Malayalam or Nambuthiri Brahmins. The Tamil Brahmins are supposed to have migrated from Madras; they speak Tamil at home. The mother tongue of the Nambuthiri Brahmins is Malayalam and they are supposed to be the descendants of the Brahmins to whom 'Parasurama' had distributed land. Till recently, they formed the bulk of the feudal lords of the state. As a result of the previleges enjoyed by them in the past, even today they play a prominent part in the power polity of their respective areas. Then come the Kshatriyas, who, mostly belong to the erstwhile ruling families. They are very small in number. One wonders how such a numerically small group of people could wield so much of power in the past. Next in importance are the Nairs. They once constituted the fighting class, though now they are mostly land holding agriculturists or agricultural labourers. They are also met with in other trades.

1 Researches into the early history of Kerala, (in Malayalam) A. Balakrishna Pillai, 1957, pp. 104.

2 There is difference of opinion among the historians about this. Some doubt whether Cheraman-Perumal, embraced Islam at all.

3 Under the Province and States (Absorption of Enclaves) Order, 1950, a few bits of territory were added to this State from Madras and a few enclaves were surrendered to Madras State with effect from 25th January 1950.

Ezhavas, supposed to be an immigrant community, comes next. Traditionally toddy tappers, the Ezhavas are now mostly engaged in agriculture, and commerce; they are met with in other walks of life as well. After them come the functional castes like the Vilakkithala nair (barbers) Veluthedan and Mannan (washerman), Asaris (carpenters), Thattans (gold-smiths), Kollans(iron-smiths) Moosaries (brass-smiths) Kallans (masons) Thandans (tree climbers and coco-nut pluckers) Kusavans (potters) Chemmans (cob-lers) Thottis (scavengers), and the agricultural serfs like the Vedans, Parayans, Kuravans and Cherumans or Pulayans. There are also a number of tribes like Kadar, Kuruman, Malapandaram etc., who live in the hills.

Apart from the Hindus a good number of Christ-ians, Muslims and a few Buddhists, Jains and Jews live in Kerala.

The traditional social structure of Kerala is marked by different ranges of social distances among the different castes and communities.

Traditionally the caste structure was very much related to the economic structure. The Nambuthiri Brahmins and Nairs formed, by and large, the land owning castes. Majority of the working force for serv-ing as agricultural labour (adiyan) was drawn from the untouchable castes of Vedans, Parayans, Kuravans and Cherumans etc. They generally lived in the houses provided to them by their masters (ədayan or thampuran). The thampurans were responsible for the upkeep of the 'adiyans'. Even the expenses con-nected with marriage, birth or death in an 'adiyan's family was met largely by the 'thampuran' concern-ed. The serfs were always known as "so and so's adiyan" and 'thampurans' had the authority even to intervene in the family feuds of the 'adiyans'.

The family structure in those days regulated, in a way, the social and economic structure of the region. Joint family system, popularly known as 'Tarawad' in case of the Nairs was the order of the day. Matriliny was the dominant form of descent and the responsibility for conducting the affairs of the joint family rested with the Karanavan (the seniormost male member in the mother's line). By and large the pattern prevailing among the Nairs, provided the model for the other castes and for generations most of the castes in Kerala organised their social polity accordingly.

Modern changes in social relationships

Change in the political power has brought about a series of changes in the social and economic struc-ture of the region. In the realm of land tenure the right of the intermediaries in the land has been abolished through a series of legislations. This has brought about a series of changes in the relation among the landlords, the vassals and the serfs. The vassals (Kudiyans) now very seldom pay homages to the landlords in the form of presents indicating the latter's authority over the former. But as the land reforms did not benefit the serfs much, they though in a limited way, still continue to respect the authority of their 'thampurans'. The temple entry proclamation and other legislative measures aimed at the removal of untouchability have very much influenced the social relations of the various castes and communities. Legislations like the Hindu mar-riage act and the Hindu Succession Act have con-siderably changed the pattern of inheritance of pro-perty. The matrilineal 'Tarawad' is now a thing of the past, the 'Karanavan' is no more important in the economic affairs of the family, though he con-tinues to remain in the picture as far as other social aspects are concerned. The social reform movements initiated by organisations like the Shree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Society, the Nair Service Society, the Pulaya Maha Sabha* etc., are responsible, for bringing about far reaching changes in the outlook of the people about religious and social matters. As will be shown later, all these changes have their bearing on the performance of Onam festival.

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* Shree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Society was started in the early 20th century after Shri Narayana Guru, a reformer saint, belonged to the Ezhava community. The aims and objectives of the Society were to strive for the social, material, religious and educational amelioration of the Ezhava community.

Nair Service Society was formed by the Nair community sometime in the early part of this century and was aimed at the social and educational development of the Nairs.

Pulaya Maha Sabha was formed by 1930 by the Pulaya community and was aimed at the social and material ema-nicipation of the community.

CHAPTER III

REFERENCE ABOUT-ONAM IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

References about the celebration of Onam are available in the early writings of travellers, philosophers and historians. A few raferences are also available in the ancient inscriptions collected from temples.

The earliest known reference about Onam is in 'Madurai Kanji' which is one of the several Tamil ballads of 'Sangham' literature. This was composed by 'Mangudi Maruthanar' who is believed to have lived in the second century A. D. In the ballads, the author describes how Onam was celebrated in Madurai in the bright fortnight of the month of 'Sravana' or 'Chingom'. Onam was celebrated for seven days and people sent oblations to the near about temples. Games and duels were held in front of the temples. At the end of the seventh day of the celebrations, the King presided over an assembly of warriors, patriots, poets and chieftains and gave away presents to them. The people adorned new clothes on this occasion and had sumptuous feasts.

Another early reference[1] is met with in Tamil literature. It is in the 'Pathikas' and 'Pallads' of Periyazhwar, a famous Tamil thinker of the early 9th century A. D. He has described how offerings and oblations were made to 'Ananthasayanam' (Vishnu) on the occasion of Onam. Particulars of the feast, dress, songs and dances of the womenfolk, are vividly presented in the 'Pathikas and Pallads'. He has noted the appeal of a devotee to Lord Vishnu, which is as follows: "Lord, there are only seven days for 'thiru onam', your birthday. The women folk have started their devotional songs in praise of you. Rice, vegetables etc., meant for the 'Onam' feast are all ready. So, Lord, you should not go for grazing cattle from tomorrow onwards."

Bartolommeo, in his 'A voyage to the East Indies' describes[2] how Onam was celebrated in the Malabar country. He writes: "The fourth grand festival, celebrated in Malayala, is called Onam, and happens always in the month of September, on the day of new moon (not always). About the 10th of September the rain ceases in Malabar. All nature seems as if regenerated; the flowers again shoot up, and the trees bloom, in a word, this season is the same as that which Europeans call spring. This festival seems, therefore, to have been instituted for the purpose of soliciting from the Gods a happy and fruitful year. It continues eight days and during that time the Indians are accustomed to adorn their houses with flowers and daub them over with cow's dung; because the cow, as already observed, is a sacred animal dedicated to the Goddess Lakshmi, the Ceres of the Indians. On this occasion they also put on new clothes throw aside all their old earthenware and supply its place by new. The men, particularly those who are young, form themselves into two parties and shoot at each other with arrows. These arrows are blunted, but exceedingly strong, and are discharged with such force, that a considerable number are generally wounded on both sides. These games have a great likeness to the Cerealia and Juvenalia of the ancient Greeks and Romans."

Yet another refrence found in the inscriptions shows that Onam was an important festival of the people of Kerala during the 7th century A. D. (First Century of Malyalam Era). One of the earliest of the inscriptions of Malayalam Era (M. E.) 36[3] indicated that the people used to send oblations and presents to the temples on the occasion of Onam celebrations. The inscription runs, thus "The land donated by Chendan Changaran for the celebration of Avani Onam. Changaran further donates 500 measures of rice and other ingredients needed. This may be cooked and distributed in consultation with the local assembly." Further the inscription describes the items of dishes and so on.

1 Quoted in Land marks of Civilization (Malayalam) P. N. Kunjan Pillai, 1959 pp. 59.

2 Bartolommeo Era,-A. Voyage to the East Indies, p. 370. Bartolommeo (1716-1795) started his travel after 1757. He wrote his book in his old-age.

3 Kunjan Pillai, P. N. 1959 pp. 59.

In another inscription[1], supposed to have been written in the latter period of the second century of Malayalam Era, there is reference of a votary who had made arrangements for offering a series of oblations on these days starting from two days earlier to Thiru Onam. The oblations consisted of rice, clarified butter etc.

An inscription[2] of the third Century M. E. found at the Thiruvalla temple (in Travancore) shows that one Chennan Kesavan had donated a large landed property, the output of which was to be used for the expenditure on Avani Onam.

1 Ibid pp. 59.
2 Ibid pp. 60

CHAPTER IV

ONAM AS TRADITIONALLY PERFORMED IN PUBLIC PLACES

Earlier references indicate that in the past Onam celebrations were held in temples and in many cases the ruler used to preside over the functions and give away presents to the poets, patriots, warriors and chieftains. Today, on the other hand, the celebrations are generally held in individual homes, though in some areas celebrations take place both in individual homes as well as temples. Thrikkakara is one such place, where even today, Onam celebrations are conducted with full vigour in the temple. It is situated at a distance of six miles from Ernakulam and is believed to be the seat of Mahabali, when he was the ruler. Thrikkakara is considered to have been derived from Thrikkalkara, that is, the place (kara) where Vishnu had kept his divine feet (Thrikkal) on the head of bali and trampled him to the bowels of the earth.

In the past the place was known as Kalkara[1] and was an important town in Kerala. It was the capital of the Kalkarai chieftains during the rule of the Perumals who had their capital at Mahodayapuram. The temple at Thrikkakara is very famous. Even in ancient literature there is reference about it. In Chilapathikaram, a Tamil treatise, it is mentioned that in 604 A. D. Dirkhayara Cheran (with the surnames of Padu Cheran, Athan, Kerala Perumal) had built this famous temple.

The temple has a big compound covering about 10 acres of land. There are two big structures side by side, both facing east. The one on the left is the main temple with Vamana as the presiding deity and the one on the right is smaller in size and is presided over by Shiva. Popularly, the Vamana temple is known as 'Vadakkum Devar' or deity of the north, and the Shiva temple is known as 'Tekkum Devar' or deity of the south. A number of subsidiary deities have been installed in the Vamana temple. They are Yakshi, Bhagavathy (Kali), Shree Ayyappan, Srikrishnan, Parvathy, Durgambika, Subramanian and Ganapathy and Brahma-Rakhshas (spirit of a Brahmin who committed suicide).

Though the Vamana temple is accepted as the main temple at the elite level, the local people consider the Shiva temple as the more important one. They believe that Shiva was the 'Kuladeivam' (family deity) of Mahabali and that there was no Vamana temple at that time. The palace of Mahabali was situated at the place where the Vamana temple is at present. After the fall of Mahabali, his palace was destroyed and later on Vamana was installed on that spot by the saint Kapila.

There are two ponds on the north of the temple, locally known as 'Danadaka Poika' (the pond pertaining to alms) and 'Kapilathirtham' (sacred pond of Kapila). It is believed that the former existed even at the time of Mahabali. He had taken water from this pond to sprinkle over the alms given to Vamana. The latter came into existence after the construction of the Vamana temple. It is said that when the Vamana idol was consecrated by Kapila, water flew out of the idol in profuse quantity. This holy water constituted the 'Kapilathirtham'.

In the past the Thrikkakara temple was the main centre of Onam festival in Kerala. It is said that after installing the idol of Vamana, on the ruins of the palace of Mahabali, saint Kapila asked the rulers of Kerala, to accept the supremacy of the deity. They were also asked to conduct a festival in the temple for 28 days, starting from the 'Thiru Onam'[2] of 'Karkatakam' (the last month of the Malayalam calendar) to the 'Thiru Onam' of Chingom (the first month of the Malayalam calendar). As there were fifty six rulers, it became the responsibility of a

1 Some problems in Kerala History, Kunjen Pillai P. N., Trivandrum, 1955 pp. 30-31.

2 Thiru Onam is one of the 27 stars of the Malayalam Calender. The twenty seven stars are Aswathi, Bharani, Kartika, Rohini, Makayiram Thiruvathira, Punartham, Puyam, Ayilliam, Makom, Purom, Uthiram, Atham, Chithira, Chothi, Visakhom, Anizham, Ketta, Moolam, Puradom, Uthradom, Thiruonam, Avittam, Chathayam, Pooruruttathi, Uthrittadi, Revathy.

couple of rulers to organise the festival for a day by turn. They were also required to be personally present at Thrikkakara, at least for a day during the festival period. All the rulers submitted to the wish of the saint and thus originated Onam festival at Thrikkakara. They constructed their temporary abodes at Thrikkakara, the vestiges of which can be seen even now.

The rulers not only began to personally attend the festival, but also instructed their subjects to visit the temple at least once during the festival period.

It is said that once the head of a family could not visit the temple during the festival. He was suffering from a sense of remorse for it. But in the night he had a vision that he could participate in the festival by worshipping 'Onathappan' at home on 'Thiru Onam' day. He did the same. Since then it became a custom with those who could not visit the temple during Onam to worship 'Onathappan' in their homes.

As already indicated, saint Kapila is believed to have enjoined that Onam would be performed for 28 days starting from Thiru Onam of Karkatakam. The festival started on that day with hoisting of a flag on the porch of the temple. In course of time, the period for performance of the festival was reduced and the date for flag hoisting was changed from Thiru Onam of Karkatakam to 'Atham' of Chingom.

At present the festival is performed in the temple from Atham of Chingom to Thiru Onam of Chingom. The festival starts with laying of 'Pookalams' (flower carpets) at the front courtyard of the temple. Flowers for the flower carpet are generally plucked from the plants in the temple premises by the temple servants. On Uthradom day an Onathappan is installed at the centre of the flower carpet and offerings are made. On the Thiru Onam day, after worship of Onathappan, all the deities of the temple are worshipped and are then wrapped with new yellow clothes.

In 1962, when this study was conducted, Onam celebration in Thrikkakara temple started on 2nd September and lasted till 11th September. The celebration formally started with hoisting of the temple flag on the evening of 2nd September. On the subsequent days pujas were performed thrice daily; in addition, a number of cultural programmes were organised. The cultural programmes included 'Ottanthullal' (dance drama), Kurathi Attam (a kind of folk dance), 'Nadaswara Kacheri' (pipe recital), 'Kathakali', (a kind of dance drama), Patakom (recital of religious texts), Harikatha (story recital), vocal music, fireworks and religious speeches. Reputed artists from different parts of the state were invited to make the performances.

The finances for the celebration were met partly from the funds made available by the 'Devaswam' department of the Government of Kerala and partly from the voluntary contributions made by the local people. For organising the festival, a committee was formed with the Devaswam Superintendent as President and a few local people as members.

While with reference to the ritual and historical aspects of Onam festival, the performances at Thrikkakara are most important, with reference to the festive aspect, the boat race at Aranmula is more well known.

Aranmula is a village in the district of Alleppy. On the fifth day of Onam, a boat race is held here every year. The boats participating in the race represent different 'Karas.'

The boats are long and narrow with various designs. These are popularly known 'as Chundan Valloms' (snake boats). People from outside the state even, come to see the boat race. It has become so popular that a few years back a Prime Minister's trophy was instituted to be presented to the winning boat.

Regarding the origin of this boat race, the following legend is narrated by the local people. At Aranmula, there is a temple dedicated to Shiva. Long ago, on the Uthradam day, an unmanned boat, with provisions for the temple, had landed near the temple. In commemoration of this, the people of the area go in their snake boats under the leadership of their respective 'kara' chiefs to welcome the divine boat. This boat is supposed to have come from the east. Even today, on the 'Uthradam' day, an unmanned boat with some provisions comes to the temple. This is sent by a Nambuthiri Brahmin of

Aroor, 14 miles east of Thiruvalla. The man who comes with the provisions gets down a few yards away from the temple and allows the boat to drift to the side of the temple. The snake boats, kept ready by the members of the different Karas, go to welcome the boat. In this, the people of all religious faiths join.

The boat race is performed in honour of this event. But it is not known why the race takes place on the 5th day of Onam, while the arrival of the divine boat is on the evening of the first day of Onam.

Till recently, there was another performance of great interest, viz., 'Athachamayam',* which used to be performed publicly by the then rulers of Cochin and Kozhicode. After integration of the states, the ex-rulers do not perform this ritual publicly; now it has become a private affair.

At Cochin, when Athachamayam used to be performed publicly, the king in his ceremonial dress used to come out of the palace through the front gate and return to the place through a side gate. It is said that this practice was related to an incident of the past. It has been noted earlier that in the beginning, two rulers used to jointly take responsibility by turn for organising the performances connected with Onam on each day. It was the joint responsibility of the king of Cochin and Zamorin of Kozhicode to make arrangement for the celebration on Atham day. For this purpose both the kings along with their attendants used to present themselves at the temple. Once, as the king of Cochin was coming out of his palace, a messenger ran upto the king and informed him that he should not go to the temple that day as the festivities would not take place due to certain reasons. But as the king was not supposed to turn back, once he had started a sacred task like this, he asked the palanquin bearers to go ahead, but returned to the palace through another gate.

A similar incident took place in the palace of the Zamorin of Kozhicode also.

To commemorate this incident state festivals used to be performed both at Cochin and Kozhicode. On this occasion the rulers used to invite their officers to the palace and give them presents. They were also entertained with a sumptuous feast.

Now, though Athachamayam is no longer performed as a State festival, some part of the old tradition is still retained. At present the Government sponsored Onam festival is formally inaugurated at Trippunithura, the seat of the Cochin royal family, on Atham day. Besides, the ex-ruler, sends some oblations to Thrikkakara temple, through a special messenger on this day.

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* Prelude to the rituals on Atham day.

CHAPTER V

GOVERNMENT SPONSORED ONAM CELEBRATION

In 1961, Government sponsored Onam festival was first performed in Kerala. The idea was mooted by the Department of Tourism, Kerala for development of tourism and for promoting emotional integration among the different sections of the population. In a meeting of the Kerala State Tourist Traffic Advisory Board held on 15th June 1961, it was decided to organise the festival on a mass scale at three regional centres, namely, Kozhicode, Ernakulam and Trivandrum.

For the implementation of this decision, committees were set up at the State aud district levels. The Governor, the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister were the patrons of the Central Advisory Committee; the Minister of Public works was the Chairman. A member of the Tourist Advisory Committee was the convener and the Director of Public relations was the joint convener. The Director of the Tourist Department was the Treasurer. A few prominent people of the State were associated with the committee as members. At the District level, a prominent non-official was nominated as the convener and the district Information Officer as the Joint Convener.

It was expected that these Government sponsored State-wide celebrations would promote emotional integration between the different sections of the people. The Governor, Sri Giri said on the occasion, "Let this be an occasion for sinking past rivalries and for cultivating goodwill among all sections of the people." Keeping this in view, it was decided to have cultural pageants, fire-works, games and tournaments (mostly of indigenous character), community feasting, drama, 'Kathakali' and other entertainments, 'Kavi Sammelan', literary symposia, boat race and childrens' rallies and sports.

For financing of the celebrations rupees one lakh was allotted by the State Government from the budget of the Tourist Department.

In 1962, when the study was made, the Government sponsored celebrations were held mainly at three places, viz. Trivandrum. Ernakulam and Kozhicode as in the previous year. While addressing a press conference at Trivandrum, the Minister for Tourism, Kerala, said, "this festival is a national festival with two main purposes, namely, fostering of emotional integration among the people belonging to various religions and regions of Kerala as well as providing an occasion for concentrated action so as to put Kerala on the tourist map of India permanently." This year, as mentioned earlier, the celebration of the Onam festival was formally inaugurated by the Governor of Kerala, Shri Giri, on the 2nd September (Atham day) at Thripunithura, 6 miles east of Ernakulam. The inauguration was done by the ceremonial handing over of the Onam flag to the Convener of the State Committee. The flag consisted of a piece of yellow cloth; with the design of a 'Nilavilakku' (brass votive lamp) sandwitched between two ears of paddy on it. Later, the Governor lighted the Onam torch which marked the beginning of a colourful procession described earlier.

The formal opening of the Onam celebration was kept at Thripunithura because of the fact that the kings of Cochin used to give lead for starting the celebration from there.

In the evening a community feast was also arranged at Thripunithura School, in which all those who took part in the procession were present. A peculiarity of this feast was that no caste distinction was observed. After the feast, competition in laying of flower carpets was held and prizes were distributed among the young artists who participated in the competition.

A big fair was also held where people from far and near brought various commodities for sale. Important among them were screw-pine mats of different sizes and counts, leaf baskets, reed baskets, winnowing fans, wooden agricultural implements, grinding stones etc.

Though the Onam festival was formally opened on 2nd September, the festivities were actually per-

formed from 10th September, the Thiru Onam day, to 16th September.

A list of important items included in the programme at different places, is furnished below.

1. **Cannanore**—Nadaswara Kachery (pipe recital) and light music on 10th September; wrestling, Kalari-payattu (a kind of dual) and dance drama on 11th September; flower carpet exhibition, fancy football match and folk dances on 12th September; community lunch on 13th September.

2. **Kozhikode**—'Panchavadyam' (recital of five musical instruments) mass rally by school children, torch light tableau and drama on 10th September, 'Kalaripayattu' and variety entertainments on 11th September; Circus and folk dances on 12th September; fancy dress, football match and folk dances on 13th September; ballet and folk dances on 14th September; variety entertainment on 15th September and pageant fire works and Kathakali on 16th September.

3. **Palghat**—Children's day on 10th September; song recital on 11th September; music programme on 12th September; 'Kalaripayattu' and Kanniyarkali (a folk dance of the young girls) on 13th September; flower carpet competition; music and dance on 14th September; and community feasting on 15th September.

4. **Trichur**—Children's day on 11th September; community feast on 12th September; water carnival on 13th September; Kavi Sammelan and Kathakali on 14th September.

5. **Ernakulam**— Youth's day and folk dances on 13th September; water carnival, 'chavuttu-natakam' (a kind of folk dance) and fire works on 14th September.

6. **Kottayam**—Children's day with indigenous games and sports on 10th September; boat race on 11th September; water carnival on 12th September; youth festival, sports and drama festival on 13th September.

7. **Alleppy**—Boat race on 11th September; children's films festival on 12th September; boat race on 13th September; women's day celebrations on the 14th September; traditional snake boat race at Aranmulai on 15th September; dance programme and pageant on 16th September.

8. **Quilon**—Water carnival on 11th September; drama on 12th September; Kathakali on 16th September.

9. **Trivandrum**—Variety entertainments and music on the 10th September; music and dance on the 11th September; Kavi Sammelan on 12th September; variety entertainments on 13th September; ballot and sports on 15th September; and pageant, fire works and variety entertainments on 16th September.

At the district level programmes were chalked out, which included sports, games, drama, dances, Kavi-Sammelan etc., at different places. The heads of departments sent directives to the institutions under them to celebrate Onam at an official level with the help and co-operation of the local people. Thus, the different Development Blocks were asked to organise sports and community feasts at the schools, libraries and Panchayats within the Block area, in co-operation with those institutions. Rs. 250/- was allowed to be spent from the budget of each Block and Rs.50/- from the budget of each Panchayat.

With a view to depicting the traditional culture of Kerala, the Onam celebration committee included on the agenda 'Nadaswarakachery' (pipe recital) wrestling, Kalaripayattu, (in former days kings organised Kalarees or gymanasiums to train the soldieres. The training was popularly known as 'Kalaripayattu) flower carpet exhibitions, folk dances fancy foot-ball match etc.

At every place community feasts were held which the organisors thought, would help national and religious integration. It has however been observed, in some places, that mostly youngsters and people of the lower castes participated in the community feasts. One of the elderly persons, who did not participate in the feast, remarked, "let the present orthodoxy,— if you call it orthodoxy—continue till we live".

At Trivandrum, apart from the general celebrations, the Governor gave a feast to the dignitaries and high officials on the 16th.

Though the Government's desire is to foster national and religious integration through the State sponsored festivities during Onam, the general feeling is that the impact of the festival is yet to be felt in this direction.

CHAPTER VI

CELEBRATION OF ONAM AT FAMILY LEVEL

Prefestival Preparations

It is the endeavour of the people of Kerala during this festive period to project an image of the golden days of Mahabali. So they start preparing for the celebrations sufficiently ahead of the Onam day. The necessity and importance of Onam is quite evident from the popular saying 'Kānam Vittum Onam Unnanam' (celebrate Onam one must even at the cost of landed property).

The pre-festival preparations may be broadly divided into economic, ritual, social, recreational and other aspects. Their particulars are furnished below.

Economic aspect

In some parts of Kerala, especially in Travancore region, the people make it a point to complete the harvesting of paddy before Onam. The harvesting also starts with a ritual called "Illam Nara" (Illam-house, Nara-fill). It takes place on an auspicious day, either in the month of Karkkadakom (last month) or in the month of Chingom (First months); of local calendar. On this day, early in the morning, a male member of the family who has abstained from non-vegetarian food and sexual intercourse for one day, goes to the paddy field, after taking a purificatory bath. He carries with him a plantain leaf in which is kept a few ears of ripe paddy corn and leaves of a few trees, creepers and shrubs, which are supposed to be auspicious. They are mango leaves, bamboo leaves, 'ushinja' (Cardiospermum Halicaabum) and 'Kanjara ila (leaves, of Strychnine nuxvomica). He carries the whole bunch on his head to 'Padippura' (gate house) of the family. While he moves on to home, he yells repeatedly the following words.

Nara narayo nara.

Nara narayo nara.
(Fill, fill, fill)

Illam nara, Pathayam nara,
Kutta nara, Vatti nara
Fill the home, fill the granery,
Fill the baskets)

Nara narayo nara,

Nara narayo nara,
(Fill, fill, fill)

At 'Padippura' a puja is performed. Before he reaches the place, it is smeared with cowdung paste on which certain circular or horizontal figures are drawn by the women-folk with rice-flour mixed in water. A plantain leaf is placed on the spot, and some paddy grains, a tender coconut, a few plantain fruits, a few rice-flour cakes, a lighted lamp and some water are kept on the leaf. The newly plucked ears of corn along with the leaves and creepers are kept here and then the puja is performed. The bunch thus sanctified is tied to a post at the thrashing place. It is only after this ritual that harvesting starts in the family.

The consumption of new rice, which is the staple food of the area, is done after undergoing another ritual, locally known as 'Puthari *oonu*' (eating of new rice.) For this purpose an auspicious day is selected when some new rice is cooked with molasses, and is served first to the family deity and then to the members of the family.

As soon as the harvesting and the thrashing are over, the agricultural communities engage themselves in sowing the next crop. Everybody tries to finish, as far as possible, the agricultural operations before the Onam, so that they may celebrate the festival in a carefree atmosphere. But in those cases where they could not finish, they would resume the work on the fifth Onam. On this day the agricultural serfs have their Onam feast at their master's house.

Feast being one of the most important items of Onam celebration, preparations for the feast start sufficiently early. Paddy is boiled and dried in the sun and husked at least a week before the festival. A local saying goes that "chothikku chothichum

nellu puzhunganam" (On 'Choti' day,-seven days prior to Thiru onam, paddy should be boiled even if it is borrowed). Other ingredients for the Onam feast are also assembled fairly in time. Fuel wood for cooking vagetables and provisions for the feast, are all collected before the Onam day. It is the duty of the Thandan (coconut plucker) to see that required quantity of fuel wood is assembled for his master sufficiently befor Onam.

The agricultural serfs associated with the agricultural families, collect their wages and procure paddy for the Onam feast pretty early; the factories distribute yearly bonus during this time in order to enable the factory workers to assemble their provisions for the Onam feast. Even the Government servants get their advance salary in this month. In the plantations and factories festival advances are given to the workers before Onam. Some of the housewives of the lower income groups have been found to save a fist-full of rice from the daily quota of consumption throughout the year, for use during the Onam festival. Children on their part might save a few coins to be utilized at this time. This, they use for purchasing articles like kite, rubber ball, fancy watches, cheap glass bangles etc. It has been observed during the field investigation that those who could not procure the provisions for the Onam, borrowed the same from some source or the other. Instances of pledging jewellery to raise money for the expenditure have also been reported. All these indicate the importance of the festival and the enthusiasm of the people to celebrate the same.

Wearing of new clothes during the Onam is a must. The clothes for the garments to be worn during the festival are sent to the tailors sufficiently in advance. Other clothes, either meant for the members of the family or for the agricultural labourers, are also purchased in advance.

Ritual aspect

The rituals, ushering in Onam, start on 'Atham' day, of the month of Chingom, the first month of the Malayalam Calender. Some rituals, however, are observed on the last day of Karkadakom, the last month of the Malayalam calender. On this day, the women sweep the premises and collect old things of the house like winnowing fans, broken pots, old baskets, broomsticks etc. and throw them at a junction of three or four paths, somewhere near the house. While doing this they sing:

"Anjavum panjavum po
Avanimasavum onavum va"

literally this means,—let go the days of scarcity and let come 'Avanimasam'* (first month of the year) and Onam." In some other areas (Cochin) the women while throwing the rubbish shout, 'Pottipurathu' 'Shri Bhagavathi Akathu,' meaning, the ills may vanish and Shri Bhagavathy the embodiment of prosperity, may come in."

57 Hindu families were asked whether they performed the ritual of throwing rubbish. 29 families reported that they did. Among these 29, 12 are Nairs, 4 are Pulayas, 2 are Thandans, 5 are Ezhavas, 1 is Kshatriya, 1 is Tamil Brahmin, 2 are Nambuthiri Brahmins and 2 are Nadars. It appears that this ritual is practised only by the Hindus of Travancore, Cochin and Cape Comerin of Madras State. Out of the 29 families 19 are from Travancore, 8 are from Cochin, 2 are from Cape Comerin and none is from Malabar region.

The table given below gives an idea of the incidence of this ritual in the different regions and amog different castes.

* In Tamil Avani is the month corresponding to the Malayam month of Chingom in which Onam falls.

S.	Hindu castes	Travancore		Cochin		Malabar		Cape-Comorin	
		Total families	No. performing the ritual	Total families	No. performing the ritual	Total families	No. performing the ritual	Total families	No. performing the ritual
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Nambuthiri-Brahmin	..	..	2	2	..	..	..	..
2.	Tamil Brahmin	4	1	..	...	...	..	..	..
3.	Konkana Brahmin	..	...	..	..	3	..	..	..
4.	Kshatria	1	1	..	...	..	..	..	..
5.	Nair	10	8	4	3	6	..	1	1
6.	Ezhava	3	2	3	3	1	..	..	..
7.	Nadar	1	1	..	..	..	..	1	1
8.	Pulaya	4	4	1	...	...	..	1	..
9.	Thandan	2	2	..	...	..	..	..	..
10.	Maravan	1	...	..	..	..	..	..	..
11.	Pallar	3	...	...	...	..	...	..	..
12.	Thevar	2	..	...	..	..	..	..	..
13.	Kurichan	..	...	..	..	3	...	..	..
	TOTAL	31	19	10	8	13	...	3	2

A close study of the above table brings out some revealing facts. Only 19 Hindu families out of the 31 studied in Travancore area perform 'throwing of rubbish'. Out of the 12 non-performers 9 are Tamil speakers who do not celebrate Onam. In Cochin area 2 out of the 10 Hindus do not perform this ritual while in Cape Comerin 2 out of the 3 are reported as performers. All the 13 families from Malabar do not perform this ritual. To sum up 'throwing of rubbish' on the last day of the Karkadakom is practised by almost all the sections of Malayali Hindus of Kerala except those living in Malabar region.

Athappoovidal

The next ritual item connected with the Onam celebrations is Athappoovidal (laying of flower carpet) and installation of Onathappan. As mentioned earlier, the ritual starts from Atham day, ten days prior to Thiru Onam. This is supposed to be done to welcome Mahabali to the home. Early in the morning young boys and girls, go to the near-about bushes, in groups, to collect flowers of various types. "The flowers include the common red as well as the rarer variegated, lantana, the large red shoe flower (Hibiscus rosa sinensis), an indispensable feature of the cultivated vegetation in a Malayali homestead, the yellow marigold, the yellow aster, the scarlet button flower, the sacred tulsi (Ocimum Sanctum), the wee, modest thumber (a vermifugal member of the Nepetac tribe), the common tagara (yellow wild cassia), the beautiful blue bell and another common species of cassia, locally known as 'Onam flower'. In addition, various little violet and purple wildings that adorn the margins of rice fields, and beautiful specimens of the lily and allied orders of tropical plants." [1]

The children particularly the girls, going to pluck flowers sing a variety of folk songs. The following is a song generally prevalent in Cochin area:

"Chombil house maiden, little maiden,
What did he give you who yesterday came ?
A new dress he gave me, a small dress he gave me,
A lounge likewise on which to recline,
A tank to disport in, a well to draw water from e compound,
To gamble in, a big field to sing in,
Freshen up flowers, oh freshen for me.

1. Quoted by K. P. Padmanabha Menon, in the History of Kerala, Vol. IV.

On the south and the north shore in the compound of

Kannan, there grew up and flourished a thumba[1] flower plant.

Out of this plant were fifty boats, gotten; at the head of each boat a banyan tree grew.

From the banyan there grew a tiny little babe, and a drum and a stick for the baby to play with.

The drum and the drum-stick, the house hold domestic, all together they flew away and they vanished.

Freshen up flowers, oh freshen for me.

A measure and a half measure, and elephants' chains and earings, who goes under the flower tree beneath which the elephant passes ?

It is no one at all, it is no one at all; it is Kuttikat baby god; when we went forth to pluck off ripe fruit, a mischievous urchin sprang up and bit us.

With bitten foot when we went to the Brahmin's, the Brahmin lady, we found, had been injured.

With bitten foot then we went to the house of Edathil whose lady with fear lay stricken.

At noon of Attam day a bamboo fresh sprouted, and therewith we made us a good fish trap.

And when to the tank afishing we went, we baited a minnow.

By its tail did we hold it, on the bund did we dash it, and of coconuts, with milk, eighteen we ground.

With elephant pepper we dressed it; with asafoetida we filled it, right to the elephant's head.

Freshen up, flowers, oh freshen up for me[2]

The petals of the flowers are assembled at one place and then the little artists make exquisite designs with the flower petals, the colour combination varying according to the fancy and skill of the artists. The flower carpets are made by the virgin girls of the family concerned early in the morning. Those who are engaged in this ritual, take a purificatory bath and put on new clothes. At the centre of the carpet is kept a pyramid shaped clay model about 9" in height to represent Onathappan (Mahabali). This terra-cotta piece is prepared by the local potter who is paid 25 to 50 paisa for it. Before this is kept in the centre, it is smeared with rice flour prepared out of new rice of the season. Water, flower and leaves of lucas aspera are offered to the image. In some areas—as for example, in the Trivandrum district and Cape Comerin—it has been observed that the 'Onathappan' is nothing but the upper piece of the grinding stone. While in some other areas, as in the Quilon district,—the worship of 'Onathappan' is not found at all.

Some well-to-do families construct a pandal in the front of the courtyard where flower carpets are layed and Onathappan is propitiated.

The preparation of the flower carpets and the worship of Onathappan continues for 10 days ending on Thiru Onam day. Every morning the dry flowers of the previous day are thrown away and a new flower carpet is made with a new design. It is the common belief that the dry flower used in laying the flower carpets should not on any account be trampled by feet. The dry flowers are, therefore, either thrown on the roof of the house or are flown in water. During this period it is a common feature among the children in the villages to go from house to house, to observe and appreciate the flower carpets made in different families. As a result, a competitive spirit develops among the children and they compete with each other in the preparation of flower carpets.

The information collected from the different families show that only the Hindus observe this ritual. Six Christian familiss and three Muslim families who were interviewed, reported that they did not observe the ritual at all. Among the Hindus also all did not perfom the ritual. Out of the 57 Hindu families from whom the data were collected, only 23 reported that they observed 'Athappovidil'. The caste-wise break up of these Hindu families is as follows:—2 Namboothiri Brahmins, 1 Tamil Brahmin, 1 Kshatriya, 13 Nairs, 4 Ezhavas and 2 Pulayas.

1. Lucas plant.
2. Ibid

The table given below indicates the region-wise and castewise performers of Athappoovital ritual.

S. No.	Caste	Travancore		Cochin		Malabar		Cape-Comerin	
		Total Hindu families	No. performing Athappoovital	Total Hindu families	No. performing Athappoovital	Total Hindu families	No. performing Athappoovital	Total families	No. performing Athappoovital
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Nambuthiri-Brahmin	..	..	2	2	..	..	..	..
2.	Tamil Brahmin	4	1	..	..	..	..	..	..
3.	Konkini Brahmin	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..
4.	Kshatria	1	1	..	..	..	..	..	..
5.	Nair	10	2	4	4	6	6	1	1
6.	Ezhava	3	..	3	3	1	1	..	..
7.	Nadar	1	..	..	..	..	..	1	..
8,	Thandan	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
9.	Pulayan	4	1	1	..	..	..	1	1
10.	Kurichan	..	..	..	..	3	..	..	..
11.	Maravan	1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
12.	Pallar	3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
13.	Thevar	2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
	TOTAL	31	5	10	9	13	7	3	2

It may be noted that out of 34 non-performers, 17 are Tamil speakers who by tradition do not celebrate Onam, 15 are Malayalam speakers from Quilon district (12 living in Quilon district and 3 living in other districts dut belonging to Quilon) and 2 belong to Travancore outside Quilon.

The region-wise break-up of the persons who perform Athappoovital and instal Onathappan in their houses, shows that these rituals are widely prevalent in the Malabar, Cochin, Cape Comorin, and some parts of Travancore. 9 out of the 10 families studied in Cochin areas reported that they observe these rituals. The sole non-performer is a Pulaya, who reported that these rituals were performed in his master's house and hence he did not perform the same separately. 7 out of the 13 families studied in Malabar are performers. Out of the 6 non-performers 3 are Kurichans (a Scheduled tribe), who observe Onam in a different way and 3 are Konkani Brahmins who do not celebrate Onam at all. Two of the 3 families from Cape Comorin are performers. The one family which is reported as a non-performer is a Tamil speaking Nadar.

Summing up, it may be stated that most of the Malayalam speaking Hindus throughout the State, except those living in or hailing from Quilon, perform the rituals of laying flower carpets (Athappoovital) and installation of Onathappan.

Another ritual, very common among the Malayalam speaking Hindu families, is the offering of oblations to the family deity or to the village temple on the Uthradam i. e. the day before ThiruOnam.

3. Social aspects

Exchange of gifts

Exchange of gifts form one of the main social aspects of the Onam celebrations. The vassals send 'onakkazhcha' (Onam presents) to their land lords. The servants offer presents; to their masters, those children who stay away from the family send Onam gifts to their parents, and the parents on their part send gifts, in the form of vegetables to the homes of their daughters.

On the evening of 'Uthradam' (otherwise known as the first Onam day) the agricultural serfs and other village servants attached to the different families bring presents to their masters. Generally the presents consist of some product of their own labour. The serf brings flattend rice or parched rice, yam, pump-

kin, plantain bunches etc. The blacksmith brings knife, sickle, chopper etc., which are used in agricultural operations. There is a custom that the new knife brought by the blacksmith to a family should be used for cutting out separate pieces of Kodi (new cloth) for distribution among those who would bring presents. Mild jokes are cracked if the severed edge of the cloth is not even; they say "the blacksmith has presented to the master a knife prepared out of bad iron". The carpenter brings a few ladles made out of coconut shells and wood or bamboo splints, or some other things made by him. The washerman and the barber generally bring a few tobacco leaves and betel leaves.* The same is the case with the family goldsmith, and other people rendering special service. These presents are known as 'Onakkazhcha'. There are innumerable references in Malayalam literature indicating how affectionately the serfs grow the best plantain bunch or cucumber or yam, meant for 'Onakkazhcha' to his master.

The master too, is traditionally expected to reciprocate the respect shown to him by presenting to the serfs, and other village servants attached to the family,all the ingredients necessary for the celebration of Onam. Paddy, vegetables, coconut-oil, coconut, papped, and other provisions as well as pieces of new cloths are given by the master. The amount of paddy and other provisions depend on the importance of the serf, or the quantum and quality of service rendered by him. The head man of the group gets the maximum. The clothes (veshti and randam mundu—loin cloth and second cloth or towel) are given to all the adult members of the family; the children, get yellow loin clothes.

Another social obligation which was very important in the past, is the presentation of various objects by the vassals to the Jenmis or feudal lords. With the abolition of Jenmi right, this practice is now dying out. But because of their long standing influence, some ex-Jenmis, even now get Onam presents (Onakkazhcha), from their vassals.

Information collected from the field indicates that there are many families which do not give any present or receive any present from anybody during Onam. Out of the 7 plantation workers interviewed none had received any present or given any present during the 1962 Onam celebration. None of the 13 businessmen interviewed, had given presents to their employees, though 1 family had received presents from their relatives and 2 families had sent presents to their relatives.

Out of the 17 agriculturists 5 reported that they presented provisions and clothes to their agricultural labourers. Two were working on the lands of others in addition to cultivating their own lands. They received some provisions from their respective landowners. The rest had neither given any present to any body nor had received any present from anybody with whom they had economic ties. 5 persons however reported that they had sent new clothes and other presents to their relatives and 2 reported that they had received new clothes and other presents from their relatives. Among the agricultural labourers, however, giving presents or receiving presents seem to be more frequent. 8 agricultural labourers were interviewed; out of them 3 had given presents to their masters and the rest had received presents from their masters. Out of the latter, 3 had received clothes and other provisions and 2 had received some nominal presents. One of these families had also received new clothes and other presents from their relatives, another had given presents to their relatives.

Recreational and other aspects

Some preparations are also made on the recreational side. 'Unjol' (Sowing) is an inevitable item of Onam. The women and the children spend much of their time in singing and swinging. A popular folk song sung by the women and children while swinging on swings, describes the good old days of Mahabali. It can be translated as follows:

> "Those days when Maveli ruled the land,
> All men were equal in their stand.
> False and fraud, all were then unknown,
> The liar and the cheat were unknown,
> Measures and measuring rods proved true,
> Weights and balances all were true."

The preparation for making the swing has to be started sufficiently early. Formerly, the rope for the

* Presenting of tobacco leaves and betel leaves is supposed to be a respectful gesture.

swing was generally made in the family itself. The coconut husks used to be retted in a pit three or four months before the festival; later on these used to be brought out and the fibres used to be separated and spun by hand. Now-a-days, ropes for the swing are purchased from the market a few days prior to Onam and the swing is hung from the branch of a tree. Conventionally tieing of swing is the duty of the Thandan (coconut plucker) attached to the family.

The houses are repaired and white washed sufficiently before the festival. The premises are cleared and daubed with cowdung or black clay before Uthradam (first day of Onam). The overgrowths of grass are cleared upto the main pathway to facilitate the visit of Mahabali to the house. Conventionally this work is done by the agricultural labourer attached to the family, without any payment.

It is thus found that the period immediately before Onam, is a period of hectic activities. The people are in great hurry to be able to complete their preparation in time. The following song reveals the anxiety of the people in this connection.

"The courtyards are not cleared as yet
Oh Maveli* why thou art come?
Bananas are not brought from market yet,
Oh Maveli ! why thou art come?
Ball games have begun not, nor the pandal ready.
Oh Maveli! why thou art come?
Neither the uncle has come, nor have the gifts arrived.
Oh Maveli ! why thou art come?
Neither the paddy is boiled, nor is it dried,
Oh Maveli ! why thou art come?
Neither goldsmith has come, nor are the ornaments ready.
Oh Maveli ! why thou art come ?
Kunjeli maiden's face looks pale,
Oh Maveli ! why thou art come ?
Nangeli maiden's spouse has not come yet
Oh Maveli ! why thou art come ?

Performance of the festival

Though, it is believed that Onam festival lasts for 28 days, in practice it is celebrated only for 4 to 5 days. As it is believed that Mahabali visits the individual families on the 'ThiruOnam' day, every thing is kept ready a day earlier to welcome him. The day previous to 'ThiruOnam' is known as 'Uthradam'. It is from this day that Onam celebration begins. This day is also called 'Onnam Onam'. (First Onam).

On this day the women folk remain most busy in making all arrangements for the feasts of the ensuing four days. A folk song runs as follows:

"Uthradam uchathirinjal,
Achimarkkoru tathuaram".
(The afternoon of Uthradam is a busy time for the housewives).

The condiments are powdered, yam and plantain crisps are fried and different varieties of pickles are prepared. Some of the dishes like 'Sambar' and 'Pulissery' which can be preserved for more than a day without decay, are also cooked. In fact many of the items which are served in the feast on Thiruonam day are also served on this day and a feast on a moderate scale takes place.

The males also have their part to play on this day. They remain busy in arranging the presents to be given to different persons.

In the evening oblations are sent to the family or clan deity or to the local temple as the case may be. From most of the families a few members visit the local temple and invoke the blessings of the deity. Besides, in each household, a number of Onathappans are installed. The number of Onathappans varies from area to area; in Malabar 9 Onathappans are installed while in Cochin, particularly in and around Thrikkakara the number is 11. These are installed over spots sanctified by being daubed with cow-dung. One is installed near the gate and one near the well or the granary. The rest (nine or seven as the case may be) are installed in two linear rows in the front courtyard.

Now oblations like plantain fruits, tender coconut, paddy, incence and 'poovadas' (rice cakes) are offered to the 'Onathappans' installed at these three places. A lighted lamp is also kept in between the linear

* Maveli is the short form of Mahabali.

rows of Onathappans at the courtyard. The head of the family does some pooja and the 'prasadam' is distributed, among the members of the family and others present. The distribution of presents and provisions to those who bring 'Onakkāzhcha' starts after this ritual is over.

In Quilon district, where neither flower carpet is prepared nor Onathappan is installed, a lighted lamp is kept at the principal part of the house and some pooja is performed before the distribution of presents start.

Though swinging on swings accompanied by folk songs, dance and folk plays start just after 'Atham' they reach the climax on the 'Uthradam' day. Till late at night one can hear chanting of melodious folk songs by the women and the children throughout Kerala on the moonlit Uthradam night.

Next day is Thiru Onam, the most important day of the Onam celebrations. This is the day on which Mahabali is supposed to pay a visit to his lost kingdom. On this day the people get up early in the morning. The children as usual go out to pluck flowers to be offered to 'Onathappan'. The women start preparation for the Onam feast, while the men either help the women or join in the propitiation of 'Onathappan'.

A flower carpet is made in the front courtyard and an Onathappan is installed at the centre of it. Oblations consisting of parched rice, paddy grains, plantain, tender coconut, incence; poovada (3 in number), lucas flowers and leaves etc., are offered to the idol. A lighted lamp is also kept till the pooja is over. In some parts like Cape Comorin and Ernakulam a fake bow and arrow is used to shoot at 'Poovada'. The 'Poovada' is now taken out and distributed among those present. As soon as the pooja is over, the head of the family distributes new clothes, popularly known as Onappudava, to the members of the family.

It is a convention that the clothes given as present during Onam should be wholly or partly yellow in colour. Except this, there is no speciality about the dress worn during Onam. It is the same as the dress worn on ordinary occasions. Everybody is however expected to wear new clothes during Onam; only those in whose family some grown up member has died during the preceding year refrain from wearing new clothes.

Onam is the occasion when all members of the family are expected to be at home. Those members of the family who are living outside, try to return home. The girls, who are married out, come home along with their children. They are expected to give some presents to the head of the family in the form of new clothes,tobacco leaves and betel leaves. They in return get new clothes. The head of the family may also send presents to his father, mother and other close relatives who are staying away.

In case of a newly married couple, sending of presents to their parents is particularly important. In return they get comparatively costly presents like jewellery, money etc., in addition to clothes. In the Travancore area this is known as 'Onam Kānal' (visit during Onam).

Onam Feast

The Onam feast takes place after the distribution of presents is over. Before the actual feast starts, a little bit of all that has been prepared for the feast, is kept on a plantain leaf alongwith a lighted lamp and is offered to the ancestral spirits of the family. Some however believe that this offering is made to Mahabali; again there are others who believe that the offerings is meant for Ganapathy. All the members of the family, expect those who are to serve, sit together to partake of the Onam feast. Before that they take their bath and put on new clothes. As far as possible they sit facing east in linear rows on leaf mats. Plantain leaves which take the place of plates are spread in front of the members. Generally a large number of items are served on this occasion. These include rice, various curries, large and small pappadams, upperies (things like yam, plantain, potatoes etc., fried in oil), pickles of various kinds, chutnies, puddings of different types, plantain fruits and sweets. The most important plantain fruit served is 'Nentra Pazham', a big size of banana found in Kerala coast. On this occasion non-vegetarian items are strictly prohibited.

K. P. Padmanabha Menon* in his history of

* History of Kerala, K. P. Padnabha Menon Vol. IV, Ernakulam.

Kerala has described the methods of preparation of the different dishes. Relevant extract from the same is furnished at appendix..1.

The diners often compete with one another in the feast. They sometimes consume so much that they can scarcely move out of their seats.

Recreations

After the feast, the people enjoy various games according to their taste and fancy. There are both indoor and out-door games. Elderly men generally participate in indoor games like playing cards, 'Puliyum nayum' (a local game similar to that of chess), etc. The youngmen and boys on the other hand take part in a number of outdoor games like 'Thalapandu', personal combats, boxing, 'Kilikali' etc., Some of these are described below.

Thalapandu—This is almost like football game of the European countries. A. R. Rajaraja Varma describes it as follows.

"Of the several (games) which are played, football, or adhering to the vernacular name, head-ball (Thalapandu) is the most important out-door game. The football as in the case of its English prototype, is played with a ball made mostly of thick leather, occasionally of woven flax, and stuffed with coconut fibre or cotton. In size it is not more than half that of an English football. The rules of game bear little comparison, except that there are two parties and a goal on the winning side. An extensive open space forms the play ground. There is a boundary marked only at one end, i.e., the playing side, the other three sides being determined only by the length and breadth of the field. When the players have all assembled, they divide themselves into two parties by casting lots. There is neither restriction as to the number of players on either side nor that the players on either side should be equal in number. Equality in strength and not in number is the rule. There may also be players who do not belong to either party, but assist the party who is in. The two parties are designated the 'ins' and 'outs', the former who play on the winning side and the latter who play on the losing. A stick two feet long is planted on the ground on the winning side, and it marks the boundary there. Should any ball thrown by the adversaries hit the stick or by a kick from them the ball goes behind the stick unstopped previously by those who play on the winning side, then they lose and the adversaries gain. The rules of the game are briefly: (1) The party to begin the game is determined by casting lot. (2) There are seven minor games each consisting of three consecutive hits to constitute one round, and these are:—(a) 'Talapantu or preliminary game, (b) 'Otta' or first game, (c) 'Eratta' or second game, (d) 'Kettu', game with tied hands, (e) 'Talam' or game with intermediate clapping on the thigh (f) 'Kalumkeel', game by throwing the ball from below the leg, (g) 'Ittuvettu' or game with the foot, (3) Whichever party is first in taking collectively the whole round and also repeats the preliminary game, and wins one blow of the first game is declared victorious, and the defeat is indicated by drawing a circle called 'Pattam' round the stick and derisive hurrahs by the victorious party. (4) Each one of the players on one side plays in continuation of his predecessor. (5) When all on one side have played and lost, the other party is in. (6) For the preliminary game the adversary can defeat the players by catching the ball by the hand before it touches the ground or by hitting the stick with the ball. During all the other minor games the adversary can use his feet also, by kicking the ball in motion and driving it behind the stick. Besides these general rules, there are several minor restrictions which the reader can understand only by actual experience. The game gives much exercise to all parts of the body, and is so exciting that very often feuds arise in consequence. Betting is freely made on such occasions by spectators and players."*

This game is popular throughout Kerala. *Personal combats* are of two types viz. duels and group combats. The first is known as 'Kayyankali' and is popular is Cochin and Malabar areas.

"Kayyankali is a violent game. It possesses all the risks of an ancient duel only no weapons or horses are allowed. The combatants should only use their fists in the attack. As in Kondoti the players form two opposing parties. The number in each party is equal and well matched. On both sides stand spectators. When everything is ready, one man

* Malabar Quarterly review Vol. V pp. 138-139.

issues from the ranks of one party and advances to the middle of the field. He does so with certain measured steps pertaining to the technology of the game. At once his match from the opposite party goes out to meet him with the same measured steps. So far this game bears resemblance to Kondoti. When the opponents have met they come to blows. Blows and counterblows, fists and counter-fists constitute the game. The left elbow supplies the shield and the right arm the weapon of attack. If the match is good no single blow will fall on the oppenent, however, well aimed. It does not infrequently happen that when amateurs play the game some blow hits on some vital part and kills the opponent. In the hurry of the game everything else is forgotten and the spectators stand dumb in expectation of the final result. Each party shouts at the victory of their champion, which is indicated by the falling of the opponent to the ground. Again another couple continues the game, and in the end victorious party earns the prize and applause of the spectators".[1]

The second type is popularly known as 'Attakalam' was popular in Northern Kerala. Here a large circle is drawn on the plain sand floor and people are selected for each of the two sections from amongst the assemblage. One section is then placed in a collective body inside the circle while the other stands around the outside. The latter then try, with of course as little personal injury, to themselves as possible, to strike at and bring outside, the former who are inside, each by each. In the interval between one outsider getting inside and touching the body of any one amongst the inside group the latter are allowed to beat and worry the antagonist. But the moment he touches the person of the inside man he obtains complete immunity from violence at the hands of the rest of the inside batch. But the person who is caught is at liberty to strike him and struggle to prevent his being driven out. If he gets turned out, then he is no more to remain inside; and when whole of the inside section are thus driven out, the first batch has finished its turn, and is then followed by the other batch; and if anybody is left inside who cannot be driven out, his party is declared successful. Sometimes presents are given to the winners as tokens of appreciation of their training and strength".[2]

In south Malabar wrestling combats, popularly known as 'Onathallu', were in vogue during Onam celebrations. Even now the same is practised in some villages in the Palghat district. 'Onathallu' is started on the 'Atham' day and continued for 10 days. The wrestling combats were arranged and presided over by the feudal chief of the 'Kara' or 'Desam' The wrestling particularly of 'Uthradam' and 'ThiruOnam' are very famous and thousands of people assemble to witness the combat.

The wrestlers of two 'Karas' are divided into two groups, the one on the north and the other on the south. The umpires with canes in their hands stay near the feudal chief in the centre.

At the outset a few members of one side go to the other side and show gestures, supposed to be a sort of challenge thrown to the other party. The same is repeated by the other side. This is called 'Cherikali' (play of the cheri or kara).

Now, one man from each group comes out to the centre of the arena and shakes hands with each other. This is followed by wrestling. Wrestling continues, pair after pair, till all the wrestlers are exhausted. Those assembled enjoy the sight and show their appreciation by clapping of hands and yelling. The feudal chief gives presents to winners.[3]

Competitions in archery is another revelry seen along with the Onam celebrations. In Kurumbranad Taluk in between Korappuzha and Kattahppuzha it is in vogue even to this day.

"There is a semicircular stop-butt, about two feet in the highest part, the centre, and sloping to the ground at each side. The players stand 25 to 30 yards before the concave side of it, one side of the players to the right, the other to the left. There is no restriction of numbers as to 'sides'; each player is armed with a little bow made of bamboo about 18 inches in length, and arrows or what answer for arrows, these being no more than pieces of the mid-

1 Raja Raja Varma, Malabar Quarterly Review Vol. IV, p. 227 (Quoted in History of Kerala).

2 Gopala Panicker, Malabar and its Folk, pp. 95-96.

3 Kesava Menon, K. P., 'Onathallu', (Malayalam) Mathrubhoomi Weekly, September 5, 1954.

rib of the cocount plam leaf, roughly broken off, leaving a little bit of the leaf at one end to take the place of the feather. In the centre of the stop-butt, on the ground, is placed the target, a piece of the heart of the plantain tree, about 3 inches in diameter, pointed at the top, in which is stuck a small stick convenient for lifting the 'cheppu' as the mark which is the immediate objective of the players is called. They shoot indiscriminately at the mark, and he who hits it (the little arrows shoot straight and stick in readily) carries off all the arrows lying on the ground. Each side strives to secure all the arrows and to deprive the other side of theirs. He who hits the mark last takes all the arrows, that is he who hits it, and runs and touches the mark before anyone else hits it. As I stood watching, it happened several times that as many as four arrows hit the mark, while the youth who had hit it first was running the 25 yards to touch the 'cheppu'. Before he could touch it, as many as four other arrows had struck it; and, of course, he who hits it last and touched the mark secured all the arrows for his side. The game is accompanied by much shouting, gesticulation, and laughter. Those returning after securing a large number of arrows turned somersaults, and insultatory motions expressed their joy".*

Yet another popular game, pevalent mostly in the Travancore area is 'Kilikali'. Here, two teams are formed each with say 5, 6 or 7 members. As indicated in the diagram (page 24) a ractangle with a few cross-lines and one length wise line at the centre is marked out in an open space. The rectangle is about 8 ft. in breadth; the length varies according to the number of chambers marked out by the cross lines. Generally the distance from one cross line to another is about 6 ft.

One man of the first team who guards the central longitudinal line, is called 'Kili'. He is the head of the team and does not allow the opponents to cross his line. Other members of the team stand on the cross lines and stand alternately as shown in the diagram. Thus each of them is required to guard a cross line. The members of the second team stand outside the rectangle at one end and try to cross the cross lines and reach the other side of the rectangle. Again they turn back and try to reach the side from where they started. While they try to cross the bars those on guard try to prevent them. If any one of the team can cross all the bars and return to the original place, the team is considered to have scored an 'Uppu' (goal). If, while trying to cross the bars any member of the second team is touched by any member of the first team, the particular turn of game comes to an end and another turn starts by repeating the position.

Kuttium Kolum is another popular game of the youngsters during Onam. In this the instruments used are a long stick of about 1½ ft. in length known as the 'Kol' and a small one of about 5" in length known as the 'Kutti'. Two teams are formed generally with equal number of persons on each side. But if there are some good players on one team, weightage in number is given to the other team.

Before the game starts, the Kol is tossed to determine which is to be the opening side. Then any person from the opening side starts the game. The rule of the game is as follows. A small shallow burrow, about 6" in length is made on the ground, and at one end of the burrow the small stick (Kutti) is kept. It is then thrown off with the big stick, the action being called 'thombal' (trial). All members of the opposite party remain on guard and try to catch the Kutti. If is the caught, the person who has thrown the Kutti is declared out and the next man in the team takes his place. If it is not caught, the 'Kol' is kept upright near the burrow and the other party tries to hit it with the 'Kutti' by throwing the latter from where it fell. In case the 'Kutti' hits the 'Kol', the player is declared out. After 'thombal', starts 'Para'. In 'para' the 'Kol' is caught by the right hand and the 'Kutti' is held in front by the left hand. The player tosses the 'kutti' upwards and as it spins in the air, he tries to strike it with the Kol. The distance between the burrow and the place where the 'kutti' falls is measured with the 'kol'. Seven measures constitute one 'panam'. The way the 'kutti' has to be tossed again depends on the last number of the measurement. If it ends with one, the 'kutti' has to be kept on the toes of the right or the left leg and tossed and struck with the 'kol'. If the measurement is two, the 'kutti' is flipped by the Kol and struck. In case it is three, the 'kutti' is kept on the thumb and the

* Fawcett—Madras Museum Bulletin Vol. III, pp. 293-294.

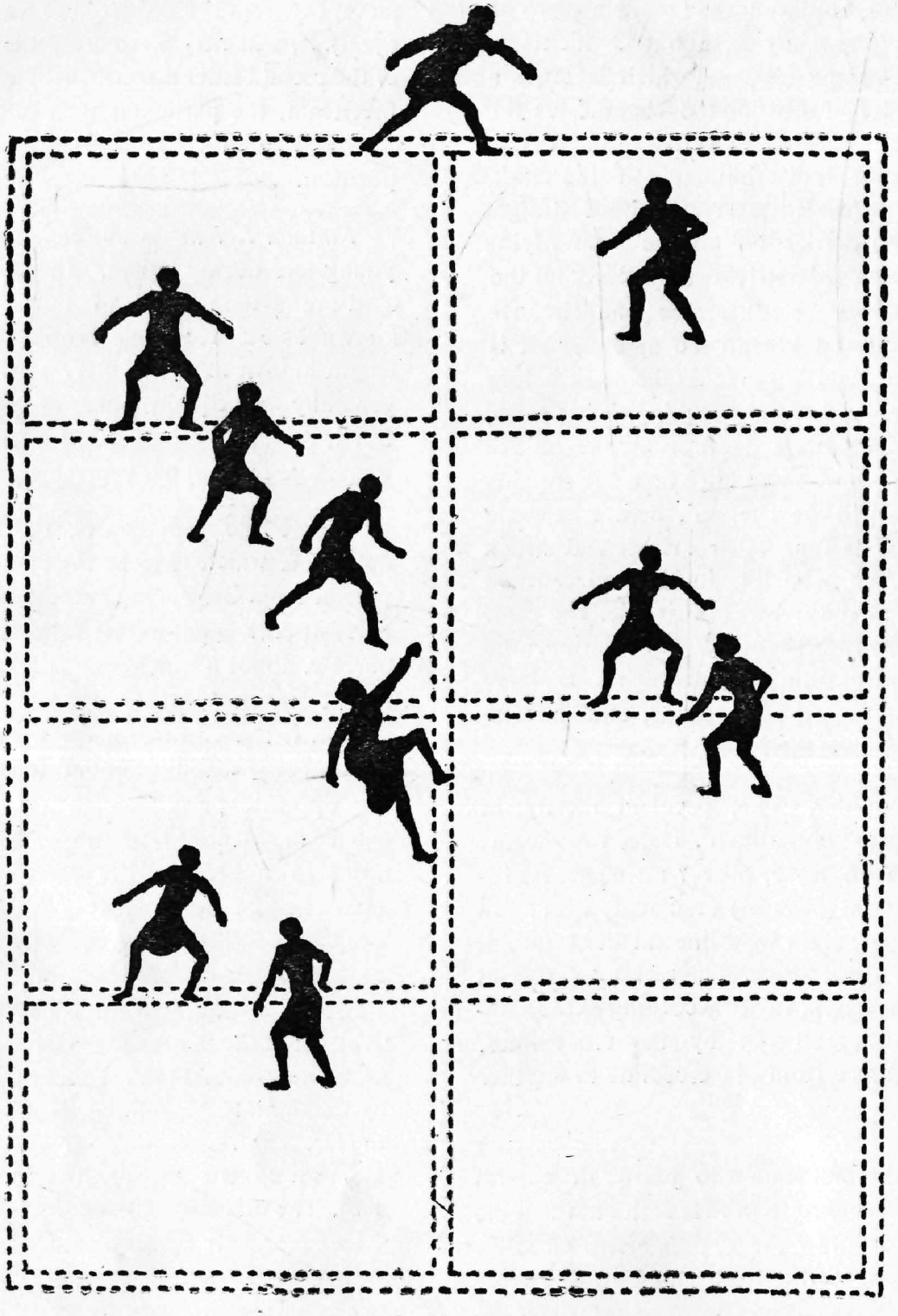


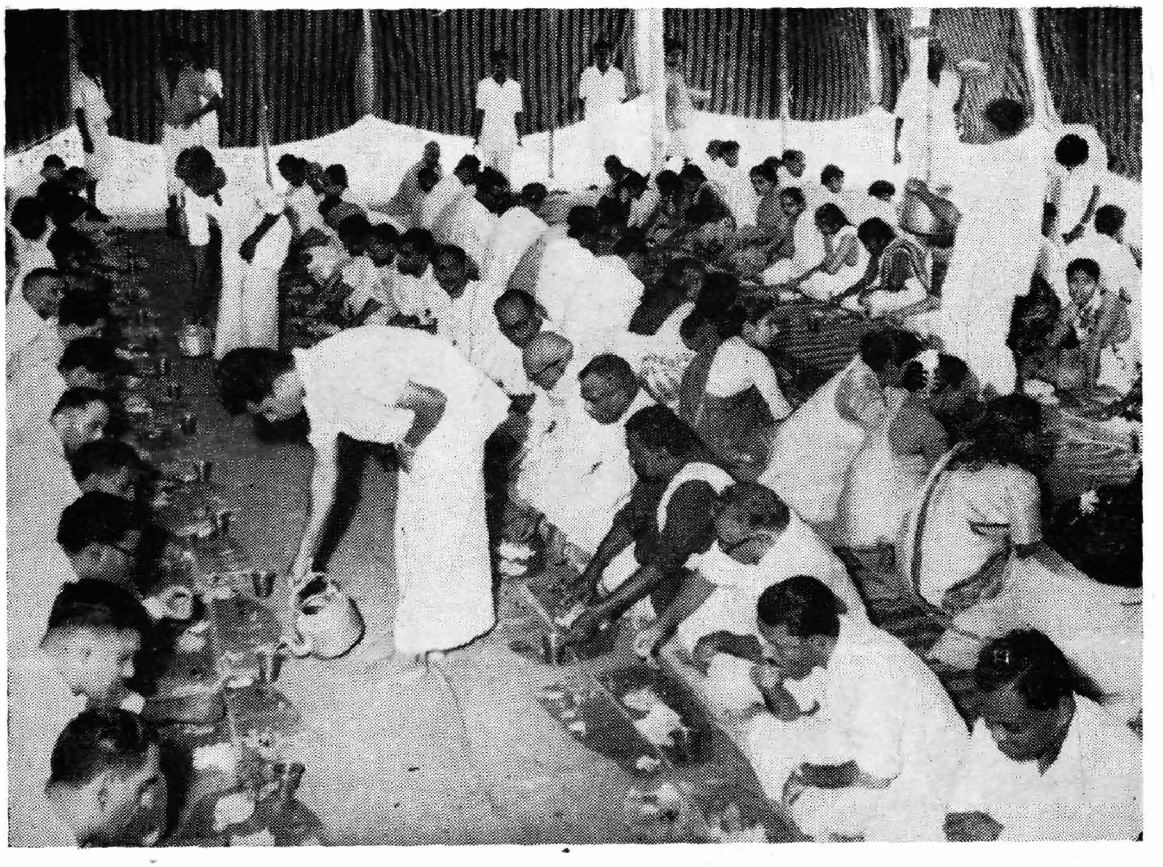
Figure showing the position of the members of the two teams in 'Kilikali'



2. ONATHAPPAN

At the centre of the flower carpet is kept a pyramid shaped clay model about 9" in height to represent Mahabali—Vaitala, Ernakulam. (Page 16)

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3. COMMUNITY FEAST

In connection with the Onam celebrations organised by the State Government, community feasts were also held-Trivandrum. (Page 12)



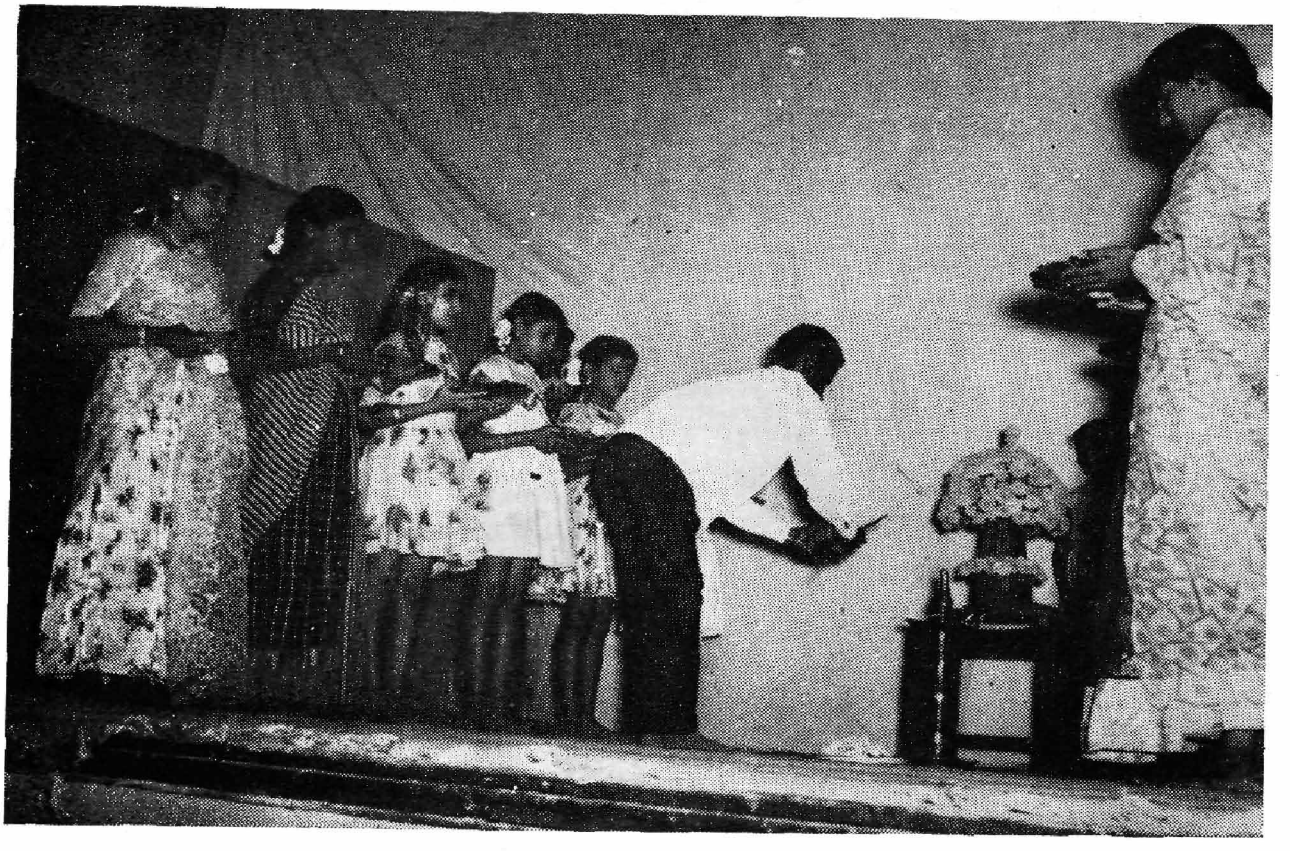
4. ONAM FLAG

A flag with Nilavilakku (brass votive lamp) sandwitched between two ears of paddy on a piece of yellow cloth was specially designed for the occasion. (Page 11)



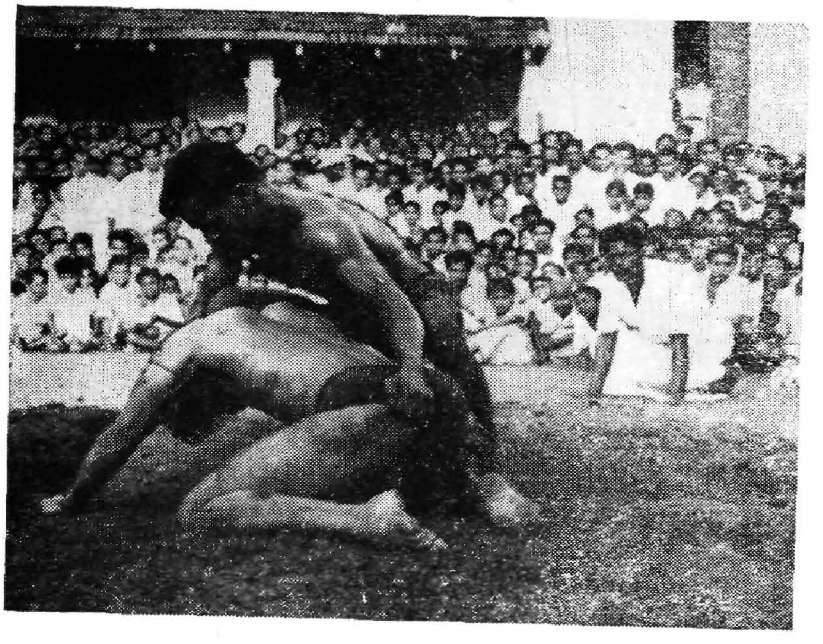
5. CHILDREN'S RALLY

Organised as a part of the cultural programmes held at various centres on the occasion of the State sponsored Onam celebrations —Kozhikode. (Page 12)



6. VENERATION OF ONATHAPPAN

Public performances connected with Onam, as organised by the Malayalee population in Delhi, starts with veneration of Onathappan by young girls (appendix II).



7. WRESTLING

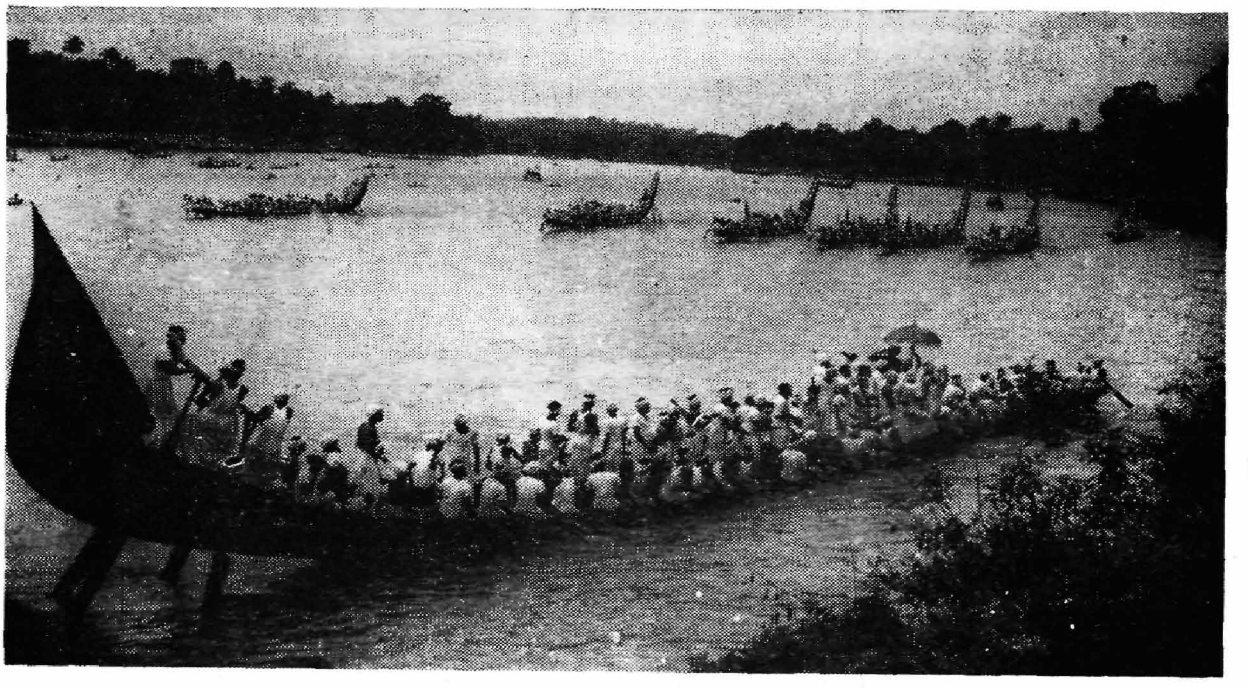
One of the items in the cultural programmes organised by the Onam Celebration Committee, Cannanore. (Page 12)

8&9. KALARI PAYATTU

Duels practised in Kalarees (gymnasiums) to train soldiers in former days. (Page 12)







10. VALLAM KALI

Boat race at Aranmula forms one of the items in the traditional celebrations of Onam festival. (Page 9)



11. CAPRISONED ELEPHANTS

Lead the colourful procession organised in connection with the 'Atham' celebrations at Thrippunithura. (Page 1)

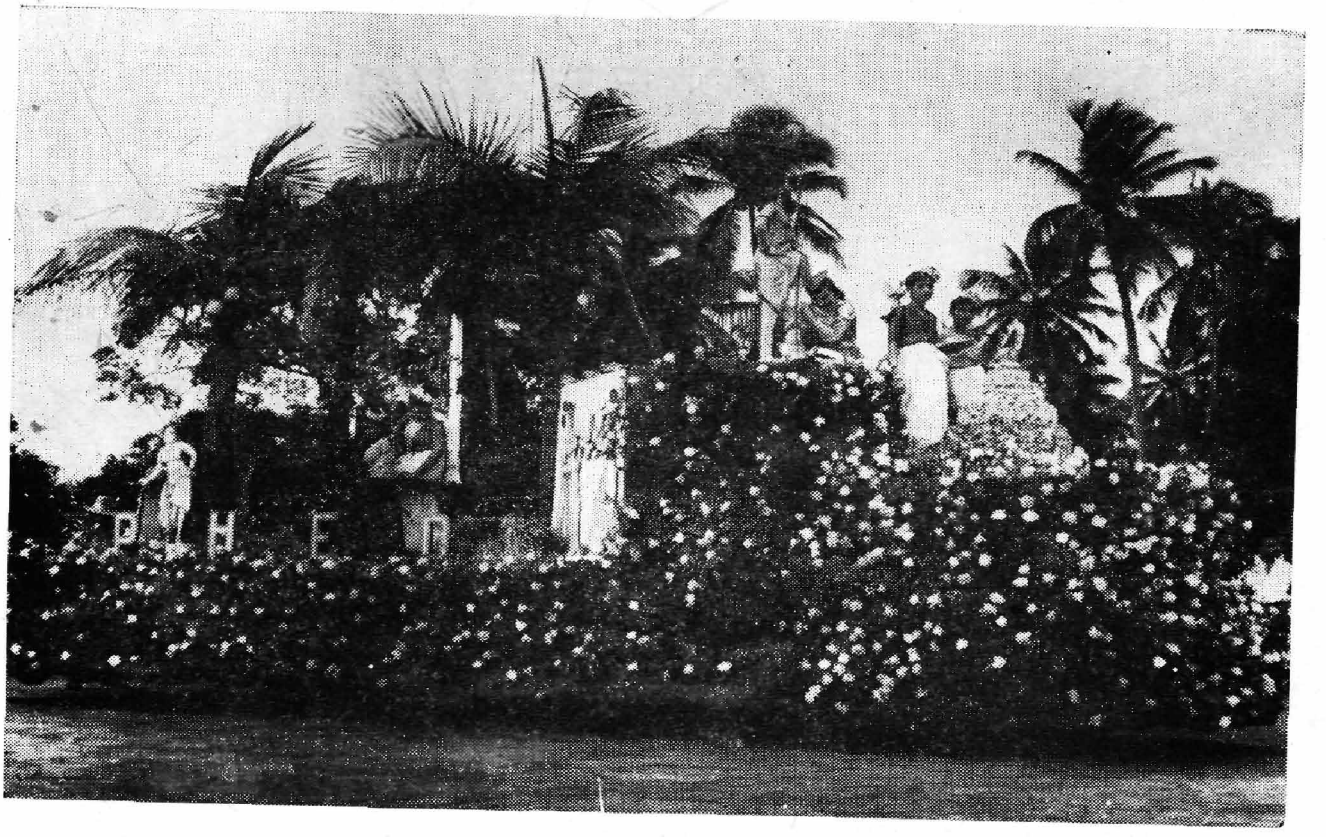


12. TABLEAU
Showing Vamana trampling Mahabali to the bowels of the earth—New Delhi. (Appendix II)



13. TABLEAU FLOAT

Presented by the Agriculture Department of the Govt. of Kerala in the procession, depicting Nair Agricultural family. The 'Karanavan' and the members of the family are near the house while the agricultural serfs of the family are a little away from them. (Page 12)



14. A TABLEAU FLOAT

Presented by the Trivandrum Water Works in the procession. From right to left are young girls laying floral carpet, Vamana trampling Mahabali and young women at the 'Unjol' (Swing). (Page 12)



15. KATHAKALI

A scene from 'Daksha-yagam'. (Page 12)



16. THIRUVATHIRA KALI

A kind of group dance by women in which the participants stand in a ring and clap their hands in a rythmic manner at definite intervals. (Page 25)

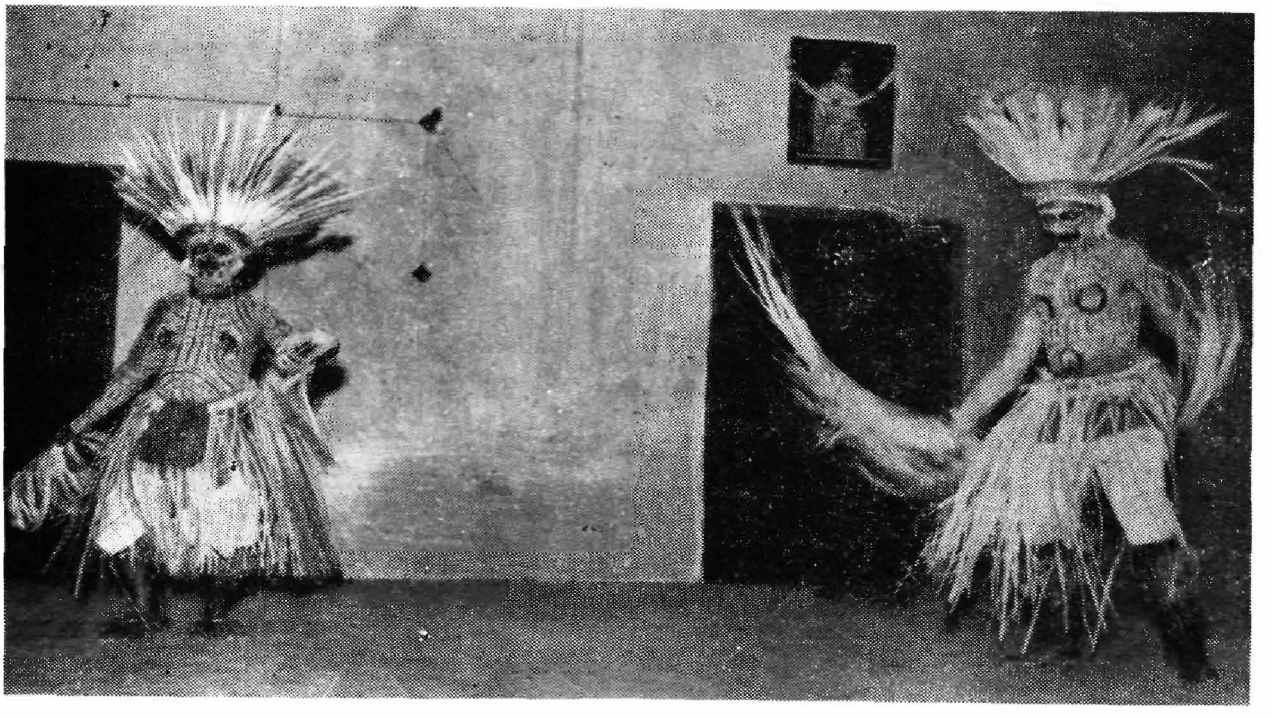


17. MUDIYATTAM KALI

A folk dance by women in which the participants unlock their hair and dance frantically in accompaniment of folk songs and playing on musical instruments. (Page 25)



18. GARUDAN THOOKKAM
A folk dance, miming vulture. (Page 12)



19. FOLK DANCE
From Cannanore. (Page 12)



20. THIRAYATTOM

A folk dance of North Kerala. (Page 12)



21. ADIMA DRAVIDA THEYYAM

A folk dance of North Kerala. (Page 12)



22. KUMMATTI KALI

A folk dance of Ernakulam.
(Page 12)



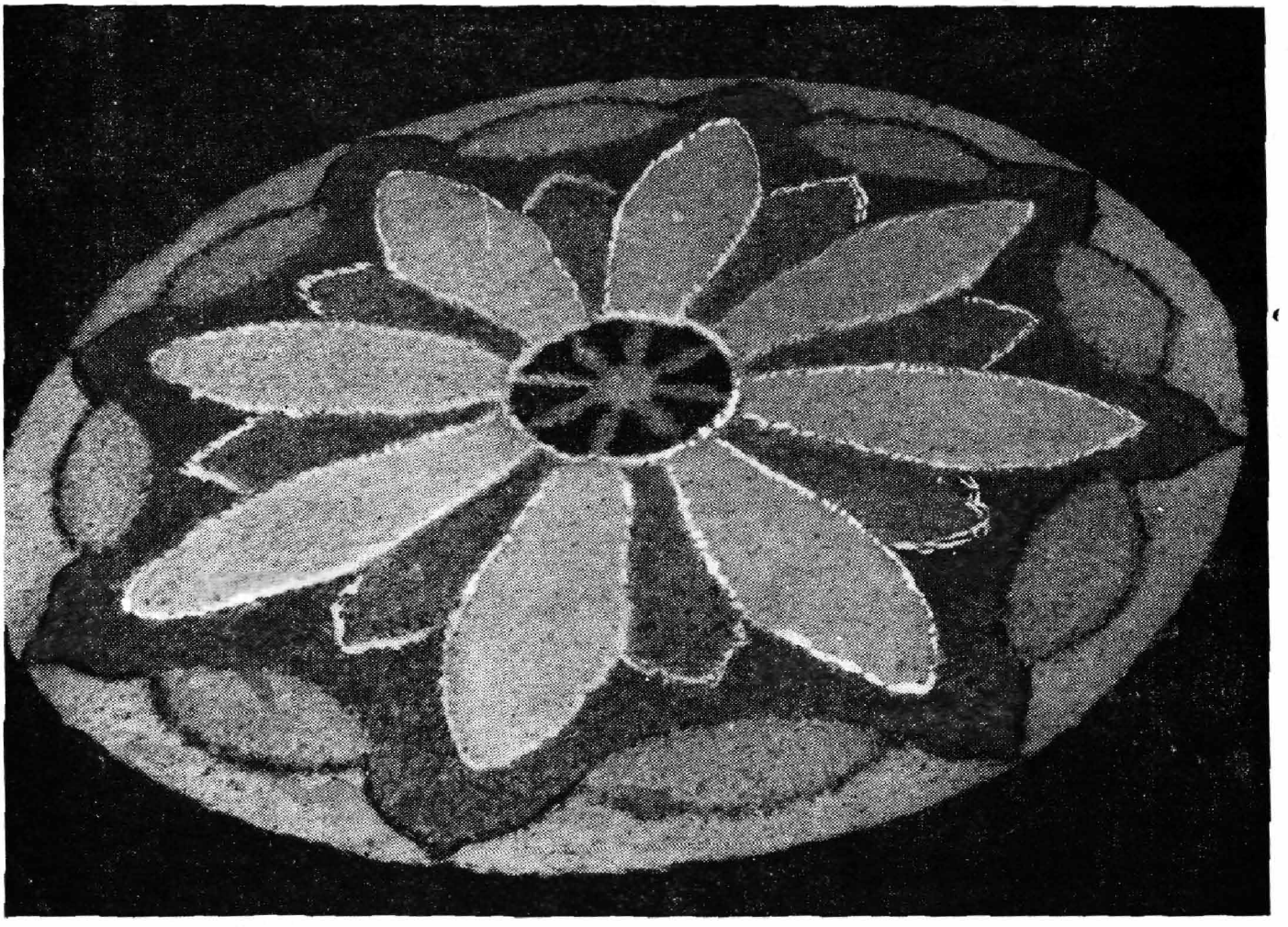
23. ATHAPPOVIDIL

A competition of Athappovidil (laying of floral diagrams) was organised at Kozhikode as a part of Onam celebrations.
(Page 12)



24. ATHAPPOOV

A floral diagram. (Page 12)



25. ATHAPPOOV

A floral diagram prepared in Trivandrum. (Page 12)



26. CHOODAMANI

A dance drama staged at Cannanore. The scene is from Ramayana, depicting Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman after the rescue of Sita from Ravana. (Page 12)

fingers of the left hand, if it is four the 'kutti' rests on the fore and the tiny fingers. If the last number of the measurment is five, the 'kutti' is kept on the first of the right hand which also holds the 'kol'. If the measurement is six, the player has to face a very difficult position. The 'kutti' is kept on the eye, tossed with a jerk of head and struck. Each time the kutti is struck with the kol and flown in the air, the players of the opposite team try to catch and oust the person operating the kol and the kutti. When all the members of one team are ousted, the members of the other team begin to operate the Kol and the kutti.

'Karadikali' and 'Pulikali' are two other recreations, in which the youngsters are engaged. The actors dress themselves as 'karadi' (bear) or 'puli' (tiger) with coconut leaves, dried plantain leaves etc. They go from house to house accompanied by a group of singers and display their dance mimicking tigers and bears. In return, they get presents in cash and kind.

The games in which the women folk participate are 'Thiruvathira Kali, 'Kummi', Parakali', 'Vattukali', 'Amman', 'Unjol' swinging, 'Thalayattam Kali' etc.

'Thiruvathirakali is a kind of group dance in which the participants stand in a ring and clap their hands in a rythmic manner at difinite intervals. The steps are also controlled in consonance with the clapping of hands. The clapping and stepping is accompanied by folk songs.

Kummi is a varriant of Thiruvathira.

'Mudiyattam Kali' is another folk dance in which the participants unlock their hair and dance frantically in accompaniment of folk-songs.

'Pasuvum Puliyum' is yet another folk play in which the women mostly take part. A ring is formed by a group of girls standing at some distance from one another, but each clasping the hands of the next one on either side. One girl plays the role of pasu (cow) and stands inside the ring, while another girl plays the role of puli (tiger) and stands outside. The game starts when someone from among the spectators yells out "the cow is eating paddy". On hearing this, the 'tiger' tries to break the cordon to 'eat' the cow. The persons forming the cordon do not allow the 'tiger' to go in. Side by side they also sing the folk song, which is in the form of a conversation between the tiger and those who guard the 'cow'. The tiger says, "I will on any account eat the cow". Those who guard the cow say "we would not allow you to eat the cow at any cost."

The 'tiger' goes round, trying to find out a weak spot to break through. The game ends when the 'tiger' enters the cordon and touches the 'cow'.

'Thumbi thullal', is another important game, played by the women during Onam, all over Kerala. One girl becomes 'tumbi'; she is seated and completely covered with clothes. She holds a bunch of lucas plants in her hand. Other girls go around her and sing songs.

"Enthae thumpi ni thullathirikkunnu,
Poovu porānjo pookkula porānjo,"
(Dear 'thumbi' why you do not dance,
Is it because you need more flowers
Or want more flower bunches.)

After some time 'thumbi' gets up from her seat and dances frantically and then tries to beat the co-players. The latter try to run away to avoid being beaten by 'thumbi'. Those who are beaten become 'outs'. When all become 'outs' the game is repeated with another 'thumbi'.

'Unjol' or swing, as stated elsewhere, is a must during Onam celebration. In Trichur area, it has been found that Unjol is equally popular during Thiruvathira,—a festival celebrated in honour of Kamadeva (God of love).

A number of folk songs are sung by the women and the children while rocking on the swing. These songs are sung in a particular tune and they generally depict the conditions of the good old days of Mahabali. One such song is 'Maveli Charitam' (narration about Mahabali). The theme of the song is as follows:

One bird from Thrikkakara (supposed to be the abode of Onathappan) comes to the country side to narrate the story of Mahabali.

The little bird tells the people that she has come from Thrikkakara. In great jubilation the people

give a seat to her and ask her to tell them the news of Thrikkakara. The bird invokes the blessings of Ganapathy, Parvathy, Lakshmi, Lord Krishna and the various Gurus and then tells the people that she would narrate what she has heard from Narada. "When Mahabali ruled the land, all people enjoyed equal status and were extremely happy. None had any difficulty and there was no disease or decay. In fact infant mortality was unknown during the time and the people enjoyed long life. Agriculture was in its zenith and paddy yielded hundred times. All were extremely good and not a single corrupt or cruel person was to be seen. The temples were all alike. People used only good gold to make their jewellery. Thieves and cheats were unknown; measures and measuring rods were true. They got sufficient rain at the appropriate time. People read the scriptures and invoked the deities with reverence".

"During this time emperor Mahabali told his subjects that Thiruonam day which is the birthday of Lord Siva should be celebrated. He entreated the people that they should pay a visit during this time to Thrikkakara, the seat of Lord Siva. To this, the young and the old, replied that it was difficult for them to walk all the way to Thrikkakara. Realising the difficulty of the people the kind emperor suggested that in that case they might celebrate Onam at their homes."

"He also told his subjects how they were to celebrate the festival. The festivities should start from 'Atham'. The houses should be cleaned, duabed with cow-dung and bedecked with flowers of lucas and others. On the evening of 'Uthradam' the members of the family should take bath and propitiate 'Mahadeva'. This should be continued on all the Onam days."

The bird continued "These happy days did not last long. Mahabali left his beloved land for Lord Vishnu who continued the rule. During the reign of Vishnu the practice of worshipping Shiva and the celebration of Onam was discontinued. Mahabali was pained to hear this and he asked Vishnu, why it was so. To this, Vishnu consoled Mahabali and allowed him to visit his people once a year on the day of Onam, in the month of Chingom.

This news was conveyed to the people with the request that they should celebrate the day of the arrival of Mahabali with added pomp and pleasure. The people were asked to clean their homes, bedeck them with varieties of flowers. They should also dress themselves pompously and wear tasteful ornaments.

Thus, from this day onwards emperor Mahabali accompanied by Mahadev came to visit the people. They also visited Thrikkakara, where, all including Vishnu assembled to greet the distinguished visitors."

Feasting and other activities connected with Onam celebration continue for three more days after Thiru Onam. The 'Pururuttadi day' (5th Onam) is the last day of the Onam festival. The feast on this day has a special significance. Farm labourers and others rendering special service, are expected to dine at their master's place on this day. In many places this day is considered to be an auspicious day for resumption of economic activities. In fact, it is believed that one need not refer to an almanac for starting any activity on the fifth Onam. The business centres and shops remain closed for four days and they resume their business on this day. The agriculturists consider it to be a sin to undertake agricultural oprations during the first four days of Onam; it is only on this day that they resume their activities.

Expenses connected with Onam

For fulfilling the social obligations, every family has to shoulder extra economic responsibilities. They are to procure necessary ingredients for the celebration sufficiently early. Food materials like rice, provisions, vegetables etc., are to be procured; new dresses are to be made for the members of the family and in some cases, for the relatives and servants also; things for presentation are also to be assembled.

The expenses are met through various means depending on the nature of economic pursuit of each family. The agriculturists raise money by selling the surplus agricultural products. The agricultural workers obtain the requisite amount from their respective masters, either in cash or in kind or in both. At least a week before Onam, the masters make payments to their agricultural servants. The plantation workers, over and above their remuneration, receive festival advances and bonus before Onam. The factory workers get their payments, both salary and

bonus, before Onam. The Government servants get advance salary for the month before Onam.

The expenses connected with Onam can broadly be divided into three categories; expenses on clothes, expenses on food and expenses on miscellaneous items, including recreation, oblations to be sent to temple and betel leaves and nuts.

Information regarding the expenses incurred in connection with Onam has been collected both from Hindu and non-Hindu families. The non-Hindus spend comparatively more on food and miscellaneous items. On an average, they spend 21% of the total expenditure on clothes, 45% on food and 34% on miscellaneous items. Among the Hindus, the expenditure pattern differs according to the economic status. The agricultural labourers belonging to lower income group spent 36.5% on clothes, 44% on food and 19.5% on miscellaneous items. The agriculturists and others belonging to middle income group spent 44.2% on clothes, 41.2% on food and 14.6% on miscellaneous items.

The above figures reflect the nature of participation of the different categories of population in the festival. The Muslims and the Christians spent less on clothes, as it is not customary for them to wear new clothes during Onam. In fact, a good percentage of the expenses incurred by them for purchase of clothes, was for giving presents to their Hindu agricultural labourers. Some amount was also spent for purchasing clothes for their children, who otherwise would have longed for new clothes when they see the children of the Hindu neighbours going about in new clothes. The expenses connected with miscellaneous items did not include any expenditure for performance of any ritual. Under this item they spent money for social and recreational purposes.

The middle income group of agriculturists spent more on clothes as they were to provide clothes for their agricultural labourers also. Almost an equal amount was spent on food but the expenditure on miscellaneous items was comparatively low.

The agricultural labourers got some clothes from their masters and, therefore, their expenditure under that item was comparatively less than that on food. They also spent a good percentage of their total expenditure on recreations.

Initiative in the family in organising Onam

During the study some information was collected about who took initiative in the different families for performing the festival. It was found that, by and large, the initiative rested with the female members of the families concerned. Among them, the prerogative was exercised either by the eldest female member of the family or by the wife of the eldest male member of the family. In a few cases, the initiative for performing Onam rested with the male members.

Dominant voice in the family in matters connected with the performance of Onam

From 40 households information was collected about who had the dominant voice in matters connected with the performance of Onam. In 34 households the dominant voice was that of the eldest female member or the wife of the eldest male member of the household. This is in conformity with the matriarchal tradition of the area, specially among the Nairs. Only in 6 households the eldest male member had the dominant voice.

Enthusiasm among different categories of members

The study also revealed that comparatively more enthusiasm was displayed by women and children. It was also observed that the children and elderly people were more enthusiastistic about the celebration of Onam than the young people. Information on this aspect was collected from 44 Hindu households. In 16 cases the children were more enthusiastic, while in 10 cases the women showed more enthusiasm. 11 households reported that the elderly people showed more enthusiasm and in 7 households all the members shared the enthusiasm equally.

Method of spending time by males, females and children

Information was collected about the mode of spending time by males, females and children during the Onam festival. It was reported that the males spent most of their time in visiting friends and relations. They also spent much time for recreational activities like playing cards, attending movies, dances, dramas etc. In a few cases they either took rest or read

books. The females spent most of their time by visiting neighbours. A few attended movies and other recreational activities also. The children had a gala time. They enjoyed various types of games, folk dances and other recreational activities.

Regional and communitywise differences in performance of Onam

The description of the performance of Onam as furnished above, holds good mainly for the higher castes of the larger area of Kerala. But there are some regional and castewise differences.

In Cape Comerin, while the Nayars follow the general pattern of Kerala, in performance of Onam; the other castes celebrate it in a different way.

Cape Comerin now forms part of Madras State. The bulk of the population of this area belong to Nadar Community, though other castes like Nair, Pulaya, Vedar, Brahmin, etc., are also met with. The Nadars immigrated to this area long ago from other Tamil speaking areas. It is said that they came here as agricultural labourers of the Nayars. Because of their close association with the Nayars for a long time, they have imbibed many elements of Nayar culture, though Tamil is their mothertongue. Most of them speak Malayalam as well. Their food habits dress and marriage customs, etc., are also very much similar to those of the Malayalam castes. In recent decades, some of them have embraced Christianity; but this has not brought in many changes in their social customs.

Onam is celebrated by the Nadars of Cape Comerin. But their celebration is limited to a feast and wearing of new clothes. The various rituals including laying of Athappovital are not performed by them. Even the Christian Nadars celebrate Onam; but their celebration is limited only to a feast on the Thiru Onam day. Those Nadars who work as agricultural servants of the Nayar families send presents to their masters and receive in return new clothes and provisions for the Onam feast.

The change in the political set up of Cape Comerin has affected the Onam celebrations to a certain extent. When it was a part of the ex-Travancore State and later Travancore Cochin State, the Onam week was declared as a holiday by the Government. But now, only the Thiru Onam day is treated as an optional holiday. As a result, those people who are working in Government institutions or in schools are unable to celebrate Onam in the same way as they used to do in the past.

Pulayas are the agricultural serfs of the land holding people of the area. Till recently they used to send with great enthusiasm Onam presents to their masters and get in return new clothes and provisions for the Onam feast. The recent trend, however, is that they are not very much enthusiastic about observing this custom. In a convention of Pulayas held at Pallichal near Trivandrum a few years ago, it was decided that in future the Pulayas would not send Onam presents to their masters. The political parties, functioning in the area, are also trying to dissuade the agricultural serfs including the Pulayas, from sending Onam presents. The younger people have been much influenced by these developments. Some of the older people, however, like to stick to the old custom.

Shenkota is another area which has been transferred to Madras State. Here the bulk of the population speaks Tamil, though there is a sprinkling of the Malayalam speaking castes like Nayars, Ezhavas, etc. To the Tamil speaking people Onam has no significance. But formerly when it was a part of the then Travancore State, a few Tamil speaking people used to observe Thiru Onam. The celebration was limited to a feast in the family. Today the Tamil speaking people, by and large, do not even hold the feast. On the other hand, they perform their regular economic activities, which they did not do, when the area was part of Travancore State.

To the Malayalam speaking people of the area, Onam is still an important occasion. They do not participate in any economic activity during this time. Exchange of gifts, especially from and to the Malayalam speaking servants and their Malayalam speaking master, is scrupulously observed even to this day. The Tamil speaking servants too send gifts to their Malayalam speaking masters but generally the latter do not reciprocate by sending gifts.

Kasargod taluk bordering Mysore State, is another area where Onam is celebrated in a conspicuously different way than the rest of the State. Here, though

the bulk of the population speaks Malayalam, the influence of Kanarese culture is quite great. In this areas the Malayalam speaking people perform Onam on a much reduced scale than in other areas of the State; the Kannada speaking people on the other hand are completely indifferent about Onam.

There are also some regional variations in the ritual aspects of Onam. Athappovita (ritual of laying flower carpets) is a common ritual throughout Kerala excepting Quilon and adjoining areas. In laying the flower carpets different methods are used in different regions. In South Travancore, the flower carpets are laid over mud steps specially prepared for this purpose. The steps must be in odd number. In north Travancore, Cochin and Malabar flower carpets are laid just on the floor of the front courtyard where cow-dung is already plastered. Excepting south Travancore, in all the places, where flower carpets are laid, clay made representations of Onathappan are also worshipped. In South Travancore, in place of clay made representation of Onathappan, upper half of a grinding stone is used on Thiruonam day; on the other days cowdung, shaped in phallic form, is worshipped.

The data collected from a rubber plantation show that Onam is not celebrated enthusiastically there. In this particular plantation Onam was declared as a holiday till 1958. In 1958 under the instruction of the State Government, it was declared as a paid holiday. The other paid holidays are, 15th August (Independence Day), 26th Jaunary (Republic day), 1st May, Adi (a Tamil festival day), Christmas and Deepavali. Festival advances are given on these days.

Both Malayalam and Tamil castes live in the plantation. Except for the celebrations at the family level in the Malayalee households, no joint celebrations were held till 1962. In 1962, however, a few Malayalam speaking workers took initiative and organised sports and games. Contributions were made both by the Malayalees and the Tamilians. Even the Christians and Muslims belonging to both these language groups contributed. The plantation authorities also contributed a good sum. At the family level, the nature of performance among the Malayalee families depended on the area of origin. Those belonging to Quilon district did not propitiate Onathappan, while those who belonged to north and south Kerala did.

As already mentioned there are caste and communitywise differences in the performance of Onam. The Nambootiri Brahmins and Nayars celebrate Onam on a grand scale and observe all the rituals in vogue in their area. The Tamil speaking people on the other hand do not consider Onam as an important day for them. However, because of their long association with the local people they, too, have the Onam feast. Besides, the agricultural families give presents to their Malayalam speaking servants and accept presents, from them. One Tamil Brahmin family out of four studied was found to have performed the various rituals connected with Onam. The investigator, however, was informed that such cases were very rare.

Among many of the tribes of Kerala, Onam has a different meaning. The Kurichans of Parambikkulam hills do not celebrate Onam in the manner it is conventionally celebrated by the caste Hindus. They do not know much about the popular Mahabali myth. To them Onam is a festival for eating of new grains. Just before Onam, they go out for a community hunt. The party consists of clansmen and relatives living in the same settlement. The games bagged during the hunt are distributed among the participants who consume the same in the feasts held in each family on the occasion of Onam. The feasts are held on two days, viz., Uthradam day and Thiruonam day. In these feasts in addition to rice and vegetables, fish and meat are served. This is a deviation from the custom of the orthodox Hindus who refrain from non-vegetarian food during Onam.

Before the feast, some new rice mixed with coconut and jaggery is ground into powder. It is kept inside the room on a plantain leaf along with plantain fruits, tender coconut, parched rice etc. This is considered to be an offering to the spirits of the dead. After the propitiation, the 'prasad' is distributed among those who are present.

Among the Kuravans of Travancore, Onam is the day for offering of thanks to the ancestral spirits. Among them the ancestral spirits are enshrined under a tree situated on the southern side of the house. On the Uthradam night they offer

liquor, rice cakes, flattened and parched rice, incense, camphor, etc., to the spirits. The spirits are requested to be satisfied with whatever has been offered and are assured that next time attempts would be made to offer more. Then an appeal is made to the spirits to look after the welfare of the persons worshipping them and to ward off the evil spirits which haunt the area. This ritual is locally known as 'kalayam vaikkal'. A similar offering made during the 'makaram' harvest, is popularly known as 'Uchara'.

In addition to their attempt to establish good relations with the ancestral spirits, they try to establish good relation with fellow human beings, on this occasion. The agricultural serfs send presents to their masters and in return receieve presents. But the other elements of Onam, viz., laying of flower carpet and propitiation of Onathappan is not found among them.

The Pulayas of Quilon area also celebrate Onam in the same way as the Kuravans.

The Vedans, holding the lowest status in the social hierarchy, celebrate Onam in a different manner. They propitiate their own deities and spirits which are enshrined in the local 'Kavu' (sacred bush) by offering liquor, paddy, parched rice, flattened rice, etc. After offering these things they sing and dance in the'Kavu' itself. This is popularly known as 'Verichukali'. After the dance is over, a feast takes place, for which, contributions are collected from the members of the community by the headman. Generally, only one 'Kavu' is found in a particular region. On the Uthradam night all people belonging to the community who live in the area, assemble at the 'Kavu' and join in the propitiation of the spirits. On this occasion the 'Kavu' is cleared of all the undergrowths. This requires joint labour by a large number of people. A representative from each family takes part in it.

The Thandans (coconut pluckers) of Travancore area worship their implements during Onam. On the night of 'Uthradam' they assemble on a plantain leaf, a few rice cakes, parched rice, flattened rice, incense, plantain fruits, paddy grains along with some liquor and offer the same to 'Ganapati'. A lighted lamp is also kept at the place. The implements namely 'Kathal' (a long and strong chopper) and axe are kept in front of the lamp and certain 'poojas' are performed. The implements are not taken out till the 5th Onam. On the Thiru Onam day, they hold Onam feast after worshipping the implements.

Among the artisan castes, like the blacksmiths, carpenters and masons, worshipping their respective implements is considered to be the most important ritual aspect of Onam festival. On the Uthradam night, the implements are kept at a sanctified place in a room and pujas are performed. These are taken out for use only on 5th Onam.

Some special rites are performed by the former rulers of Kerala. These rites are not related to their caste or community but to their special status. These are, however, briefly indicated here. On Thiru-Onam day, the ex-Maharaja of Travancore goes to the family temple and offers prayer. In the temple he is given a bow and an arrow as symbols of power; also he is given a piece of cloth, a part of which must be yellow. After returning to the palace, he meets all his important officers and presents them new clothes. After that, the Hindu officers are entertained with a sumptuous feast. In the evening the non-Hindu officers are entertained at a tea-party.

More or less similar functions are held at the palace of the ex-rulers of Cochin and Kozhicode.

As already mentioned, the non-Hindus perform Onam festival in a much abbreviated form. The Christians constitute the most important non-Hindu community in Kerala. Among them the preparation for Onam festival is limited to cleaning of premises and daubing the same with cowdung, repairing, plastering and white washing the houses and collecting food stuffs for Onam feast. Rarely they purchase new clothes for thsmselves. But they give presents to the agricultural serfs and others rendering traditional services to them.

Laying of flower carpets is not generally found among the Christians. But sometimes the Christian children lay flower carpets in their courtyards in immitation of the Hindu children. The ritual of propitiation of Onathappan is not performed in any Christian family; but in one family a small girl installed an Onathappan in the middle of the flower

carpet. The elders of the family did not object to it as they considered it only a child's play.

The Christians also hold Onam feast. But it differs from the feast among the orthodox Hindus in one important respect. Whereas the orthodox Hindus refrain from non-vegetarian food during Onam, the Christians do not.

As regards participation in recreational activites there is hardly any difference between the Hindus and the Christians.

Next to the Christians the Muslims constitute the most important non-Hindu community. They too hold a feast on Thiruonam day where non-vegetarian items are served along with the vegetarian items. Besides, they give presents to the farm servants and others who render traditional services to them.

CHAPTER VII

TRENDS OF CHANGE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF ONAM

A few elderly persons belonging to the different parts of the State were asked to narrate how Onam used to be performed during their childhood. On comparing the picture of the past, thus obtained with the present day position, it is found that the performance of Onam has undergone a series of changes both in content and pattern. Some of these are indicated below.

Impact of change in family structure

In former days, when the ethos of joint family (tarawad) was the most important factor in determining the mode of behaviour, the responsibility for organising the various rites and other activities connected with Onam rested with the head of the joint family, the 'Karanavan'. Today, with the change in the family structure, the responsibility for organising the various activities connected with Onam has fallen mostly on the shoulders of some elderly women of the family; only in a few cases the responsibility remains with the head of the family. This change has been brought about because of two reasons. In the tarawads of former times, there was rigid division of labour among the different members and the Karanavan had to co-ordinate their activities. Performance of Onam festival involved activities of different types and without the active initiative of the Karanavan coordination of the same would have been difficult. In the nuclear families which prevail now-a-days, there is much less of formal division of labour; even the joint families of present day differ from the tarawads of earlier days in content and function. In the tarawad a number of sisters used to live together with their children and the seniormost brother was the head of the family. It was very much heterogeneous in composition and required formalisation of common activities. Present day joint families on the other hand consist of parents and married children and hence formalisation of authority and function is not so much necessary. The second reason why the male head of the family is not always in the picture, is that there has been a change in the content of the festival. Previously economic activities, to wit, giving presents to the serfs and other servants were as important as the ritual activities. But now the economic activities have become less important and hence the active roles of the male members have been considerably reduced.

Another aspect of change which has been noticed as a result of the change in the family structure is the comparative enthusiasm shown by the members of the family in connection with the celebration of the Onam festival. In a joint family, the enthusiasm was shared by and large, by all members. Today, on the other hand, it has been found that the women and children are comparatively more enthusiastic about the celebration. Not a single case in which the young men were enthusiastic about the festival was reported in the present study.

Changes have also been reported in the exchange of visits. Formerly, exchange of visits were few, as the kiths and kins who were to be visited lived together in the same joint family. Exchange of visits then were limited to the neighbours or a few friends or distant relatives. Today, it is not so. As the near relations live in separate nuclear families, the bounds with them are reinforced by exchanging visits during Onam festival.

Impact of change in agrarian structure and economic opportunities

In recent years a number of land reform measures have been introduced in the State. Some of these reform measures have direct bearing on the performance of Onam. These are indicated below.

Formerly in all the areas of Kerala, substantial portions of land, were in the hands of the intermediaries. There were different categories of intermediary right holders; most important among them were the 'Jenmies'. The 'Jenmies' had absolute rights over the lands, which they used to lease out to 'Kanam' or 'Kanapattam' tenants on payment of Jenmi dues called 'Jenmikaram'.

Through a series of legislations, e. g. Edavagai

Rights Acquisition Act 1955, Land Reforms Act 1960, the intermediary rights have been abolished, and the tillers have become the masters of the soil.

As noted earlier, under the traditional pattern, the tenants had to send presents to the Jenmis during Onam. It is reported that in some parts of Cochin provision for sending presents to the Jenmi was incorporated in the tenancy deed. But with the change in the tenancy system, the erstwhile tenants are no longer under obligation to send presents. Even then some send presents to their former masters, not because the former masters can any longer apply any economic sanction, but because of respect for old tradition. The number of such persons is, however, gradually coming down. Besides, now-a-days they tend to offer only token present. Compared to the past, it is only nominal, in quantity.

This change in the agrarian structure as well as change in the employment situation, has affected the agricultural labourers also. With setting up of new industries in the outlying areas and introduction of different development measures the opportunities of rural employment have gone up. Hence the agricultural labourers have become less dependent on the cultivators. This is progressively reflected in the nature of their participation in Onam. Just as the cultivators are more and more disowning their traditional obligations towards the erstwhile Jenmies and other intermediary right holders, the agricultural labourers are also trying to disown their obligations towards the cultivators. Traditionally they are to clear the premises of the houses of the cultivators during Onam without any payment; but now many of them either avoid this task or demand payment for it. The amount of presents given by them now-a-days to the cultivators is also nominal very frequently. Even many do not give any present at all. The cultivators also in their turn frequently give only nominal presents to their farm labourers. Previously they used to give clothes and other provisions to all members of the labourer's family, now they give presents, only to the labourer and his wife.

Impact of change in the boundary of the State

Some of the changes which have taken place in the ritual complex of Onam, in different areas, after reorganisation of States in 1956, have already been indicated in other contexts. These are being consolidated and recapitulated here. Some additional data are also furnished here.

Most of the Malabar area was previously part of Madras State. On reorganisation of States this was transferred to Kerala. The bulk of the population in Malabar are Malayalam speakers. Change in their political affiliation does not appear to have brought about any change in the manner of their performance of Onam. But some change has taken place in Kasargode taluk which was formerly part of Mysore State. Prior to transfer of the administrative jurisdiction of this taluk to Kerala, except few Malayalee families hardly anybody performed Onam here. Even the Malayalee families used to restrict the celebration to a day or two. Now, almost all the Malayalam speaking families have started performing Onam. The period of performance has also gone up to four days. Many non-Malayalam speakers have also started observing Onam; their performances are, however, mainly confined to recreational aspects.

In contrast, changes in the reverse direction have taken place in Cape Comerin and Shenkotah taluk. These areas were previously parts of former Travancore-Cochin State. On reorganisation of States, administrative authority over these was transferred to Madras.

When these areas were parts of former Travancore-Cochin State, there was long Onam vacation for schools and offices. The people, therefore, had sufficient leisure to celebrate Onam. At that time not only the Malayalam speakers used to perform Onam but also the Tamil speakers of the areas used to perform it to some extent. Now, only ThiruOnam day is declared as optional holiday. Therefore, those who are reading in schools or working in Government offices are compelled to reduce their participation in the celebration. As a result, many of the recreational aspects of the festival have been given up. Dance, music and other cultural activities which imparted to the Onam week, a new jest for life, have now been almost discontinued. Only some of the ritual aspects, to wit, throwing away of rubbish, laying of flower carpets and woshipping of Onathappan, persist among the Malayalam speaking families. The Tamil speakers have practically dissociated themselves from the performance of Onam.

Change in the relative importance of secular and sacred aspects of the festival at community level and family level

Avilable evidences suggest that in the past, religious rites constituted the more important part of Onam festival. These rites were performed in the temples. In other words these were performed at the community level. In course of time two developments took place—the recreational and the economic aspects became equally, if not more important, at the community level. At the same time there was decentralisation of the focus of the performance of the religious rites. Instead of being performed at the community level, in the temples, these bagan to be performed in the families. At present there is only one temple in Kerala viz., Thrikkakara temple, where the rites connected with Onam are performed. The people visit other temples also during Onam; but in those temples no rite connected with Onam is performed.

The gain in importance of the recreational activities at the cost of the ritual activities, at the community level reached its zenith in 1961, when the Government of Kerala, decided to perform Onam as a State festival. As described earlier, the State festival comprises of secular recreational and cultural activities only.

Performace of Onam as a State festival has an important sociological bearing, which may be mentioned here. As the festival is performed on a mass scale, a large number of youths take part in the sports and various competitions of physical feats. A large number of people of different age and sex groups also attend the various performances as audiance. As a result, family is likely to be relegated to the background as a functional unit, for performance of the various activities connected with the festival and Onam may turn out to be a platform festival in course of time.

CHAPTER VIII

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ONAM

Some authors have tried to trace the origin of Onam from historical events of the past. They have depended partly on historical evidences and partly on myths and legends.

N. V. Krishna Warier in his 'Kalotsavam'* has tried to show that there is some similarity between Onam festival of the Malayalee people of Kerala and new year festival of the ancient Sumerians of Babylonia. Till 2400 B.C. new year festival used to be performed in Babylonia during the time of the year which corresponds with the month of Chingom of Malayalam calendar. Like Onam festival of Kerala, the new year festival of Babylonia was also performed for a number of days; it was 28 days in Kerala and 11 days in Babylonia. In the new year festival of Babylonia the Sumerians performed a dumb dance depicting the creation of the world and the battle of the gods and the demons. According to Warier, the theme of Onam is also the same. Warier has drawn attention to another aspect of the new year festival of Babylonia. During the festival, the king used to go to a temple outside the city in a procession. In the temple, the king used to surrender all his powers to the religious head and turn to an ordinary citizen. Later on the power was restored to the king. In Kerala, though there is no formal transfer of power, there are some practices which according to Warier are relics of the same. Till recently, the king of Cochin used to go out in a procession on the Atham day; at this time he did not wear the crown but kept it on his lap. In Travancore, the king used to accept some new clothes and a bow from the priest of Shri Padmanabhaswami temple, on Thiru-Onam day. While the act described above for the king of Cochin can be interpreted as a symbol of surrender of power, the act on the part of the king of Travancore can be interpreted as a symbol of fresh receipt of power. The symbolic surrender and restoration of power can be seen not only in those two practices, but also in the legend about the origin of Onam. The belief about the return of Mahabali to earth during Onam, suggests that though originally Mahabali was required to surrender his power to god Vishnu, it was temporarily restored to him.

Warier has also stated that Thrikkara temple has some similarity with the Sumerian temples.

According to Warier, all the sesimilarities indicate some sort of relationship between the Sumerians and Malayalees in the past. In this connection he has drawn attention to some additional fact. The ancient Sumerian kingdom was known as Assiria or Assur, on the other hand according to Indian epic Mahabali or Bali was an Asur. His father was Virochana and his grand father was Prahlad. In the dynastic table of Assiria there are some names which bear some similarity with the names of Prahlada, Virochana and Bali. These names are Asura Upallitha, Bela Ulusan, Belalusa, Belakudra Asura. Warier thinks that Prahlada is the Sanskrit form of Upallitha; Ulusan, the son of Upallitha was Virochana and either Balalusa or Belakudra Asura was Bali.

According to Warier, due to some political disaster, the ancient Assirians migrated to Kerala, which was known to them from before as is indicated by the presence of green stone from Nilgiri among the archaeological finds of Sumer. After settling in Kerala they continued their ancient festival and associated with it the name of their favourite ruler Bali, who was victim of some political upheaval.

Thus according to Warier Onam is essentially a new year festival which has been brought to Kerala from Assiria in the hoary past and that Mahabali legend represents some political event which took place before the migration of the Assirians to Kerala. Obviously the contention of Warier is conjectural and it is difficult to say how much value one should put to it.

There are others, who without subscribing to the view that Onam had its origin in Assiria, consider

* N. V. Krishna Warier, Onam in the Dravida land & Mahabali, the Asura king; Kalotsavam (in Malayalam) Kozhicode, 1960.

that it is essentially a new year festival. Logan considers that Onam is celebrated to mark the beginning of Malayalam era. He also thinks that the era had its origin when the last Perumal sailed to Mecca.

Logan's view is generally contested on two grounds. Firstly, it is not universally accepted that the last Perumal sailed to Mecca. Secondly there are evidences to show that even before the beginning of the Malayalam eara Onam used to be celebrated. There is reference abut Onam in Sangam literature of 2nd century B. C. to 2nd century A. D. and Tamil literature of 9th century A. D.

Though it is not generally accepted that Onam is related to the beginning of Malayalam era, most of the people of Kerala agree that Onam can be considered to be a new year festival.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the descriptive and interpretative data furnished in the foregoing chapters that Onam festival is a combination of multiple complexes. At the cognitive level, it is primarily looked upon as a festival in commemoration of an event which took place in the mythical past; it is also looked upon as a harvesting festival, a spring festival and a new year festival.

The primary theme of the festival, viz., return of Mahabali to his people, however, underwent secondary elaborations even generations ago. The different performances connected with the festival were so organised as to ratify on the one hand and reflect on the other, the power structure at the state level, village level and family level. It appears that in the past independence period, in the context of the national efforts to build up economic and social democracy, the secondary elaborations are undergoing further change. Establishment of the rapport between the people and the state and also among the different segments of the population seems to be the dominant ethos of the secondary elaborations at present.

Perception of Onam as a harvesting festival and as a new year festival provide additional dimensions to the festival for most of the people in Kerala. But for some of the tribal communities, e.g., the Kurichans of Parambikkulam hills, perception of Onam as a harvesting festival provides the alternative theme. They are not aware of the Mahabali legend at all. As mentioned earlier, to them Onam is a festival for eating of new grains. By way of secondary elaboration, ancestor worship came to be associated with it.

At the functional level, Onam has undoubtedly, played a great integrating role in the social polity of Kerala. It provided common platform of action to the rulers and the people of the diverse independent and semi-independent principalities, it laid down the interaction model for the people belonging to different ethnic groups and status groups and lastly, it helped the people to dream a common dream; a dream of the past, as at the time of Mahabali and a dream of the future as they would like to have.

As described earlier in the changed context of the country, many changes are taking place in the interaction pattern connected with Onam; but these appear to be short term adjustments to the long term process of cultural persistence. In other words, inspite of the structural changes, or rather because of the structural changes, Onam continues to be the same functionally.

Kerala with its eternal charm, wlll have its eternal Onam.

APPENDIX I

FOOD STUFF USED DURING ONAM AND THEIR PREPARATION

Erisseri. It is made of raw plantains and yams sliced and boild in water with salt and chillies added. The pulp of the coconut is ground with a little cummin seed added to it, and, when the whole thing is properly boiled, a few mustard seeds along with scraped coconut pulp fried in coconut oil is thrown into it to give it flavour.

Kalan or Pulisseri. Literally sour curry; it is a preparation of buttermilk. Sliced plantains, specially of the class known as 'nenthra-kaya and yams (chena) are boiled in water with salt and chillies. Buttermilk mixed with ground coconut pulp is poured in proper time and the preparation is flavoured by the addition of mustard fried in coconut oil.

Olan. Sliced cucumber and brinjals with peas or pulse sometimes added, are boiled in water with salt but no chillies; when properly boiled some fresh coconut oil is poured and for flavour 'kariveppila', i.e., (the fresh leaves of Bergera Koenigei, is added).

Aviyal. This is a preparation into which all sorts of vegetables go. The term itself means a compound of miscellaneous things. These are boiled in water with salt and chillies. Some tamarind and well ground coconut pulp are also added, in proper time. So also coconut oil and 'kariveppila'.

Thoran. This is no watery preparation. Brinjals and other vegetables are sliced into very small pieces, boiled in water with salt and chillies till all the water dries up, otherwise the water is strained away, ground coconut pulp is added, also mustard fried in coconut oil.

Mulakoshyam. This is somewhat like 'Olan'. These are all purely Malayalam curries. But of late other curries have also come into fashion, and they are:—

Koottukari. In this curry a miscellaneous assortment of vegetables and some Bengal gram are used. The difference between this and Aviyal is that no tamarind is added and instead of pouring oil, various things, such as mustard, beans and other like things are fried in coconut oil with little pieces of sliced coconut pulp and poured into it.

Sambar. This is highly relished and is purely an East Coast curry recently introduced into Malabar. The chief ingredients are 'dhall' and vegetables, such as brinjals, drum-sticks, pavakkai (momordica charantia) etc., boiled in water with salt and chillies. Tamarind is added, as also certain other things such as coriander, cummin seed, etc., fried in oil and powdered. Mustard fried in oil is an invariable element and the whole preparation is flavoured with a little asafoetida. This is the same as the Malabar Pulinkari with a slight variation.

Pachchati, Kichchati. These are different forms of the same curry in which cucumber, mustard and sour buttermilk or curds form the principal elements. In the case of the latter, the cucumber not be of the ripe sort but young and slender and very small slices into which it is cut up but will not be boiled.

Besides these, there are several other minor curries which do not call for details.

Now to come to the sweet things:—

Payasam. This is a sort of pudding made of boiled rice to which is added molasses and coconut milk. It is then flavoured with spices. There is another sort in which rice is boiled with milk and sweetened with sugar, when it goes by the name of Pal Payasam (milk pudding),.

Prathaman. Of this there are various kinds, such as Ata, Pazham, Parippu and Palata Prathamans. The various ingredients used are:—

In Ata Prathaman rice flour mixed with molasses is formed into a paste cut into small pieces and boiled water. To these coconut milk and mollases are added in proportion. It is then flavoured with ghee.

Palata is just like the above with the pieces of flour paste boiled in milk and sweetened with sugar. No ghee or spices are added except perhaps some cardamoms.

Pazham. Plantain fruits of a special kind, indegenous to Malabar known as 'Nentra Pazham' are well boiled in water till the whole water is dried and the whole thing is reduced to a pulp by constant pressing. Then it is tempered with ghee. Coconut milk is added and the thing sweet in itself is further sweetened with molasses. The kernal of a dried coconut cut into small slices, is boiled in ghee and added to it.

Parippu. This preparation is not unlike the rest. The main ingredient used being 'Parippu' i.e., pulse skinned in water, halved and dried.

Many more kinds of 'Prathamans' are made of other articles as with Bengal gram, Pumpkins, etc.

APPENDIX II

ONAM AS CELEBRATED BY MALAYALEE PEOPLE LIVING OUTSIDE KERALA

Onam as celebrated in two malayalee Hindu families living in Delhi

These two families left Kerala more than 20 years ago. But they still maintain contact with their village home and go there once in a year or two.

Both these families belong to Nair caste and are Government servants. Their income is Rs. 400-500/- per month.

Both these families are nuclear families and have very young children. In 1962 one of the families performed some of the rituals connected with Onam. The other family was not interested in rituals.

Both these families started preparation for the festival one day before the Onam day. On that day they purchased new clothes and the ingredients for the feast next day. Besides one family purchased Agarbathies, Camphor and Sandal paste. This family spent about Rs. 100/- on the occasion of Onam, the other family spent about Rs. 70/-.

On Onam day, in one family a Onathappan puja was performed in the afternoon. During the puja a lighted lamp ('Nila Vilakku') was lighted and all the members of the family dressed in typical Kerala fashion congregated at the place of the puja. There was no Brahmin priest. The house-wife offered banana chips, papad, plantain, sweets, etc., to the deity.

After the puja a sumptuous feast consisting of vegetarian items, was held and all the members of the family partook of it.

The other family also held a similar feast but did not perform any puja. That family had invited a Malayalee Hindu friend to join them in the feast.

There was no exchange of visits. But the members of both the families participated in the Onam celebrations at the Kerala Club.

In both the families, it was found that all the grown-up members as well as some of the children were aware of the Mahabali legend, associated with the Onam festival.

Onam as celebrated in a malayalee christian family living in Delhi

This family belongs to the Marthomite sect of the Syrian Christians. The head of the family left Kerala about 15 year ago, but visits his home occasionally. He is in Government service with a monthly income of about Rs. 300/-.

The family consists of husband, wife and a seven years old daughter.

On the occasion of Onam no new clothes are purchased for the family, nor any religious performance was held. Onam was celebrated by holding a feast on the Onam day. The feast was held in the noon. Banana chips, 'papad' and sweets are the essential items of Onam celebration but there were non-vegetarian items as well. In their village home in Kerala they do not take non-vegetarian food on this day. A relative working in Delhi was invited to join the feast. In the evening all the members of the family visited a Hindu friend, who hails from the same village in Kerala. The family did not participate in the Onam celebrations in Kerala Club or any other place.

Celebration of Onam by Kerala Club, Delhi

Kerala Club, a registered body is organising Onam celebration in Delhi since 1941. It is a cosmopolitan association formed for promoting the social and cultural activities of the Malayalees. Its membership is open to all Malayalees irrespective of community or caste.

In 1962, the celebrations connected with Onam started six days before the Onam day and ended just one day before the Onam day, so that on the Onam day the people could be free to perform the festival in their respective homes. In previous years, the club used to organise Onam for 4 days, but this year it was extended to one day more.

The functions were held in the evening only as the

participants had to attend the schools and offices in day time. The functions of the first three days were held in the club hall situated at Connaught Place. The entrance to the Club hall was decorated with banana leaves and banana plants bearing bunches of fruits. The club hall was also decorated with leaves and flowers. The decorations were made in such a manner as to give the appearance of the courtyard of a Kerala house.

On the platform was placed a wooden representation of 'Trikkakarappan' (Onathappan) which is traditionally associated with Onam celebration in Kerala. It was decorated with flower garlands and some flowers were spread in its front. A lighted bell-metal lamp known as 'Nilavilaku' with five lighted wicks and a few agarbattis were kept in front of 'Trikkakarappan.'

On the first day the function started at about 6.30 P. M. with a song depicting the beauty of Kerala and its people during Onam. It was followed by variety entertainments including music, dance, fancy dress, etc. After that some Kerala sweets were distributed among the participants. At about 9.00 P. M. the day's programme was over after the singing of the National anthem. About 200 people attended the performance.

On the second day, the function started at about 6.30 P. M. and lasted upto 8.30 P.M. The programme of the day consisted of competition in Anthakshari. As it was a purely literary programme, it was attended by a very thin audience. On this day, too, the Nilavilaku was kept on the platform.

On the third day the programme consisted of a discourse on some short stories and poems written by some Malayalee authors living in Delhi. There was a thin audience on this day also. The function was from about 6.30 P. M. to 8.30 P. M.

The venue of the function on the 4th and 5th days was changed to an open ground in the neighbourhood. The function on the fourth day started at 3.00 P.M. and continued upto 9.00 P.M. It was started with the sports followed by prize distribution and a short Malayalam Drama. About more than a thousand people were assembled to witness the performances. Some light refreshment was also provided to the people gathered there. The performance ended with the singing of National anthem.

On the 5th day the function started at 6.30 P. M. and a lighted 'Nilavilaku' was kept on the platform. The programme included some musical recitals and two short 'Kathakali' dances depicting scenes from the Malayalam translations of 'Uttara Swayamvara' and 'Rasa Creeda'. The Kathakali scences were presented by a troupe from the International Centre for Kathakali. The programme was concluded with National anthem. About more than a thousand spectators gathered to witness the function.

Celebration of Onam by malayalee Association, Kanpur

The membership of this association is open to all Malayalees, irrespective of religion or caste. The Association set up an ad-hoc Committee to organise the performances connected with Onam. All the major communities, viz, the Hindus, the Christians and the Muslims, were represented in the Committee.

Fund for the celebration was raised by collecting voluntary contributions from all Malayalees living in Kanpur.

As, on the Onam day the people remain busy in performing the rituals in their respective homes, the association origanised its function on the evening of the next day.

The function started with a tea party at about 5.00 P.M. The items served in the tea party included banana chips obtained from Kerala. It is to be noted that banana chips constitute one of the essential items of Onam feast everywhere. The tea party was followed by a variety entertainment. A wooden representation of Trikakarappan (Onathappan) was placed in the middle of the stage and was decorated with flowers. A lighted lamp was kept in front of the wooden representation. A few girls showed veneration to Trikakarappan by symbolic movement.

Veneration of Trikakarappan was followed by a group song depicting the glory of Kerala. This was followed by some music, dance and an one-act-play depicting the famous boat-race of Aranmula. After this, prizes were distributed to the best actors who participated in the variety entertainment.

APPENDIX III

STUDY OF FAIRS AND FESTIVALS : ONAM

SCHEDULE I

DATA TO BE COLLECTED FROM THE PUBLIC RELATIONS DFPTT.

1. List of festivals celebrated with Govt. initiative.
2. The Govt. Department responsible for the celebrations.
3. Any committee is constituted for the celebration of the Onam festival in the different levels, viz., State, District, Tehsil, and village. The constitution and procedure may be explained.
4. Since when Onam is celebrated with Government initiative.
5. What was the position during the time of the Maharajas? Had the Maharajas any special role to play? What changes have taken place at present?
6. The reasons why the Government has taken up the celebration of the festival.
7. Any special facilities such as economic aid, bonus, etc., are granted to the Governmnet and other employees in this connection.
8. Duration of the celebration and whether it is a notified holiday.
9. How organised at
   - (i) State level
   - (ii) District level
   - (iii) Tehsil level
   - (iv) Village level
   - (v) Institutional level
10. How financed at
    - (i) State level
    - (ii) District level
    - (iii) Tehsil level
    - (iv) Village level
    - (v) Institutional level
11. Functions and ceremonies organised at
    - (i) State level
    - (ii) District Level
    - (iii) Tehsil level
    - (iv) Village level
    - (v) Institutional level
12. Any fair organised at any level in this connection.
13. The acceleration of commerce and trade; special articles produced; bonus, advance pay, etc., paid in the business concern.
14. Copy of the report, if any, on the last year's celebrations.
15. Study of the press revealing and reflecting public opinion; opinion of the Religious and Caste groups, on the festival organised with the Government initiative.

NOTE: 1. Information from Hindu Endowment Board and some religious scholars on the origin, the two contradicting legends (Parasurama and Mahabali legends) may be collected. The mystic relation, if any, of the rulers with Mahabali.

2. Old references are likely to throw much light on various aspects of the festival.

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR GENERAL, INDIA HANDICRAFTS AND SOCIAL STUDIES SECTION.

STUDY-OF FAIRS AND FESTIVALS: ONAM

Schedule No. II

Data to be collected from Family

Part—A

I. General

1. District, Tehsil, Village.
2. Head of family, Age, Sex.
3. Religion, Caste or Tribe.
4. Type of family.
5. Members of the family, number sexwise.
6. Source of income.
7. Economic status.
8. Educational Status of the members.
9. Date of the festival and duration.
10. Economic pursuits Vis-a-Vis the festival.

II. Pre-Festival

When the preparation for the festival start.
What are the preparation.

A. Economic

1. Stocking or storing of food material.
2. Purchase of new articles like, clothes, utensils, materials for recreation, materials for offerings and oblations and for presents.
3. The source of Expenditure, occupation, sales, contribution, etc.
4. The extent of expenditure in different items.
5. Preparations for agriculture : sowing, weeding, etc.

B. Socio-Religious

1. Starting of religious observances, ordeals, austerities, etc., agewise and
2. Expenditure on the above.
3. The role of every member or group, age, sex in the preparation for the festival like construction of the booth, structures etc., cleaning, daubing, white washing, repair, etc., of the house, temple.
4 Bringing up of animals, plants, etc., meant for the festival or sacrifice, if any.
5. Co-operation from clansmen, tribe, etc., in the preparations.
6. Taboos, if any, attached to the participation on the basis of caste, clans, sex, etc.
7. Attitude of the different age, sex groups towards the festival.

III. Festival Period.

1. History of the festival as they know; mythology, if any, connected with the festival.
2. Do you believe in the myth of the visit of Mahabali. If so why ? If not why ?
3. Leadership in the family regarding the celebration of the festival.
4. Description of the religious aspects in details; rituals, offerings, penances, ordeals, etc., vis-a-vis the participants.
5. Interaction, duties, rights and obligations i. e. by way of presents, gifts, etc., given to and received from.
6. The comparative enthusiasm of the different age and sex groups.
7. Exchange of visits and communal feasts.
8. Recreations, sacerdotal and secular and the participations therein by the different members of the family.
9. Special dress etc., worn during the occasion and taboos, if any, connected with it.
10. Interaction of clansmen, family members, etc. in admittance of new members, setting of disputes, selection of spouses, etc.
11. Fairs organised just before or during the festival in the vicinity. The type of commodities come to the fair, from where do they come? Do the family take some commodity to the fair ? If so details about it viz., kind, quantity, exchanges brought.
12. What impact the seasons play on the performance of the festival. Compare last year with this year.

PART—B

1. **In Malabar area**—Is there any change in the contents and performances of the celebration after the integration; if so, in what way?
2. **In Cape Comerin district**—Do they celebrate Onam with the same emphasis or not, if so in what way?
3. **For the Tamil Speaking families**—Do they celebrate (Onam) with the same emphasis as the neighbouring Malayalam speaking families? If not in what way and why?
4. **For the Malayalam speaking families**—In what respects they differ in the celebration of Onam from the neighbouring Tamil speaking families?
5. **To the other religious groups and families**—In what way their onam celebration, if any, is different from that of the Hindus? Why?
6. What are the various caste and religious groups in the village? Do you think that the performance of this will bring together all the groups of people mentioned by you? If so, how? (This question to be put in different areas)
7. How do the newly converts celebrate the festival? What are the deviations? If so. Why?
8. Historic perspective of place of performance of the festival. Whether it was performed in the temple or at a particular place in the former days and the change taken place today.
9. How do the various age and sex groups in the family spent their time during the festival?

NOTE: Case history of elderly people to be recorded to bring out the deviation and variation from the norm and also the historic perspective.

APPENDIX TO SCHEDULE NO. II

FAMILY BUDGET FOR ONAM

District..... Tehsil..... Village.....

Head of family..... Age..... Sex.....

Religion..... Caste/Tribe..... Occupation.....

Educational status.....

Members in the family.

Male		Female		Total
Adult	Children	Adult	Children	

Expenditure on

1. Cloth for family members
2. Cloth for servants and workers.
3. Food stuffs.

	For families	For servants & workers
i. Grains		
ii. Pulses, oil, provisions		
iii. Vegetables.		
iv. Tobacco, betel		
v. Miscellaneous.		

4. Presentation goods.
5. Recreation like toys, rope for swings etc.
6. Contribution, presents etc.
7. Others.

Income

Income	*Source*
In cash	
In kind	
In the form of presents.	

STUDY OF FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

Schedule No. III

FUNCTIONARIES OF INSTITUTIONS

I. General

1. Name of informant—Age—sex, Religion, Caste or Community, Status, office held by him in the institution.
2. Name of the institution, type of institution.
3. District, Tehsil, Place.

II. Why and how celebrated

1. Why the festival is celebrated.
2. Since when started.
3. Other festivals celebrated.
4. How organised.
5. Details of the recreations and ceremonies, etc. organised.
6. How financed.
7. Leadership.

III. Participation

1. Approximate number (if possible, sexwise and relation and caste.)
2. Attitude of the participants.
3. Any taboo-religion, Caste or Community.
4. Leadership in participation, individual, group, etc.

APPENDIX IV

TYPE AND NUMBER OF SCHEDULES CANVASSED

Sl. No.	Place	Type No.	No. Canvassed
1	2	3	4
1.	Trivandrum	Govt. sponsored Festival	1
		Institution	3
2.	Pallichal	Family	6
		Case study	1
3.	Thikkurissi	Family	4
		Case study	1
4.	Quilon Town	Family	2
5.	Kilikolloor	Family	9
		Case study	4
		Institution	3
		Family budget	11
6.	Thenmala	Family	9
		Case study	2
		Institution	1
7.	Shenkottah	Family	3
		Case study	2
8.	Alleppy	Family	5
		Case study	1
9.	Vaitala	Family	4
10.	Trichur	Family	2
11.	Mundur	Family	4
12.	Calicut	Family	5
13.	Mananthery	Family	6
		Institution	1
14.	Parambikulam hills	Family	3
		Case study	2
15.	Kasargod	Family	4
		Case study	2

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