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Kanipayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad (1891-1981): An account of a vanishing life *

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Abstract

Kanipayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad might seem to be a rather obscure figure,but that is arguably an effect of the way in which we teach and study the history of our country. We focus on "important" figures like Gandhi and Nehru, and in the study of modern India, importance is determined almost entirely by association with the nationalist movement. There is another problem too. Most of what we study as Indian history focuses on the Indo-Gangetic plain and perhaps Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. Why are there no Malayalis? History, though, has a way of correcting what historians write about the past. So, to locate and analyse the life and deeds of Kanippayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad would certainly open up new vistas of debate in the social and intellectual history research.
Keywords: Namboothiri, Social Reform Movement, Caste (Jati), Nairs, Nationalism

What I shall speak about today is part of a larger project on the histories of Kerala written between 1860-1960. It begins with the seemingly curious question: where is Kerala? When one reads existing histories of Kerala, one would imagine the state to be a landlocked space rather like Hungary! The narratives speak only about land, agrarian society, revenue settlements, landlords, tenants, temple holdings and so on. The sea beside which we live doesn't figure in the historical imagination. Think, for instance, about K.N. Panikkar's classic book on the Mappila rebellion: *Against Lord and State.* There is an extensive discussion of land settlement and the frictions that agrarian hierarchies induce between Hindu landlords and Muslim tenants. That the Mappilas of

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Kerala had intimate connections with the Indian Ocean through trade, religious flows is almost entirely absent as theme. This is the puzzle for me. Why do people who live beside the sea, forget the sea? This is even more curious given that most of us have at least one family member in the Gulf. And the Gulf region is almost like another district of Kerala! Despite this maritime history of Kerala, we have tended to ignore this in our academic work. Arguably this myopia is the result of a very particular upper caste intellectual formation which writes history in terms of the Hindu imagination. If we were to engage with the sea, that would bring in the history of the Mappilas, Jewish people and Syrian Christians as much as that of seafarers and fisher people. Malabar is also a part of the large oceanic world that stretches all the way from Melaka to Aden through to Lisbon, Amsterdam and London. As also the Hadramawt migration from Yemen that has characterized the Indian Ocean for the last 500 years and is increasingly being written about by scholars like Engseng Ho, Mahmood Kooria and Yasser Arafath. So the question where is Kerala, is an important point of departure to understand that Kerala is as much part of the landmass of India as it is part of the Indian Ocean world.

My book takes up several figures who write histories of Kerala, but I do not take up professional historians. When one says that History is what historians write and only historians write history, these are uninteresting propositions that limit our understanding of the historical imaginations in a society. What would it mean to study the historical writings of figures like "Kesari" Balakrishna Pillai (a literary critic), Chattambi Swamikal (a religious leader), K.P. Padmanabha Menon (a lawyer), Kanipayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad (a traditional intellectual). All of these individuals thought about Kerala within larger as also very distinct geographies. For instance, Balakrishna Pillai's essays on the history of Kerala begin with Babylon and Rome. Now this may seem very odd. The way in which we are taught history is firstly, to think in terms of the hermetic spaces of nations. Second, we have created distinctions between swathes of time called ancient, medieval, early modern and modern and we are discouraged from straying temporally. Finally, each of these categories has distinct temporality of a few hundred years. All of these are blinkers that have been put on our mind so we do not raise the question of how far back do we have to go in order to write a history of the present? When Balakrishna Pillai writes in 1930, on the history of Kerala, why does he begin with ancient Rome, a few thousand years earlier: another place, another time? For him the most important

factor of Kerala's existence is that Kerala has always been a part of the oceanic world. He reminds us that early Latin texts, whether of Pliny or Ptolemy, speak about Kerala because of the trade in pepper across the oceans. When the Roman Empire fought wars against Carthage, the vanquished Carthage paid tribute to the Roman Empire in pepper that came from Kerala. This leads Balakrishna Pillai to ask the question in the 1930s in a series of articles that he wrote for the *Mathrubhumi:* is Kerala a chapter in the history of Rome, or is Rome a chapter in the history of Kerala? A sentence like that challenges the conventions of the historical discipline, blasting open space and time, allowing a historian with temerity to think about the world from the standpoint of Kerala.

We have to rebel against a narrowing of the imagination which forces us to think with the dyad of nation and region, rather than transnationally and across time and space. The narrators that I work with are all near contemporaries and each of them write histories which are very expansive. Balakrishna Pillai begins his history of Kerala in Rome in the first century AD. K.P. Padmanabha Menon who wrote a four volume history of Kerala, connects Kerala to the history of Dutch colonialism and settlement, and Kerala enters the ambit of the Netherlands and Amsterdam. The book is a series of scholarly annotations to about thirty letters on Kerala and its customs written by a Dutch priest Jacobus Canter Visscher to his sister in the 17th century. Padmanabha Menon's annotations insert Kerala into the much larger history of European colonialism and its presence on the Malabar Coast. Kanippayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad, for his own reasons, when he writes his histories begins with Central Asia, given the then current historical belief that the brahmins were Aryans who migrated from that region into India. For none of them is Kerala a narrow strip of land, clinging on to the south west coast of India. To talk about Kerala, they bring in larger spaces and longer times. We have to think expansively, and beyond the confines of the post 1947 geography of India, and connect different parts of India to different parts of the world, whether South East Asia, West Asia or Europe. Seema Alavi in her book, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the age of Empire*, is centrally concerned with the connections of Kerala with west Asia and Indian Ocean Islam.

What I will speak about today are some of my thoughts on Kanippayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad's autobiography, a curious document that is part ethnography, part social history and part ruminations on life in the Namboothiri community. Is this a history or is this autobiography, and what do these conventional distinctions of genre mean

for our writing? When we write history we have the idea of something called an appropriate source, generally the records of the state archive. I think we need to have a very expansive idea of what sources are and indeed the theme that we choose to write about will determine our selection of a source. It goes without saying that to study the inner life of the colonized, state archives are not of much use. A history which attempts to engage with everyday life whether we are historians, citizens or just as human beings, requires us to be imaginative, innovative and even idiosyncratic! Hopefully, we do not write histories merely because we are academics and that is our profession. Thinking as citizens of India, and as human beings we have a commitment to recover the lives of those around us in the present as well as those who lived in the past. We have to address the fundamental problems our society, the unique qualities of hierarchy, of politics, of the rise of authoritarian tendencies, and as Ambedkar put it, a continuing and elusive search for fraternity. We need to think with film, literature, music; indeed all aspects, and we need to expand the protocols of research other than the conventional reading of colonial postcolonial state archives.

A few preliminary remarks. If one is analysing films one needs to get up to scratch on film theory and an understanding of visual language. If one is reading fiction and autobiography, one has to engage literary theory. Interdisciplinarity is about an understanding that each discipline has its own protocols of enquiry, of verification and of argument. Similarly, if we are studying a figure like Kanippayyur Shankaran Namboothirippad one must read every word that he has written as also situate him in a landscape of his contemporaries as much as contemporary thought. Finally, we also have to diligently explore the references that are woven into the text. What does this person read when they write a text? This suddenly expands the universe beyond the text that we are reading.

II

Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboothirippad, a traditional Brahmin intellectual, writes a very curious autobiography, sometime in the 1960s; four volumes that cover his life till the age of 25. When he writes, he is already an old man, but the entire autobiography covers only the first quarter of his life. This is the puzzle. The other thing is that even though he is writing about his life as a Brahmin intellectual, he is writing into a space where being a Brahmin intellectual become increasingly difficult, even irrelevant. With the rise of non-Brahmin movements from the late 19th century in Tamilnad and reform movements among the Namboothiris

from the 1920s - the Unni Namboothiri movement with its radicals like EMS Namboothirippad and V T Bhattathirippad – the question posed to the community was, "What did it mean to be a Brahmin?" Any act of writing is located within a sense of crisis: there is a sense of instability about one's identity which prompts the question "Who am I?" When Kanipayyur writes, increasingly being a Brahmin is no longer about being ineffable and superior in an emerging landscape which positions a Brahmin as an oppressor. Why does he write only the first part of his life? Is it because what it means to be a Brahmin has lost value and all the markers of his life have been rendered obsolete or controversial? Let us begin with a quotation from his autobiography.

> In the progress of a people what were the troubles and obstacles that they encountered? During which periods did they encounter *ulkarsham* (success) and *apakarsham* (failure)? What were the reasons for this? In each age what were their dress, ornaments, language, beliefs, customs and institutions, and daily rituals? To make succeeding generations understand these and to help them avoid the privations suffered by those who preceded them and to achieve success is the purpose of writing history.

A curious set of themes for an autobiography: the idea of a "people" and their fate; the objects and customs that made up their life; and finally, the idea of a testament for history and the generations to follow. One tends to assume that autobiographies are about interiority: the inner life of a person and its making. Here we have the polarities of success and failure and an idea of progress that is about the troubles and the obstacles that people encounter, and the overcoming of these. Autobiographies are not generally about strategies of success and failure, as in a self-help book. What were the reasons for writing thus? "In each age, what were their dress, ornaments, language, beliefs, customs and institutions and daily rituals?" This is also curious. When you are writing your autobiography why need you concern yourself with the dress, ornaments, language, beliefs of those around you? When one reads a text one has to read very carefully and ask why is this sentence here' why this sequence of sentences, and so forth? When we read a text, we have to read like a detective who evaluates a testimony. One has to be constantly suspicious about the testimony, the evidence, the input before you. We need to ask why is this being said, and what is not being said. When Kanipayyur says that his purpose is to make future generations understand and to help them avoid suffering, he sud-

denly shifts gears and states that is the purpose of writing a history. So in this paragraph while he begins with an idea of autobiography, he ends by seguing into the purpose of writing history. So, is he writing history or is he writing an autobiography? Is the act of writing an autobiography similar to the act of writing history.? When one thinks about Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*, and his *Autobiography*, for those who have read both of these it's very curious. The *Discovery of India* is actually very autobiographical, where he is trying to find out "what does it mean for me to be an Indian?" And if one read the *Autobiography* it's very historical, because he is trying to understand the history of the emergence of the nationalist movement. We have to move beyond the confident delineation of terrain: this is autobiography, this is history, this is literature, this is poetry. This interesting paragraph raises the question of what needs to be included in the act of writing an autobiography? Kanippayyur Shankaran Namboothiripaaad would say everything. anthropology, history, even photography as we shall see.

For him the act of autobiography is a supplement to history. Writing in a period when the authority and sanctity of the Brahmin is in question he writes as a Brahmin adding a supplement to contemporary history. Kanippayyur like most of the men of his time was very anti-colonial. From the 1930s onwards we have the rise of Gandhi and mass nationalism. Most Indians who came of age at the time thought of themselves as anti - British. An interesting if you think about it is if you became a nationalist in the 1930s what would you read to understand the history of your country? Most of the available books that were written by the early Orientalists like William Jones and Colebrooke or colonial officials like Elliot and Dowson, Montstuart Elphinstone and Vincent Smith. Gandhi read the Bhagavad Gita for the first time in the English translation by Edwin Arnold, because he did not have the competence to read Sanskrit at the time. Most Indians who became nationalists at a particular point realized their own heritage through reading accounts by colonial officials and the translations from Arabic and Persian. When Kanippayyur began to write and think about his community, he read the colonial ethnography of southern India which thought in terms of the customs and ceremonies of communities. Edgar Thurston's multi-volume *Caste and Tribes of Southern India* had a huge impact on what he wrote; indeed in how he conceived the idea of a Nampoothiri community. In thinking about the customs of his community, Kanippayyur's autobiography is written in the shadow of colonial anthropology.

ചിത്രം നമ്പ് 38.
ചേലപ്പുതപ്പുകൊണ്ട് പുതച്ച അന്തർജ്ജനം.

പൊതുവെ ഗ്രാമക്കാരായ അന്തർജ്ജനങ്ങൾക്ക പ്രത്യേ
കമായിട്ടുള്ളതാണ് മനക്കട. ഈ അന്തർജ്ജനം പിടിച്ചി
യ്യുന്നത് ആ മനക്കടയാകുന്നു. (177-ാംപേജ് നോക്കുക.)

ഇരിഞ്ഞാലക്കുട ഗ്രാമക്കാരായ അന്തർജ്ജനങ്ങളും മറ്റു
പിടിച്ചു പോകുന്ന സമ്പ്രദായം ഇങ്ങിനെയാകുന്നു.
(179-ാംപേജ് നോക്കുക)

40—49 ഇടയ ചിത്രങ്ങൾ 189—191 പേജുകളിൽ

ചിത്രം നമ്പ് 21.
എല്ലാ പണ്ടങ്ങളും അണിഞ്ഞ അന്തർജ്ജനം.

(172-ാംപേജ് നോക്കുക)

ചിത്രം നമ്പ് 22.
പണ്ടങ്ങൾ അണിഞ്ഞ അന്തർജ്ജനം (ആഢ്യൻ)

പണ്ടങ്ങളുടെ കാര്യത്തിൽ ആഢ്യൻ ആസ്യൻ എന്ന
വ്യത്യാസമില്ല. (173-ാംപേജ് നോക്കുക).

In these observations on people, on customs, and on ceremonies there are two things to be noted. One is the question of memory. What does Kanippayyur remember of his life and the life of his community. The second is why does he choose custom, ceremonies, and objects as repositories of individual memory? A traditional Brahmin nationalist anticolonial intellectual writing about his community follows the model of colonial anthropology. Is this something that is ironic? Or is it something we should take for granted? What are the ways of writing about the self other than a narrative of interiority? At one level there is the portrayal of the simplicity of Nampoothiri life – the cotton vestments and the umbrella made of palm leaves which protected them both from the sun as from the public gaze. There is at the same time the display of wealth, the many ornaments the women are wearing in the second illustration. There is a statement about an aesthetic here: the possession of wealth but a performance of simple living. It is a subtle assertion against the naked display of power and wealth, and a remembrance of a time when status was about the universal recognition of an ineffable status, so that no more needed to be said. or shown.

The depictions of Nairs is equally interesting since the Nairs had been through a phase of reform against forms of familial organization like matriliny which had involved Nair families of higher status with the uncertain affections of elder Namboothiri men. The system of *sambandhams* or temporary connections between Namboothiri men and Nair women, the offspring being considered *sudra* and being sent to live with their mothers, had aroused much ire among young Nair men who had begun to gain both an education as well as colonial patriarchal values. Nair women had begun to cover their breasts and there had been a series of agitations in the late 19th century which asserted the right of women of all castes to cover their breasts. It must be remembered that we know this largely through the voices of male reformers who spoke in the language of colonial modernity; the women as Lata Mani has argued were merely the site of reform and their agency was not crucial to the fervour of male outrage. Nair men had begun to resent their social and ideological subordination to Namboothiris and O Chandu Menon's novel *Indulekha* (1892) immortalised these concerns with its modern eponymous heroine, the Anglicized Nair hero, Madhavan, and the effete and lustful Namboothiri character. However, in Kanipayyur's depiction, the Nairs are shown differently, harking back to an earlier dispensation of hierarchy and deference.

The Nair man here is shown in a classic performance of deference in front of a Namboothiri; or as it used to be called *ochaanichu nilkuka.* Kanipayyur observes that, "It goes without saying that those in possession of some resources need servants-both male and female". And by servants he means the lower classes of Nayars. Here is the point of entry into one of the impulses behind the autobiography. In an evolving social situation in which there is the creed of equality he wants to preserve something of a past in which being a Nampoothiri meant lording it over a chain of beings. It preserves a memory in apsic; frozen for all time. The world may have moved on, but in this photograph, the Nair is forever humble and devoted. This photograph by itself is worth an entire chapter. Lets look at another quote.

> The Nambudiris have inexorably (*incincayi*) moved towards the bottom. Trapped in superstition, having lost their intellectual powers and ability to reflect, unable to turn anywhere. They can be compared to caterpillars who have become butterflies. As the former they could feed themselves, defend themselves against their enemies, and propagate. As butterflies they lead a frivolous life. And at the time of their death they exercise neither their mind nor body. In my youth, my community was at such a *samadhidasha* (end-time).

History appears here as a notion of terminal decline. He says the Namboothiris have inexorably "moved towards the bottom". There is the very striking image of the transition to butterflies from caterpillars; a transition to beauty and helplessness. Caterpillars can feed themselves, defend themselves against their enemies, and propagate. As butterflies they lead a merely frivolous life. The butterfly is always a metaphor for a carefree life without the thought of tomorrow. The comparison to Nampoothiris indicates the end time of a community that has lost its place in the world but remains oblivious to decline. "In my youth, my community was at such a *samadhidasha* (end time)." He is talking here about the extreme vulnerability of the Namboothiri community. Writing in the 6th decade of his life, with an apprehension of death around the corner, he is conscious that a way of living associated with his entire community is about to vanish.

Is this autobiography about himself, the Namboothiris, a particular stage in the history of Kerala? Is he writing about the larger history of India and the position of the Brahmin? While we have discussed the historical, anthropological, and visual modes, there is a register of irony that we need to pay attention to. In a surprising move he expresses an extreme scepticism about the very idea of an autobiography. So what does he say here?

> I have no difficulty in writing my life history. In the morning I bathed, had coffee, ate, had a mid morning coffee, ate dinner and slept: this completed the history of a day. The next day's history would consist of changing the date and writing "ditto" for the rest of the days. I am now 68 years of age. For all the days that I have lived, writing "ditto" would suffice for a life history. But I do not have the courage to publish this record. If my friend is prepared to publish this, I shall hand over copyright free of cost.

This is a very interesting observation again. What we have here is a sense of the very absurdity of writing a life. Is he being merely ironic? Or is he drawing a contrast with an earlier way of life which was more suffused with value? When one thinks about the life of a Brahmin, it is Brahmin structured by rituals and prayers and practices that kept the world in place. What he is saying here reflects the degradation or the mundaneness of a modern secular life undergirded by equality. There is the endless repetition of inconsequential acts which do not add value to life or the worth of an individual. It is about the mere sustenance of the body and its hygiene.

The reduction, in his view, of life to the mere rhythms of the everyday is also the result of a particular history. In one view the changes have been cataclysmic: the challenge to caste, the demise of empire and so on. But were these "unthinkable (*acintyam*) and revolutionary (*viplavatmakam*)" changes? What is the stance that an individual should adopt towards history and historical events beyond their control? What would it mean to adopt a dispassionate attitude towards the world? As he says,

> Let us abandon our feelings that we are Nambudiris or *savarna* and think from the standpoint of world citizens-only as a human being. From this elevated standpoint let us see ourselves as French, American or English and think about the changes around us; all of this will appear to be a storm in a teacup. After all what did happen here? We have not had a terrible world war, a massacre of human beings, nor the destruction of essential foodstuffs and commodities. Nor have there been earthquakes, cyclones, floods…smallpox, plagues.

As a conservative modern he normalizes and routinises change, domesticating it to take away its sting. Being a Brahmin has no special status in an age of citizenship and equality: how should he deal with this fundamental crisis in his life? How are we to understand the statements that nothing really has happened; nothing revolutionary has occurred? He goes back to his life: I woke up in the morning, I had my coffee, I had dinner, and repeat ditto, ditto, ditto. That's life. It is not historical. It is not revolutionary. So what did happen? His answer

to this question is amusing. Human beings began to relate to other human beings as being human rather than as animals. This is a revolution if one thinks about the cruelty and pervasiveness of ideas of caste and belief in the lack of value of the life of certain classes of being. Kanipayyur normalises this cataclysm in order to make sense of the impact that this has had on his very existence and sense of identity:

We have begun to recognize one another as humans. That is all, he says. But at the heart of it, and here we come to the second part of this paper, at the heart of it is the fright and the anxiety, that is at the heart of Kanippayyur's autobiography, and drives it. It is the idea of the fragile self. If one thinks about the status of the Brahmin, one assumes a superior self, set apart from others by its purity. However, the self is also governed by an anxiety of a world that has to be made and remade every living hour through rituals and a preservation of purity. Charles Malamoud calls this the cooking of the world. A traditional Brahmin's life is structured by rituals and the performance of prayer and sacrifice. There is a structure of relentless repetition that governs, preserves and circumscribes identity. Identity and a sense of self is made within the horizon of these repetitive rituals. One has to keep doing it, to preserve one's status as the superior caste. One has to keep remaking the world, keep cooking the world. The quotidian has become governed by the mundane rituals of brushing one's teeth, having a bath, taking a coffee and so on. If one looks at the way that Kanippayyur would have actually lived, the following would have been the time table. *Tevaram*: attending to God; *aupasanam*: tending to the never-ending fire; *suryanamaskaram*: sun obeisance; recitation; *svadhyayam:* study; praying at the temple; daily prayers: 4-11, 2-4, 6-9. This is the time table which creates the brahmin self. If one doesn't follow this timetable, then one no longer exists as a Brahmin. It is a very carefully regulated existence. So when he writes this down, he is also reminding us how fragile his self is. If one doesn't engage in this repetition then one's self does not remain superior and ineffable and gets lost within the routine of the everyday. Which is why there is that irony in the earlier formulation of, this is what my life has become now: brushing teeth, having coffee and so on.

The world is a space of pollution. The repetitious time table of ritual, prayer, and sacrifice is imperative because one is in situations where the body and its sense of purity is constantly threatened. Touching others not in a state of purity; touching food that is leftover – *eccil;* touching things that polluted others have touched; a fine line in paranoia and the intrusion of the world and its defilement into one's self. There is

a passage in the autobiography that illustrates marvellously this paranoia of imminent and ever-existent pollution. Let us imagine, he says, that there is food in the kitchen. A Nair or a *sudra* takes food out of the pot, and brings it out of the kitchen. Now the food has become polluted, nobody can eat it. The Nair meanwhile carries the pollution with him, he goes out, meets somebody and touches them. The pollution spreads like an epidemic. The idea of purity is driven by the paranoia of being polluted.

These days nobody is careful, and the pollution is spreading through society. And it spreads in a society without regard for status and its maintenance, so no one is aware of it. This sense of panic of a world gone awry also extends to the new fashion of displaying one's emotions. Just as pollution opens up the body and renders it porous to harm, the overt display of emotions too renders the body porous and fragile. If one follows all the rituals that make a contained, pure body one also has to behave in a particular way: no public display of extreme happiness, sadness, affection or love. Within Namboothiri families, to show affection towards one's wife or children was strange and showed a loss of control. So look at this particular paragraph:

> There was never much show of affection in the family, particularly in public where there would be a performance of being stern. As a man you never smile, you never laugh, and you are constantly grave… To show affection for one's wife and children…Only nayars did it…not us. We are bounded and strong. We would not call our father *achan*. Because that would again mean that you are extending an affection, meaning that your body is leaking affection …

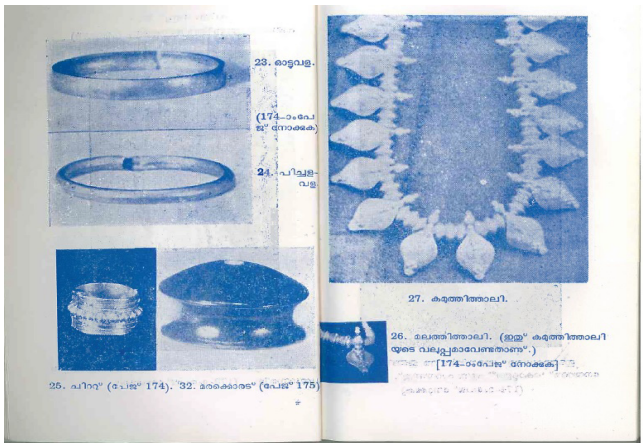
Remember here the image of pollution. And then he tells a story:

> In Olappamana a Nambudiri was ailing and he was being tended to by his children. Once in a while he would regain consciousness. To check whether he was conscious one of his sons called out *accha accha*. In great anger the father replied coldly, "*Entha mone*? [What is it my son?] Everyone felt foolish on hearing this rebuke.

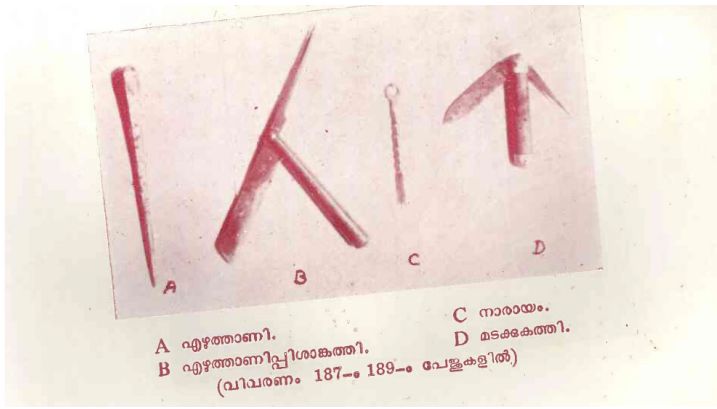
The father was reminding his son: behave yourself. "Why are you getting so emotional?" So this again is a point of entry into another worldview, a worldview in which the body is bounded, and the purity of body depends on not even allowing emotion to escape it. Here, this instance shows you how the very idea of emotion is attended with sarcasm; with scorn; with contempt.

Let us look at another curious theme. In an autobiography what one would expect is incidents from a person's life: birth, nurture, edu-

cation, marriage and so on. What one has instead in Kanippayyur's autobiography is a profusion of objects and descriptions of spaces. The photographs display one object after the other: ornaments, palanquin, rickshaw, writing implements, a water wheel and so on. These objects were what distinguished a brahmin landlord from others: wealth, the possession of land, the knowledge of reading and writing. The big waterwheel which only a *janmi* would have suggests the ownership of large fields needing irrigation. And control over and access to water. So each of these objects is actually an indication of status, rather an indication of a status past. The photographs relegate them to a past time because they mean nothing new for a brahmin without power or status. They have become mere objects. They don't signify anything. Each of these objects is telling one about a life that he has lost. So it's an autobiography not of a life gained, but a life lost. And this is the important thing to remember.




പല്ലക്കു് (വിവരണം 38–ാംപേജിൽ).



Besides the depiction of objects are the description of spaces. Once again, we can ask ourselves, why is there a chapter on buses, one on restaurants and one on cinema halls in an autobiography? Just as the discourse on objects points to objects unmoored from indication of status, the discourse on spaces speaks about the loss of self. When one enters a hotel, one can be just anybody. One sits alongside Muslims and Christians and people of other castes and so on; there is the alarm of an enforced anonymity for those who wish to emphasise their superiority. Being a Brahmin no longer matters just as much as when one travels by bus. One sits in a cinema hall in the dark, within a crowd of anonymous bodies. It becomes very clear that these chapters though not about individual interiority are actually autobiographical. Kanipayyur feels his very self slipping away from him, as Kerala becomes modern.