

NANNAN OF NORTH MALABAR

by

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A great chieftain, Nannan was mentioned in Sangam literature belonging to the period from 1st century A.D. to 3rd century A.D. The Chieftain, Nannan is said to have ruled from ēḷil hills. Now it is called as aḷumala in Malayalam. Nannan's kingdom comprised of ēḷil hills, Koṅkāṇam and Pūḷi Nāṭu in North Malabar. He had within his territory a town called Pāram which was said to be his capital. Pāram has been identified by me by field study. It is a village bearing the same name now and it is about 15 miles to the north of Cannanore. Pūḷi Nāṭu can be identified roughly as the territory to the north of Mahe, a Ex-French possession where you can still find a village called Pūḷi-talai which was the northern limit of Pūḷi Nāṭu. In Malaipaṭukaṭām, a work which can be placed latter than Akanānūṟu, Naṟṟiṇai, Kuṟuntokai which are earlier works, a king called Nannan-cēy-Nannan is mentioned as the ruler of Palkuṇṇa Nāṭu (country of many hills). Although some Tamil scholars have confused the Nannan of the Palkuṇṇa Nāṭu with the Nannan of Koṅkāṇam, there is no basis for such identification as the Palkuṇṇa Nāṭu comprising of the present Tiruvannamalai and Sengam hills is nearly 500 miles East of Mount D'eli (ēḷil hills) and could not have been ruled

by one and the same king. The Malai-paṭukaṭām poem specifically describes the hero as Nannan, son of Nannan. The reason for the migration of the son of Nannan who ruled in North Malabar in the West coast to the Sengam hills in the North Arcot District can be gathered from the Akanānūṟu Poem (199), wherein Kallaṭaṇār had said that the Chera King Nārmuṭi Cēral defeated and killed Nannan of Pūḷi Nāṭu. Paṭiṟṟupattu which gives the geneology of the ancient Chera kings of Sangam period also says that Nannan was defeated at the hands of Nārmuṭi Cēral and the titular tree of Nannan was also cut off by the Chera king. It looks obvious that after Nannan who was the ruler of Koṅkāṇam was killed, his territory was regained by the Chera king. Nannan's son left North Malabar and founded a kingdom in 'Seṅgaṇmā' near Tiruvannamalai. Nannan of North Malabar is called Nannan of Koṅkāṇam. Udiyan Nannan and Nannan Venmān are his other names found in Sangam poems. When he acknowledged the suzerainty of the Chera king Udiyan, he assumed the name of Udiyan Nannan.

The exact derivation of the name of the hill can be found out only from sangam poems where it named and described. The veteran Tamil Scholar, U.V Swaminatha Iyer in his gloss to a Kuṟuntokai

poem (130) has said that the word 'ēḷil' meant also a tree which is called 'ēḷilaipālai'. Hence, it has to be concluded that the hill 'ēḷil' got its name from the preponderant occurrence of the tree 'ēḷil' in the hill forests. On a field study, I noted that the tree, *Alstonia scholaris* which is 'ēḷil pālai' did occur in natural condition in the forests of the hills and it is appropriate that the hill was called by the name of the tree in Sangam period. It is well known that some of the ancient towns in Tamil Nadu got their names from the plants with which they were associated. The famous Pallava Capital Kāñci got its name from the tree, *Trewia nudiflora* and Vañci, the Chera capital from the tree, *Salix tetrasperma*. Even Koḷkai, the ancient sea port of the Pandya kingdom probably got its name from Koḷku, the Indian laburnum which bears most beautiful drooping clusters of golden flowers. The name of Koḷku occurs in Sangam literature in Naṟṟiṇai (302).

In the commentary of Kuṟuntokai poem (138), U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, it is said,

ēḷili oru malai, itu nannaṅ enpavanukku uriyatu.

ēḷilaippālai enṇum maramum ākum.

Since the commentator has not done any field study in the hills, he could not say how the hill derived its name from the predominance of the tree *Alstonia scholaris*. There is a confusion in the commentary as *nocci* was grown. They are even now grown as household tree for hedges as mentioned in Sangam

poems. The girl who pines over her lover could not have even a nap the whole night and hence she could hear the soft noise of the faded flower dropping in the night. The pining girl could not have heard the tiny flower falling from the tall hills. Another commentator, Avvai Duraisamy Pillai has written that the ēḷil hill got its name due to the fact that hills looked like a *yāl* the original and ancient stringed musical instrument of the ancient Tamils. But on my field study I found that the hill does not in any way look like a *yāl*. It is a fanciful derivation. Perhaps Avvai Duraisamy Pillai might have been led to guess because the word *eḷal* meant the high pitch in Tamil music.

The tree ēḷil, *Alstonia scholaris* is even now very important in Kerala rituals and folk worship, as it is the tree of the mother goddess, Bhagavathy. I found the stem of the tree being riddled by big iron nails by worshippers in order to fulfil their vows for favours in Chottanikara-Bhagavathy temple near Cochin. This tree is also associated with devil worship in Kerala. In order to propitiate the Goddess Bhagavathy, the common people in North Malabar make icons mostly out of this tree. ēḷil hills was called in popular usage as *eli malai* and later it was translated as *Mushika Parvata*. Such popular transformations are like Hamilton's bridge becoming *ampaṭṭan vārāvati* and Ellis Choultry built by the efforts of Colonel Ellis, I.C.S. as *eli cattiram*. The same sort of folk usage occurred in the name which was translated in popular usage in medieval ages in Malayalam as *eli malai*.

In 13th century there was a kingdom called *Mushika vamsa* wrongly translated in popular usage. The particular tree is still called in Malayalam as *ēḷilam Pala*. But the Sanskrit name of the tree, *saptaparni* clearly signifies the correctness of the Tamil name.

Morco Polo called the kingdom of Nannan as 'ēli kingdom'. Ibn Batuta called it as 'Ili kingdom'. Later the Europeans called the kingdom as 'Mount D'eli'. It is a precipitous hill on the sea side. It is because of this premonitory, sea voyagers from sangam times to the medieval times of Ibn Batuta preferred this port. When I visited ēḷil hill ten years before, I had to cross two rivers by boat and had to walk three miles to reach the hills.

There is a legendary treatise in Kerala called 'Chandrotsavam' belonging to 13th century, in which *Mushika vamsa* had been mentioned. The ancient history of Kerala cannot be traced unless one knows the Malayalam traditions and Tamil literature both ancient and medieval. Strabo, the Greek historian talks of a kindom 'Mousikanos' in the far south of India. This kingdom could not be anything else than the *Mushika* kingdom. *Mushika Kaṇam* has been mentioned as 'Mousikanos' by Strabo. Some historians have identified the place as lying in the eastern portion of the Sind Valley. Professor Roy Choudry, the historian has held it that it is the *Mushika* kingdom. There are others who identify it as the land where the River *Mushi* flows, that is around Hyderabad city; but, Professor Roy Choudry's conclusion seems to be

correct. Nannan's kingdom of ēḷimalai was contemporaneous with Chera kingdom, in Sangam period.

In *Mushika vamsa*, the name of Nannan and Mūvan are mentioned. Mūvan was mentioned in *Puṇanāṇūru* (209). Mūvan and Mūvan Sēy are also mentioned. A sangam poet is called 'Ammūvan'. The names seem to be peculiar to North Malabar usage in Tamil in Sangam period. The names of Nannan and Nannan sēy are found in Sangam literature. The name of Nannan is found in Sangam poems as well as *Patirrupattu*, but the name of Nannan Sēy is found only in *Malaipaṭukaṭam* of *Pattupāṭṭu* which is a later work in Sangam period. It is said in a poem in *Narṇṇai* that Cheraman Kanaikāl Irumporai killed Mūvan in the battle field and pulled his teeth and exhibited them on the door of the city of Thondi, a famous port noticed by Roman and Greek historians. The poet Ammūvan had sung about the towns of Thondi and Vanchi and as such he has to be considered as a poet from the Chera Kingdom. The name of Nannan is not used as a popular name of Tamil Nadu but I noticed that this name was still used by the fisherman of Nileswaram in North Malabar which is very near to ēḷil hills. But the word Nannan is pronounced as 'nannan' as dental not as 'nannan' with alveolar, as found in Sangam literature which shows that the name is not correctly spelled in the editions of Sangam works. It is seen that the name Nannan occurs in Chola inscriptions belonging to 11th century A. D. as the names of the shepherd caste in the famous Tanjore Peruvuṭayar temple.

“Catta mañkalattu irukkum itaiyaṅ kaṭṭaṅ karuvelaṇum ..... nannaṅ nīlaṇum.” The inscriptional usage of Nannaṅ shows that the Malayalam folk usage of nannaṅ is correct and not the literary usage in the Tamil editions of Sangam literature.

The ēḷil hill is surrounded on three sides by water but on the western side it is surrounded by sea. Because the hill is surrounded by rivers on two sides and the sea on the western side, it is not possible to approach the hills. Now it has been made easy to approach as ēḷil hills have been made as a tourist centre with the bridges to cross the rivers. I had to cross two rivers by boat at a place called Punnaikaṭavu and Korripulai to reach ēḷil hills. This place was in the midst of a thick forest of Korrikaṭavu. There is a big rock which is called ‘Ammarakkal.’ The rock is worshipped every 12 years by the common folks. I think that the region around the rock may be the Paḷi of Nannaṅ. It is also seen that Miñili, a chieftain under Nannaṅ won and captured Atikaṅ who was the chieftain of the kingdom who ruled at Tagadur, in the present Dharmapuri district and sacrificed him to the devil which was the mother goddess as per the information given by the Sangam poem Akanāṇūru (142). In this connection two important points have to be considered. The connection of the names Atikamaṅ from Satyaputra and also Emeneau’s deduction on linguistic grounds proved to be correct. The Atikaṅs and Nannaṅs were only Chieftains under the suzerainty of Cheras who later asserted themselves as kings throwing the suzerainty of the imperial Cheras of Sangam period.

There is a place near ēḷil hills called Korriyūr. Korrikaṭavu and Korripulai are names of the rivers and the river port. We may conjecture that this Ammarakkal may be the spot where, as per the Akanāṇūru poem, a powerful devil goddess resided. Avvai Duraisamy Pillai identified that ‘Paḷiclambru’ was Patkal in South Kanara. This identification is based on the similarity of sounds in the two names. It is wrong as Patkal is far off from Nannaṅ’s ēḷil hills.

Paḷi valley must be in the ēḷil hills. It is said in the commentary of Mayilai-nathar that the people of Paḷi call the small water tank as Paḷi. Nannaṅ’s Paḷi is mentioned in Sangam poems. In Akanāṇūru Poem (375) it is said that Iḷamperuñcheṇṇi destroyed the fortified Paḷi. That is why the king was called as the king who destroyed the standing army at Paḷi. Nannaṅ had a standing army at Paḷi from the reference to aruñi-kaṭippaḷi. In the 4th decade of Paṭirrup-pattu, it is said that the Chera king Nārmutiçēral who was dispossessed of his distinctive crown defeated Nannaṅ at the border of ‘Kaṭambin Peruvāyil,’ the portals of the kingdom of Kadambas after overrunning the kingdom of Nannaṅ. It is seen that near ēḷil hills there is a seashore village called Seruvattūr. There are two parts of the village which are called ‘Kāri’ and ‘Ōri’. These names obviously refer to the folk memory of the munificent donor, the tribal chieftains of the last sangam period, Kāri and Ōri who ruled their kingdoms under the suzerainty of the Cheras. The tract which the tribe of Kadambar ruled was later annexed by Mayurasarman, leader of the Haiga.

brahmins who migrated to South Kanara from North India and was supposed to have established the Kadamba kingdom by the right of hypergamy and by the strategem of marrying tribal princess.

It may be noticed, at about the same time when Mayurasarman ruled, the Pallavas also traced their origin from Brahmin-Naga alliance. The Koundinya kingdom in the far east in Indo-China, Funan was considered to have been established by a Brahmin koundinya from Kāñci who married the princess of Funan. There are references to the settlement of Koundinyas in Tamil Nadu in Sangam literature. Among the Aryan Brahmin migrants who settled in Sangam period there are *Kavunian* who were the Koundinyas. The famous Saivite saint Gnanasambandar belonged to the Koundinya gotra. Other Brahmin migrants in Sangam period were the Vadamas and Vadulas. A poet belonging to the Vadama clan was engaged in the mundane profession of assaying gold. There were Aginihotra brahmins in Chera country in the Sangam period whom the Chera king gave the village Ogandur as a gift to grow the *Othira* paddy. At the time of Mayurasarman and earlier, the kingdom of Satavahanas existed beyond the northern limits of Tamilagam. The Satavahana kings who were brahmins married Naga princesses. It is a kingdom established by the right of hypergamy like the Pallava kingdom. The Banarashtra-kingdom seems also to have been established by the right of hypergamy. *Pānar* in one poem of Akanānūru is explained as a warlike tribe by the oldest commentator Maḷavar

is also explained as a young warlike tribe. In this connection we have to consider the Sutram of Tolkāppiyam *maḷavum kuḷvum iḷamaipponuḷ*. Sangam literature refers to Iḷayar also who were considered as warrior according to the old Akanānūru commentary. After the Sangam period which may be from the first century A.D. to the third century A.D., kingdoms arose in the South whose origin can be attributed to Brahmin and Kshathriya domination by hypergamy and vedic influences and miscegenation with the local tribals.

There is a reference to *Pāraṇuttalaivan āra nannan*. Professor Vaiyapuri Pillai has given explanation about *āra nannan* as the chieftain who became king. It is a very valid explanation.

The tradition of Mother Goddess worship is very strong in the territory where Nannan ruled. In Sangam times, Nannan was called as the ruler of the Kanam, the forest. A famous Mother Goddess of the forest *Kānamarcelvi* of eḷimalai is mentioned in a Sangam poem. Nannan himself is said to have possessed many fine and thorough-bred horses through the grace of this Mother Goddess. The Kanam territory over which Nannan ruled is still called Kānhangāḍ (Kānangāḍu) and the Bhagavathy of the territory is still worshipped as the foremost mother goddess. There is also a place called Kanattūr in Kānhangāḍ. Besides, the worship of Vana Durga and Dēvi is widely prevalent even now in the area. The Korri of Kānhangāḍu, a mother goddess who is still worshipped was called in Sangam period as the *Celvi* of Kān (forest), the fertility goddess of the forest. Even

now, there are many shrines of Devi in this area. A special type of bachelor priest called *Maṇiyāṇi* does pujas in these shrines. There is also a special caste of priests, *Piḍāraṇ* still found in this region practising Devi worship and they seem to have been imported from Tamil Nadu during the Chola regime. *Piḍāraṇ* was the priest of *Piḍāri* temples in Tamil Nadu in Chola period and *Piḍāri* was a particular manifestation of the malignant mother-goddess. Even the Bhagavathy of Tulu Nadu is called *Tulukāṇāṭṭu Amman* in Tamil Nadu and personal names like *Tulukānam* is still prevalent among the backward classes. This shows that the tradition of the Mother Goddess having been associated with the forest of *Tuḷunāṭu* region is a very ancient one existing from the first century of the Christian era.

A major part of the area ruled by *Nannan* was later called *Vanavāsi* during the Kadamba rule. *Vanavāsi* meant the Mother Goddess of the Vana (forest) which is again a translation of the *Kanamarchelvi* of Sangam period. Later the kings of the Kadamba dynasty established by Mayurasarman called themselves as the devotees of seven mothers and Subramanya. The tradition of the worship of Mother Goddess continued from Sangam period until recent times.

It can be conjectured from the references in Tamil literature of the Sangam period that *Nannan* started his life as a General in the army of the Chera king and then became an independent chieftain. It is remarkable that the existing

tradition in the region of Mount D'eli still tells that the territory was ruled by a chieftain *Nannan* called *Nāṭuvāli* in Malayalam. The word *vāli* with the same meaning was used in Tamil Nadu during the ninth century in the name of the Saint Tirumangai Alwar as *Kuraiyalūr Vāli* in *Nālayira Divya Prabhantham*. The same tradition is seen in the name of *Kuruvāḷchcha* of Chirakkal Kovilagam in later Malayalam tradition. Malayalam language has preserved much more puritanically some of the ancient Tamil tradition and usages. *Vāli* is a word denoting a chieftain or a petty ruler, but even during the Sangam period, the word *Vāli* occurs in *Patirrupattu* (56) and later in the Pallava period, the term *kōvāli* began to signify an emperor or a king who ruled over the chieftains. In the 9th century inscription of *Tānuravi*, the Chera king, the name of *Nādu Vāṭutal* clearly indicates a king or chieftain, which follows the tradition of the Sangam usage. In *Patirrupattu* a king is called 'Selvakadunkō Vāliātan'. The word *Kōvāli* is significant since the Pallavas in their inscriptions as evidences by the usage of this term in the *Tēvāram* poems of Appar who belonged to 6th or 7th century A.D. In order to emphasise that they are legitimate rulers and emperors the Pallavas used in inscriptions such Tamil terms like 'Kovijaya', a typical hybrid term which can be traced to the sangam term *kōvāli*.

That *Nannan* was only a chieftain who later on became a king on his own is attested by the Sangam poems. If you look into the medieval history of Tamil Nadu it is seen a chieftain or a general or a tribal chief becomes more

powerful than the king himself and challenges the king's supermacy. Nannan was exterminated because he asserted his independence in North Malabar from the Chera suzerainty. He became powerful as a general of the Chera imperial army as evidenced in the Sangam poems.

Nannan belonged to a group called Vējir who had marriage alliances with the kings of Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms and some Sangam poems say that Nannan belonged to the Vējir caste of very ancient times (Tonmutir Vējir). Tuluva Vellala is a prosperous and progressive caste in Tamil Nadu and they migrated from Tulu Nadu to Tamil Nadu in ancient times.

There are certain traditions about the rule of Nannan in Sangam literature which still persists in North Malabar and South Kanara. Contemporary field studies have yielded reliable information to correlate the information in Sangam literature and the present persisting traditions. Near and around Pāram there are insignificant villages. There are strong tradition in these villages about Nannan. Pāram is a village which could be reached by me by jeep in 1968 as there was no proper motorable road. Surrounding Pāram, there are mainly Parambu, vast plateaus with a soil which is generally called in Tamil as 'Murambu'. Nannan's parambu is specifically mentioned in Akanānūru (356). Pāram is very near Paṇaiyāl village. There is a small mound which is called kōṭṭapāra. People say that there was a fort built by a king of the low caste Madigas whose name was Nannan. He manufactured and issued leather coins.

There is only one king known in Indian history who introduced leather currency and that is Tughluq. It is extraordinary that such a story is attributed to Nannan. But it is untrue and is only a folk legend.

Nannan did not belong to the low caste of Madigas. Besides, Madiga is not a Tamil caste. Nannan belonged to the highest and prestigious clan of Vējir whose descendants are considered as the present day Vellalas. The present Madigas are leather workers. By to stretch of imagination the Madigas can be equated with the ancient Vējirs who gave their daughters in marriage to the Chera, Chola and Pandya kings. Because Madigas settled later in Nannan's country who were leather workers, this legend gained credence. A Kannada proverb that is still prevalent in Pāram and its surroundings say *Nannana Patukku nari naye tinnu hoyithu* 'that Nannan's hoard was eaten away by jackals and dogs'. Since common folks believed that Nannan issued leather currency, the story was invented to the effect that Nannan's coins which were made out of leather were eaten by jackals and dogs. This is only a folk tradition to which no reliance can be placed. But this proverb is based on the Sangam tradition which is two thousand years old. An Akanānūru poem (258) specifically says that Nannan Utiyan had a well guarded *pālī* (a water tank) which had a hoard of foreign gold coins which was gathered and protected by the very ancient Vējirs.

Another Akanānūru poem (173) calls the *ējil* hills facing the sea as full of gold.



Nannan's Konkānam is called as possessing gold. It is said in Akanānūru (15) that the town of Pāli was well guarded. It is due to the fact that Nannan had a huge hoard of gold because, I think, he had a favourable foreign trade balance with the Romans and Greeks. It is well known that the Roman gold currency was in circulation in Tamil Nadu in the Sangam period. Nannan had hoarded the ancient treasure of gold coins inside the waters of the tank and guarded it with a standing army. Because Pāli was well guarded it was called in a Sangam poem as *Ceruppāli*, which meant the Pali town protected by army.

This information can be compared with the archaeological findings which have revealed hoards of Roman coins belonging to the period between the first century to fifth century A.D. near to Ēlil hills. Authentic references to the inflow of a huge amount of gold into Malabar kingdom for the sale of pepper are attested by foreign notices of India. Earlier I have mentioned about a reference in Akanānūru poem (345) about the white stockinged pure bred horses which came into Nannan's country by wind, obviously through ships driven by trade wind.

One other contemporary tradition which helps to reconstruct the history of Nannan of Sangam period is about the cruelty of Nannan. I met at Kasargod, Rama Naick Pundit who knew both Tulu and Kannada languages very well and to some extent Malayalam also. He knew the local legends on Nannan intimately. He wrote a drama which was enacted by high school students.

The drama had a scene in which Nannan had the hands of the children who picked up and ate the fallen mangoes of his royal garden chopped off. In Sangam literature an incident is mentioned about Nannan's cruelty. A good variety of mango fruit of his royal garden fell in the river nearby and the fallen fruit was washed off on the river shore. I saw that a river flows near Pāram, the capital of Nannan's kingdom in my field study. A small girl picked it when she came to take a bath and ate it. When Nannan came to know that the fruit from the Royal garden had been eaten by a common girl, he ordered death sentence on her in spite of her parents offering eighty one elephants and the girls weight of gold. He was cursed by the very famous poet Parananar for this extreme cruelty. Hence was called 'Girl killer Nannan'. One of the descendants who was later a petty ruler noticed in Puranānūru was not embraced by the famous poet Kaḷāttalayar because he was the cruel Nannan's descendant. Such was the commotion that was created by Nannan's act of cruelty. The irony of Nannan's cruel killing lies in the fact that his name itself literally means a 'good man' but he proved to be a bad one.

In the commentary of Maduraikkāñci it is said that Nannan's birth day was celebrated with pomp and glory. One does not know how far it is true since he was denigrated by poets when he lived and after his death also by Sangam poets. In Kasargod and other places like Nileswaram he is considered as a cruel king and he is said to have married

a dancing girl and is said to have been defeated by Mayurasarman. Contemporary field study can yield very good results sometimes to reconstruct the past history provided the material is used with scientific discrimination and the approach should be interdisciplinary.

There is a peculiar folk dance to propitiate folk dieties and more especially malignant dieties in North Malabar. Nannan's kingdom was called as 'Kolattu Nāḍu'. This name is found as 'Kōlastri' (Kōlathiri) in the geneology of Mursika vamsa kingdom in Chandrotsavam. Kōlathiri itself is a hybrid Tamil and Sanskrit term. The name arose because in North Malabar and South Canara countries there was in ancient times popular folk dance called 'Kolam' depicting the life of folk hero-gods and goddesses and later the Hindu gods and in folk garb. The kolam dance is now called Teyyaṭṭam, the dance depicting popular gods and goddesses. In these popular and seasonal dances the main thing is the folk mask and dress which is very impressive and remarkable. The only ancient reference to this kolam folk dance is found in the commentary of Cilappatikāram.

It is significant and pertinent to note that the tradition of Nannan's infamous act in killing the girl for eating the mango is still prevalent in Sengam hills where his son migrated and ruled. There is a proverb *arunta māṅkaṇi poruntiyu cēṅkam*, which carries the memory of the story of mango fruit which occurred in far off North Kerala in the first three centuries of the Christian era.

It is also significant that Nannan was also equally eulogized in the Sangam period. In Maduraikkāṇi, a mention is made of the celebration of the birth day of great Nannan with great pomp by the people of his kingdom in comparison with great noise raised by the people of Madurai.

Probably Nannan was eulogized in Madurai due to the fact that he defeated the Chera king, an enemy of the Pandyas. It is also significant to note that in Kerala the ancient megalithic burial ground in large pots is called significantly enough as 'Nannangāḍi'. The name cannot be transformation of Nankāḍu which meant Iḍukaḍu in Tamil, since it is pertinent to note that ancient burial grounds were associated with famous kings name or dynasty's name. In Kannada such ancient burial grounds are called 'Moriar Mana of Moriarangāḍi' associating the famous Mauriyas who conquered the Kannada country. It is well known that Sangam literature also mentions about the invasion of Mauryas. In Cheramangāḍi village near Kodungalloor there are burial grounds with stones shaped like umbrellas underneath which rock coffins with chambers are found. The burial ground is called by the name Seramanangadi. Patirupattu, a Sangam anthology of the poems in Chera kings mentions about the burial ground where the kings were interned in big pots underneath the *vanni* trees which signified the valour of the kings.

It is mentioned in Cilappatikāram that the *kongaṇa* and *koṭṭuṅkaruṇṭa* dancers pleased the Chera Emperor, Chera

Cenguṭṭuvan (taṅkulakkōtiya takaicāḷa-  
ṇiyiṇaṇ) with their appropriate costumes.  
The land where the folk dances were  
held is still the North Malabar country  
called in Cilapatikāram as Koṅkaṇam  
and in the Sangam literature as Koṅkā-  
ṇam. These dances are still performed  
in North Malabar, the Koṅkāṇa desa of  
Nannan and also the Kodungarunadu of  
Cilapatikāram. These ancient dances  
are called Teyyaṭṭu in Malayalam and  
Bhuta dances in Kannada. It is signifi-  
cant to note that the koṅkaṇakkūttar  
and Kaṭuṅkaruṇāṭar (Karnatakas) were  
only the dancers who were from  
Koṅkaṇam of North Malabar and also  
Karnataka who danced the peculiar  
kōlam dances.

There is a peculiar folk dance per-  
formance enacted every year in Niles-  
waram. It is about a boy who was  
beheaded and who was later wor-  
shipped. There was a landlord Kurupp  
who had his servant by name Kannan  
who was tending the herd of his cattle.  
One day the man who herds the cattle  
picked up the fruit of the mango from  
the garden of Kurupp. But the fruit  
fell on the lap of the son-in-law of  
Kurupp. The landlord Kurupp got  
angry and ordered Kannan to be  
beheaded. Then immediately all the cattle  
died. After that event, the landlord  
Kurupp propitiated Kannan by enacting  
a dance of Kōlam. Here we can see a  
clear contemporary transformation of  
the story of the killing of the small girl  
by Nannan for eating the mango fruit  
two thousand years ago. Ibn Batuta  
tells of an incident in which the king of  
Kōlam killed his own son-in-law because  
he took and ate a mangoe fruit from his  
well. He killed by piercing his son-in-

law's stomach with a sword. In this  
popular mango story the son-in-law him-  
self is involved. Another folk legend in  
North Malabar says that a brahmin girl  
belonging to Teyakkāṭṭu Mana climbed  
the jack fruit tree and plucked a  
Jackfruit and she was killed by her uncle  
immediately. Then all kinds of disasters  
happened in the family. The dead girl  
who had become a goddess, was propi-  
tiated as 'Manayil Pothi' and 'Manayil  
Bhagavathy' as the goddess of the house  
and also a kōlam dance was performed  
as 'Kannikōlam' a virgin goddess ritual  
dance. All these traditional ritual  
dances, the so called devil dances move  
from the traditional story of the killing  
of a small girl who ate the mango fruit  
of Nannan's Royal garden and other  
traditional stories may be based on  
historical fact of Nannan's killing of the  
girl two thousand years ago of a mango  
fruit from his Royal garden.

There is a village called 'Udhuma'  
near Param which may be 'Udirma' in  
memory of the fallen mango fruit of  
Nannan's royal garden.

It is important to note that the  
memory of Nannan persists even today  
in North Malabar whereas the memories  
of the ancient Chera, Chola and Pandya  
kings are not heard of at all in their  
own ancient territories. An interdis-  
ciplinary study of folk memories and  
traditions by field study linked with  
history will yield valuable results even to  
know the past history.

I have attempted through my field  
study to reconstruct the past history of  
the king Nannan. The hearsay legends,  
myths and other materials gathered from  
the common folk are utilized.

# CANNANORE DISTRICT

