

**THE
KOOTANS OF COCHIN.**



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CHAPTER I.

Name of the caste—Language—Typical names of males and females—Slavery—Habitations.

Name of the caste.—In the order of social precedence, Kootans come next to Kanakkaus. They are a small minority among the agricultural labourers of the State. They are returned at the last census as numbering 99; 50 being males and 49 females.

Language.—They speak Malayalam and are wholly illiterate.

Typical names.—The names in common use among them are Mundan, Kandan, Cháthan, Kotha, Raman, Chakran, Chakkaye, Eriya and Kappiri; among women, Nili, Chakki, Kali, Kamachi.

Slavery.—They form one of the divisions of the slave castes, working under some landlord or farmer for the daily wages of an *Edangazhy* of paddy (worth ten pies) during the months of June, July and August and two *Edangazhies* during the other months of the year. They get for the *Onam* and *Vishu* festivals a para of paddy (6 annas) some salt, cocoanut, oil and chillies. On the day of the village festival every male member gets a *mundu* or two, and every female a *kacha* or two, in addition to toddy and arrack and other articles above referred to. They dress themselves in their small *mundus* and are treated to a sumptuous dinner. With shouts of joy they attend and take part in the village festival. When they fall ill, they are properly looked after by their masters, both on account of their good feelings towards them and also of the loss of work, they may have to sustain, should they be laid up for a long time. Whenever a landlord or farmer has more men than he can afford to give them work and wages, he generally lends their

services to another on a *pattom* of 4 paras of paddy a year for a male, and three for a female. The new master gives them work and wages, and sends them back when they are no longer wanted. Should a Kootan run away from his master, he is brought back either by threat or mild words; should these fail, there is no remedy to force him back. In spite of the abolition of slavery some sixty years ago, they are in a state of bondage. In fact, they live in small huts with insufficient food and with nothing but a small *mundu* to dress themselves with, plodding on from day to day with no hope of improving their condition. They are found in the northern parts of the State especially in the *Talapally Taluk*.

Habitations.—Their huts are erected on four bamboo posts. Their roofs are thatched. The sides are protected by mud walls or covered with palmyra leaves. A bamboo frame work with the same leaves serves the purpose of a door. There is also a verandah in front. They have a few earthen and bamboo utensils for domestic use. They often lie on bamboo mats with nothing to protect themselves against chill draughts during rainy months. The inmates lie together in one room.

CHAPTER II.

Marriage relationship—Puberty—Marriage—Polygamy
Polyandry—Adultery—Divorce.

Marriage relationship.—Marriage as among other classes of agrestic serfs does not exist among them. With persons who are connected with one another, all matrimonial alliances are avoided. Neither do they adopt the custom of mating with daughters of maternal uncles, which obtains in some places.

Puberty.—When a girl attains her puberty, she is lodged in a corner of the hut. The inmates therein may neither touch nor approach her on the score of pollution. Four or seven girls who are invited, bathe the girl on the first day. The pollution is for seven days and on the morning of the seventh, seven girls are invited. Anointing themselves and the girl with oil, they take her to a tank or a river close

by to bathe. A *kaibali* is waved round her face and as she bathes it is floated on water. They return to the hut with the girl. They are fed and allowed to depart with a present of an anna each. Their relatives and others who are invited are well entertained.

Marriage.—Girls are married generally after puberty, but rarely before it. The terms 'Marriage' 'wife' and 'husband' cannot be strictly applied to their conjugal relations. They resort to *Sambandhom* like the Nayars. A Kootan can enter into a *Sambandhom* with a woman either of his own or of the Pulaya caste. He has to bathe, before he returns to his hut, if he should stay with a woman of the latter caste for the previous night. This proves that he belongs to a caste superior to that of the Pulayas, and the union resembles that of a Brahman with a Sudra woman. Should a woman of the Kootan caste mate with a Pulaya, she is at once turned out of caste. A Kootan who wishes to enter into a *sambandhom* with a woman of his own or of the Pulaya caste, goes to her hut with one or two of his relations or friends to recommend him to the parents of the woman to permit him to enter into conjugal relations with their daughter or form *Kutikuduka*. With their permission either expressed or implied, they become a kind of husband and wife. In most cases the will of the man and the woman is sufficient for the union. He has nothing to give her except the paddy which he gets as wages, when he goes to her so as to save her the trouble of feeding him then. Working for a master from morning till night, watching his fields during night and hardly getting two annas worth of paddy to maintain himself, he has no saving by which to purchase a cloth or ornament for his beloved. The woman generally stays with her parents, in her hut and very often her lover comes to her with his wages after the day's hard work and stays with her for the night. Should she wish to accompany him to his hut she does so with her wages in the evening. The lover need not support his wife. The union is attended with no ceremony nor any expense. The service of a middleman, the

ceremony of match-making, are all dispensed with. The woman is no dependent of the lover. The average age of a Kootan to secure a wife is from 15 to 20. They exercise sexual license even before marriage. If a woman who has no open lover, becomes pregnant, her fault is condoned, when she mentions her lover's name. They are then allowed to continue their existing relation. Virginity is no condition whatever for the formation of any conjugal union. This holds between a man and a wife, so long as they like each other. When one dislikes the other for some reason or other, they separate and are at liberty to form new unions.

Polygamy, Polyandry, Adultery.—Kootans are monogamists and their women are not polyandrous. Adultery is no social sin with them, nor is it regarded with abhorrence, for divorce is very easy. Widows may remarry and may even associate with their brothers-in-law.

CHAPTER III.

Inheritance—Magic—Sorcery—Religion—Death and funeral ceremonies.

Inheritance.—They follow the Marumakkathayam law of inheritance. They have no property except sometimes a sheep or a few fowls. Children are the members of the mothers' family.

They have no tribal meeting, but all disputes, cases of theft and other offences are settled by their masters whose decisions are final. Culprits are thrashed but not fined.

Magic, sorcery.—They believe in magic and sorcery. Mannans and Muhamaden Moplas are sometimes consulted, and these dupe them.

Religion.—They profess the lower forms of Hinduism and worship the local village deity (*Kali*) and the spirits of their ancestors, whom they represent by means of stones placed on a raised floor under a tree and to whom boiled rice, parched grain, husk, toddy, plantain fruits, and coconuts are offered on the *Vishu* and *Onam* festivals and on *Karkatakam*,

Thulam and *Makara sankranties*. Care is always taken to have the offerings served separately on leaves, lest they should quarrel with one another and do them harm. Should illness such as cholera, small-pox or fever break out in a family some fowls with an anna or two, are offered to the goddess *Bhagavathy* in the temple close by, who is believed to be able to save them from the impending calamity. They have no priests.

Death and funeral ceremonies.—When a member of the caste breathes his last, his landlord who is at once informed of the event, gives them a spade to dig the grave for burial, an axe or knife for cutting wood to serve as fuel, if the corpse is to be burned, a piece of cloth, for covering the dead body and also some paddy and millet to meet the funeral expenses. A cocoanut if obtained is broken and placed on the neck of the dead body, which is covered with the above piece of cloth and carried on a bier to the burial ground, which is sprinkled over with water mixed with turmeric. When the burial is over, the people who accompanied the funeral, including the relatives and friends of the deceased bathe and go to the latter's hut, where they are served with *kanji* and toddy, after which they depart. The members of the family and the close relatives of the deceased, fast for the night. In the case of a man's dying his nephew is the chief mourner, while in that of a woman her eldest son and daughter are the chief mourners, who do not go to work for two weeks, while the others cannot help going. The chief mourners bathe early morning, cook a small quantity of rice and offer it to the spirit of the dead. It is eaten up by the crows. This is continued for 14 days and on the 14th night they all fast. On the fifteenth morning, they regard themselves as having been cleansed from the pollution. All the castemen of the *kara* are invited. They bring with them rice, curry-stuffs and toddy. Their *Enangan* cleans and sweeps the hut while the rest go to the grave yard, turn the earth and make it level. They bathe and the *Enangans* sprinkle the cow-dunged water on the grave. They return home and are treated to a sumptuous dinner, after which they all take leave

of the chief mourner who observes the *Diksha* bathes early morning and offers the *Bali* (rice ball) before he goes to work. This he continues for the whole year, after which he gets shaved and celebrates a feast in honour of the dead. The pollution which they observe corresponds to that observed by their masters.

CHAPTER IV.

Occupation—Food—Their status—Dress—Ornaments—Games.

Occupation.—They are agricultural labourers and take part in every kind of work connected with agriculture, such as turning the soil, ploughing, sowing, manuring, weeding, transplanting and the like; and as soon as the monsoon is over, they work in gardens, turning the soil, watering and fencing. Thus they work all the year round as directed by their masters. They are landless day labourers working for a small pittance from early morning till sunset, with the exception of an hour or two at midday. There are no hunters nor artisans among them. They go in for fishing at times.

Food.—They take rice *kanji* prepared the previous night with salt and chillies either powdered or otherwise. They have some leisure at 12 o'clock during which they go to their huts and take just *kanji* prepared with a fish or two boiled in it or sometimes with some vegetable curry. At night boiled rice or *kanji* with fish or curry made of vegetables in their kitchen garden, form their chief food. All their provisions for housing are bought by exchange of paddy from a petty shop-keeper in their vicinity. In times of famine, they are more than half starved.

They eat the flesh of goats, fowls, monkeys, pigs, toads, quails and abstain from the flesh of snakes, jackals, crocodiles, vermin and beef. They eat the leavings of people above them in rank, as also rancid or spoiled food.

Their status.—They eat and drink at the hands of all castes except Parayan, Pulayan and Ullatan and Nayadi. In

some parts of the State, they approach the houses of Izhuvas and no other castes eat with them. They have to keep themselves at a distance of 48 ft. from all the high caste Hindus. They are polluted by *Pulayas*, *Nayadis* and *Ullatans* who have to stand at some distance from them. They may take water from the wells of Moplas. They are their own barber and washerman and may approach the temples of their Village goddess *Kali* on some special days, while at other times, they have to stand far away.

Dress and Ornaments.—Men wear a small *mundu* round their loins, and another small one as covering for their head. They are seldom seen with a shoulder cloth. Their *mundus* are small and seldom extend beyond the knees. They wear ear rings sometimes as many as three for each ear, use brass rings for the finger and shave their bodies clean leaving no tuft of hair on their heads.

Women wear small *kachas* folded twice round the waist with no second cloth to cover their breasts. A few of them whom I have seen had no ornaments on. They wear necklace of beads.

Their hair is dishevelled, the loose end being tied into a knot and placed on the top of the head slightly inclined towards the back.

Games.—They have no games of their own, but take part in the Village festivals. Women have no games.

They are rather short in stature and dark in colour. They are socially superior to *Pulayas*, and are a very quiet-going set of people.

