

THE
NAYADIS OF COCHIN.

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Chapter I.

**The name of the caste—the language—typical names
of males and females.**

The author of *Jathinirnam*, a Malayalam work which deals with the description of castes in Malabar, says that the Parayas, Pulayas, Nayadis and Ullatans form the Chandalas of the plains (Nattu Nichanmar), their social position being determined by the order in which they are mentioned. From this it would appear that the Nayadis are superior in status to the Ullatans, who however deny it.

Nayadis are found in almost all parts of the State. They are, as the name implies, skilful hunters.

Language.—They speak Malayalam, but so badly mispronounce words that those not familiar with them, cannot easily comprehend their speech.

The following is a list of a few words and sentences used by them with their peculiar meanings:—

Words used by them.	Literal meaning, or pronunciation.	Meanings.
Chembu kásu	Copper coins	Money
Elamattam	Exchange of leaves	Food
Nakkán Illa	Nothing to lick on	Having no food
Erathiam		Dishonour
Thavatharikkuka	Samsarikkuka	To speak
Ennuka	To number	To go for alms
Thanthizhikka	Santhoshikka	To be pleased
Othirikka	Upadrivikka	To injure

1. ആദിതാപ്പിതൻ ആദിതാ
പാതിരിസാപ്പിതൻ മദാദാ

O, lady of the missionary gentleman.

2. ആൾ അമ്മാ
പ്രിയ അമ്മാ

I beg thee to give me alms.

3. ആൾ അമ്മാ
മുൾ അമ്മാ

It is about to rain.

They are fond of the long sound of O.

The male members are called "Nayadis" and the grown-up members Muthadiyar. The boys are known as "Mulayans" The women are the Nayadichis and the girls "Mulachis"

Typical names of males.

Chankaran for Sankaran
Karappan
Ayyappan
Chakkan
Nilandan or Nilakandhan.

Typical names of females.

Kali
Neeli
Kurumba
Mundi

The caste has no subdivisions. Marriage is endogamous. Among relations they prefer to marry their uncle's daughter. They marry either among themselves in the same village or in the one close by. These poor people have no social status. There are no differences of religious belief nor practice. Their occupations are also uniform. There are no considerations whatever on the question of inter-marriage.

Their habits are settled. In the hilly parts or jungly tracts a few of these families are seen living in the land of some landlords, whose crops they watch during night against the attacks of wild beasts. They are found in the rural and jungly tracts of South Malabar and Cochin.

Chapter II,

Marriage whether before or after puberty—ceremonies connected with puberty—commencement of cohabitation.

Marriage is generally performed after, but sometimes also before, puberty. When a girl attains her maturity, she bathes and is subjected to seclusion for 10 days in a separate shed put up for the purpose. She is in a state of pollution for the period and is freed from it on the 11th morning, when a feast is given to the guests invited. During the period of seclusion her sister or some other girl may be with her but is often left alone. Her meals are served from a distance. She bathes on the fourth day during all the subsequent menses. It is curious to note that the lower the status of the caste, the longer is the period of pollution for puberty. The same custom is rigorously observed among the Kavaras of Malabar, savage races of Australia, the North American Indians among whom the girls are forbidden to touch the utensils, lest it may bring on some mischief or misfortune. They even abstain from touching their heads with their hands and scratch their body with a small stick when they itch. Marriage is never determined by courtship. It is the parents who arrange the match. Sexual license is never tolerated before marriage. If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, her fault is not often condoned. Her secret lover is compelled to marry her. Polyandry as well as polygamy is unknown among them.

Marriage ceremony.—A suitable young woman is sought for in the matrimonial market, and the conjugal contract is made by the parents of the young man, whose conduct, the woman's parents are satisfied with. The bride's money is only a rupee. The day for the ceremony is chosen, when the bridegroom dressed in a small neat *mundu* and a skull cap made of the bark of areca-palm, with his parents, sisters, relatives and friends arrive at the house of the bride at the appointed time, taking with him a necklace of glass beads and two pieces of cloth (*kacha*). The bride is bathed and dressed in her new wedding garments. She appears in her new ornaments. There is no *tali* tying. A small feast is

held for the guests assembled. Provisions of the feast are a few months' savings of paddy, or rice obtained as wages or charity from the village. The ceremony is done in the afternoon. From that day they live together as man and wife. Next morning the guests depart. The bridegroom with the bride goes to his hut. Generally nobody from her hut accompanies them except when she weeps at the time of departure. She is then consoled by her parents who assure her that she will be well fed and clothed in her husband's hut and that she will in future live in comfort. A feast is also held in the hut of the bridegroom. Staying there for a week, they are invited to the bride's hut, where also they stay for a few days. Conjugal fidelity is very common, if not the rule, amongst them.

Pregnancy and child-birth.—When a woman is pregnant, she craves for the flesh of a monkey or a jungle squirrel during the sixth month. During the seventh month they perform a ceremony to relieve her from demoniacal influences, if any. It is called *Ozhinmukalayuka*.

Abortion and other kinds of illness are all attributed to the malignant influences of evil spirits whom they always fear. To ward off such calamities they tie round their necks a magic thread invoking the aid and support of their hill deities and the spirits of their ancestors.

They put up a separate small hut for delivery, where the woman retires for labour. Her mother, mother-in-law or her sister, her friends or relatives attend her for the time being. Her husband all the while shampooing her belly prays to his mountain Gods for her safe delivery. As soon as it takes place, he offers his thanks to them 'for having got the child out'. The baby is bathed in warm water. The mother's diet during these days is merely boiled rice. The pollution is for ten days during which the husband avoids seeing her. Any deformity in the child is attributed to the evil influence of their Gods. She goes to no work for another seven months. The naming ceremony takes place on the 28th day. The child is named after his grandfather, if he is a male, and after her grandmother, if she is a female.

Widows can re-marry, but sometimes without formal ceremony. The brothers of the deceased do not as a rule form any conjugal union with the widows left by the latter.

Divorce.—If the husband does not like his wife, owing to her misconduct or otherwise, she is taken to her parents' hut. Divorce is soon effected and he gets back half her purchase money. The wife who finds it difficult to get on with her husband goes back to her hut and returns her purchase money. The grown-up children live with the father, while the babies, if any, reside with the mother who is free to marry again. When the children desire to see their mother, they are sent to her and she keeps them for a day or two.

Adultery is regarded with abhorrence. There is a belief that those who are guilty of it, are liable to be attacked either by wild beasts or by demons. Moral laxity is very rare among them.

Chapter III.

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

Inheritance.—They follow the Makkathayam law of inheritance. These poor people have no property except perhaps their huts and a few utensils.

They swear by their father or mother. They believe that false oaths make them blind.

Religion, magic &c.—Living in the forests and far remote from the members of the higher castes, these poor people have very few opportunities of knowing anything about the higher forms of Hinduism. They believe in the existence of certain mountain deities who are supposed to watch over their welfare and to protect them against wild beasts. It is their belief that if they neglect or indifference they fail to propitiate them by offerings, they would appear to them in dreams and thrash them and sometimes immerse them in water. They attribute all accidents to their Gods. Rain and thunder are caused by them.

Their chief Gods are *Mallan*, *Malavazhi*, *Parakutty* and the spirits of their ancestors. When offerings are not given at the proper time the Gods are inclined to do them harm. The offerings consist of toddy, fried grain (paddy) and flesh of monkeys.

Parakutty is the deity or demon who aids them in their hunting expeditions. He brings them the game and protects them from the attacks of wild animals. When they do not succeed in getting the expected game, they go to the length of abusing him for his ingratitude and for betraying the trust they have reposed in him.

Ancestor worship.—This is done in a part of the hut when the floor is slightly raised and cowdunged. Images or representations of the departed are kept either in the hut or near it.

Times for offerings.—Offerings are given on the following occasions :—

1. Karkatasankranti.
2. Vrischikasankranti.
3. Onam festival.
4. Vishu festival.
5. Kumbha Bharani.

Stones are placed representing the images of the demons or departed ancestors. Sheep or fowl is killed and the blood is let fall on them. The flesh is cooked. Prayers also are offered. A puja is performed by the priest during night with offerings of flesh, boiled rice, toddy and husk, when the people stand at a distance, because they cannot look at what is being done. The priest claps his hands when the puja is over, and they approach. They then partake of the offerings.

Forms of prayer.—When the offerings are placed in front of the images, prayers are muttered in praise of them.

“O my Malla my Malavazhi ! my Parakutty ! my Father ! my Mother ! my dead ancestors ! I give you these offerings which I have with difficulty, obtained from Thampurakal (members of higher castes) as alms.

May you accept them and protect us against wild beasts, as we are wandering through the forests. May you protect our children !”

Consultations with astrologer.—Whenever these people labour under any calamity or disease, they consult their astrologer—(a Parayan,) who is also their magician and sorcerer, as to the means of relief. He cleverly manages to elicit the true facts and circumstances, and then takes a handful of paddy and divides it into groups of four, three or two grains. According to the group he gets, he makes certain predictions, which he could have made without all this trouble or they could themselves have known on calm deliberation. He attributes the calamity &c, to the anger of their Gods, to whom offerings may not have been given in time perhaps for want of means. It is thus that these poor people are duped.

When a woman is under demoniacal influence, and make frantic movements, the Parayan, their devil-driver and sorcerer, is invited. He is furnished with a thread and some toddy. Muttering some prayers to Parakutty and other deities, he ties the thread round her neck, drinks the toddy supplied for the occasion and the demon takes leave of her.

Death and funeral ceremonies.—Generally Nayadis have their burial grounds. They either burn the dead or bury them. When a person of their caste is dead his body is washed, annointed and dressed in a new cloth. The corpse is carried by *Enangans* (relations, on a bamboo bier to the burial ground. Small bits of plantain leaves with rice &c. seven in all, are placed around the corpse. A pit is dug, the body, covered with a piece of cloth or mat, is lowered into it from north to south and the pit is then partly filled in. Seven layers of stones are placed in it. Layers of earth are again thrown in. Layers of stones are added, and the grave is finally filled in with earth. The site is marked by three big stones, one in the middle and one at each end. Care is taken to prevent jackals and dogs from disturbing the dead body in the grave. From

the time of death, till the funeral is over, all the relations and the members of the family fast. They bathe and eat fruits or other articles but do not take anything cooked, until the following morning. They never resort to meat during the days of pollution. From the second day, the son or the member who performed the funeral rites bathes early in the morning and gives the *bali* (rice ball offering). This is the food for the spirit in his passage to Yamaloka. He has to cook his meals or the *enangan* does it for him. The pollution lasts for ten days and on the tenth day, they collect a small quantity of rice, some grass, water in a coconut shell, an entire plantain leaf and a lighted wick. The agnates all assemble, and go to a river or some water reservoir close by to bathe. A sand heap or a figure made of earth to represent the diseased is made. The plantain leaf with the articles above referred to is placed near it. The eldest son begins the ceremony by standing before the leaf with his face towards the east. He pours the water twelve times, and the others then respectfully prostrate themselves before it. The rice is then left to be eaten by crows. They then return home and the *enangan* purifies them by sprinkling on each member a little of the mixture of cowdung and water. Those assembled are sumptuously fed. The eldest son performs the *Diksha* ceremony (allowing hair to grow) for a year. He abstains from eating meat during this period. He performs the ceremony of *Sradha* at the end of the year, when he terminates his *Diksha*. On the Karkataka Sankranti or some other auspicious day he zealously gives his offerings to his ancestors, with the implicit belief that the prosperity of his family depends upon their blessings.

When dead bodies are burned, the bones are collected on the seventh day, and is preserved in a pot to be disposed of in a river or a tank at some convenient time. The burning of the corpse is very rare for want of means to obtain firewood.

In the case of dead bodies that are buried, the grave is dug up. The body may have decayed and combined with the earth. The bones are then collected and placed

in a pit, along with firewood, and then burned. The half burnt bones with the ashes are collected and buried by the side of a stream. On this all the agnates pour water three times and reverentially prostrate themselves before it and disperse. On the return of the mourners home the ceremony terminates with a feast. The period of mourning for an adult is ten days. Ceremonies are performed for the propitiation of ancestors. For a childless ancestor, his brother, or anybody closely related to him performs the funeral rites.

Chapter IV.

**Original occupation of the people—Ordinary dietary
of the caste—Their status among the Hindus—
Dress and ornaments.**

The Nayadis as a class are averse to manual labour. They collect honey, bee's wax and *mattipasa* (resin) from the *mattipal* tree (~~*Alantus*~~ *Malebarica*) which they sell for a few copper coins with which they purchase their few articles of daily consumption (salt, chillies, dried fish, tobacco and toddy.) They make a kind of rope from malanar plants and the bark of *kayul* trees. They make slings of fibres, with which they shoot birds.

During the Onam and Vishu festivals, the Nayadis offer four ropes to every Nambudiri illam and two to every Nayar house near their village, in return for which they get some paddy and a few copper coins and a piece of cloth. They are sometimes employed in ploughing, sowing, weeding, transplanting and even reaping in the forest cultivation for which they get a few *Edangazhis* of paddy. They have to watch the fields during nights against the attacks of wild beasts. They collect *incha* (bark of *Acacia Incisia*) which is soaked in water. The fibre is used as soap.

Whenever there is a grand feast in a *thara* or any locality, they stand far away from the public road, leaving there a piece of their ragged cloth, and howling for charity from the passers-by.

By a wise arrangement of the old local chieftains, a *desam* is assigned to each Nayadi wherein he enjoys certain privileges and no members of his caste from another village can encroach upon his rights.

On birthdays, anniversaries and other festive occasions in well-to-do neighbouring houses, the Nayadis have their share of curry and rice. When they have no work they go out and stand at a distance from each house in the *thara*, howling with their stentorian voice for charity. The inmates of some of them take a handful of rice, salt, chillies, tamarind, oil, mustard, cocoanut, and a few pice in a vessel and move them round the head of a child or adult, supposed to be under the influence of some demon or the potency of some evil eye, and hand them over to the Nayadi, who is then asked to curse (*Prauka*). There is a peculiar feature about a Nayadi's curse. The idea is that a Nayadi's curse will have always its opposite effect and hence when he is asked to curse, he does so by invoking misery and evil upon the person who has given him alms. The terms used by him for such invocations are a *Attupo*¹, *Mutinupo*², *Adimondupo*³ &c. He does it gladly and returns home. When a person is suffering from any severe disease and is on the verge of death, a coarse black blanket (*kambly*) is bought. At the four corners of it sesamom or gingili seeds, mustard, turmeric, cocoanuts are tied up and, it is then passed three times over the patient. It is then given to a Nayadi together with an umbrella, a stick and a cucumber. It is called *kaladanam*. It is an offering to Yama, the god of death, who has to be propitiated for saving him from the calamity. The disease is supposed to be transferred to the Nayadi who has accepted it. Receiving this, he prays for the long life and prosperity of the patient. He then places the gifts before his Mallan, Malavazhi and Parakutty, with the prayer that the disease may not be transferred to him⁴.

Those that live in the forests of some landlord render him some agricultural service for which they receive small wages in kind for their subsistence. Others that live in the Sirkar forests, get better wages to maintain themselves.

1 and 2. To perish. 3 to be a slave.

4. This is generally done on Saturdays.

Their dwellings.—They live in huts with small roofs, resting on four bamboo pillars connected by bamboo beams. The roofs are thatched either with straw or palmyra leaves. A small bamboo work covered with straw or palmyra leaves takes the place of walls. The floor is slightly raised. They generally have their huts in sholas. They drag out a miserable existence in their wretched hovels. They produce fire by friction, and the benefits of match box, which can be had very cheap, are unknown to them. These miserable specimens of humanity pass off their days howling for charity under the midday sun in summer and rain during the monsoon months and they have also to watch the crops of their landlords during nights. "This tribe", says Buchanan, "as long as they continue in Malabar, will be useless to others and will exercise no influence in the country. They should be removed bodily to some place, where they would be compelled to work for their sustenance." They were at one time skilful hunters and excellent shots. They used to accompany the Nayars in their hunting excursions for beating game. They themselves sometimes set out for hunting and catch toad, tortoise, deer, &c., with the help of dogs and beat them to death. Their weapons are slings, knives, axes and swords.

Ordinary dietary of the caste.—Their chief food is *Kanji* and boiled rice. They get up early in the morning and prepare it. They take it early morning and go either for work or for alms. Should they get anything during the day, they have their evening meal or they have to starve for the night. Anything that remains out of the morning meal is given to the children during the day. They consume the roots of *nux vomica*. The roots are cut into thin slices, which are boiled with salt to form a vegetable curry. Among the vegetables are included, tubers of *dios corea* (yams) and colocasia, mangoes, jackfruits, and pumpkins. Sometimes they take the remains of meals prepared during the previous night, which is generally *Kanji* or boiled rice in water. They consume the flesh of monkeys, goats, wild squirrel, deer, rats, doves, quails, fowls,

paddy birds, tortoises and crocodiles. They never eat the flesh of dogs, land crabs, shellfish, beef, vermin, snakes, lizards and jackals.

Their status among the Hindus.—It has already been said, that they are the Chandalas of the plains and as such they cannot approach the habitations and the members of other castes. With much difficulty they cross public roads. They pollute a Brahmin, by approaching him within a distance of 300 ft., when he has to bathe, renew his sacred thread and take *panchagavyam*. Whenever they have to pass by a field, they always announce their passage by their persistent clamour, so that others may not be polluted. They are the lowest of castes, but do not partake of the preparations of the Pulayas and Parayas. Some are becoming converts to Christianity, and take a great interest in the study and utterance of Christian prayers and songs. Others become converts to *Mahomadanism* and maintain themselves by alms from them. They are called Thoppyitta (cap-wearing) Nayadis. As a safeguard against snake-bite they wear a brass ring on one of their toes and say that it has been a successful cure in many such cases. While engaged in catching rats from their holes, they wear round their wrists snake-shaped metallic rings as a preventive against snake bite.

Dress, ornaments and method of doing the hair.—In some places they have tufts of hair on the top of their heads while in others, they appear to be clean shaved. They wear a small *mundu* around their waist extending above the knees appearing to be very dirty. They are seldom seen with a second *mundu*. They wear ear-rings of brass. They also wear charms round the arms or loins to cure diseases or protect themselves from the attack of demons. The women wear a dirty loin cloth (*katcha*) which is twice folded. They are seldom seen with an upper cloth. The lobes of the ears are dilated to contain wooden plugs which serve as *thodas* or ear-rings. Round the neck are seen several strings of beads with shells and pendants. These are not removed after the death of their husbands. Virgins do not wear any ornaments in particular.

They are dark in colour and lean and stunted in growth. Men and women are often seen standing at a distance with dishevelled hair and jaded looks. They appear to be as timid as some of the animals of the forest among whom they live. Their condition is one of misery and with no hope of bettering themselves. Those who have become converts to Mahomadanism and Christianity, can approach anybody and go where they like. On the whole they are a truth-speaking people with an aversion for stealing.

The senior members of the community are called the *Pramanic*. Their priest is called *Mooppen*, whose duty is hereditary. There is also another officer, called *Arakasi*, who is entitled to two-thirds of the shares in all domestic affairs of interest. The *Mooppen* has the power to enquire into all matters affecting the community, and can excommunicate any guilty person. Disputes are not now settled by oaths.



