

THE
PULLUVANS OF COCHIN.

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Chapter I.

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

The name Pulluvan is fancifully derived from *Pullu*, (a hawk). The reason is that the Pulluvan is clever in remedying the disorders, which pregnant women and babies suffer from the supposed evil influence of these birds. They are a set of herbalists.

They speak Malayalam but very few can read and write.

When these people are questioned on any subject, by a member of some higher caste, their answer is always accompanied by 'arân' (your honour) and 'Uvva Vitakundu' (yes, by your honour's permission). For rupee and fanam, they always say 'Uruppika chempukasu' and panam chempukasu. Copper coins are always expressed by chempukasu. The people of all castes from Kammalars downwards invariably use these terms as marks of respect in their conversations with the members of the higher castes. The members of the corresponding castes in Palghat do not observe this Custom.

Typical names of males.

Kéle	Vélan
Kômbi	Theyyan
Châmi	Rayiri
Kunnan	Ittâru
Parâman (Parameswaran)	Ittâppan
Ayyappan	Kannan
Kôman	Murukan

Typical names of females.

Vélaty	Ittamma
Kandankāli	Kochamma
Karuppi	Ayya
Cheriya	Chéru
Kothamma	Cherutha

Pet names:—Kannan, Kuttan, Chellappan, Chupra.

The caste has no subdivision. Marriage is endogamous. It is said that at one time there were 31 families between, from the east of Mannur and *Nallepally* and that the members of the caste at present are the descendants of those families.

A Pulluvan may marry the daughter of his maternal uncle. In certain parts of Valluvanad Taluk marriage is allowed between the members of the same family. In Palghat members of the caste in the same village intermarry and have peculiar prejudices against contracting matrimonial alliances among the caste people of different localities. The Pulluvans of Palghat, for instance do not intermarry with those in *Mundur*¹ and *Konghat*,² whom they can identify by their speech.

It is said that in former times they had legitimate or illicit intercourse with their sisters. I enquired about this in half a dozen places, and was assured that the custom does not exist at present. When they are questioned on this they emphatically deny it. In the event of a like incident in another caste, the members thereof, contemptuously ask, "Is he a Pulluvan"? This bears testimony to the fact, that this open or clandestine connection must have sometime or other existed among them. On questioning a Nayadi whether such a custom prevailed amongst them I was answered in the negative.

1. 4 miles west of Palghat town.
2. 10 do do

Chapter II.

Origin of the Casts.

(*Origin of the caste.*—The following tradition is current among them. When the great *Khandava* forest was in conflagration, the snakes therein, were all destroyed in the flames. A large five hooded serpent, half burnt and half scalded, flew in the agony of death, and chanced to fall down in a part of what is called Kuttanād. Local men point out the sites of modern Alleppy. Two women at the time, were on their way to take water from a well close by. The serpent requested them to pour seven pots of water on his body probably to mitigate the pains of his burning sensation and also to turn the pot sidewise for him to get in. His request was complied with, and the serpent got in, but would never go out in spite of their repeated entreaties. He then desired one of them, to take him home and have him located in a room on the western part of the house; she refused to do so, for fear of the serpent, when she was advised to cover the mouth of it, with a piece of cloth, which, she did as desired. The room in which he was located was ordered to be closed for a week. Her husband, who was ignorant of the fact, tried to open the door, but could not do so, except by exerting the utmost of his strength. He entered the room and found to his surprise an anthill, with a passage for the snake to go out. He disturbed his residence when, the snake came out and bit him. He instantly died. She burst into loud lamentations and found herself helpless to maintain herself in future. The serpent nevertheless consoled her and devised a plan by which she could maintain herself without difficulty. It was that she should go to every house and say **dhana visham**, and that on hearing this, the inmates of the house would give her alms, by which she was enabled to maintain herself. Thus the snakes were causing annoyances in the houses of people, which, when known, could be remedied by the entertainments of these people. Thus when a pulluvan and a pulluvathy go for alms to a house with their *pulluvakutam*, they are asked to sing and are then given alms.

Their habitations.—These are precisely similar to those of the poor Izhuvas or Cherunas. They are mostly huts with a room or two and a verandah in front. Walls are made of mud and the roofs are generally thatched. The ceremonies connected with the construction and occupation of them are substantially the same as those which I have already described in my account of other caste.

Chapter III.

Ceremonies connected with puberty—Thalikettukaliyanam—Marriage—Pregnancy and child birth—Divorce—Polyandry—Polygamy.

Their marriage is both infant and adult. The first is the Thalikettukaliyanam, which as among the Nayars and the Izhuvas is performed during the 7th, 9th, 11th or the 13th year of a girl. In some places some who cannot perform it conveniently put it off.

Ceremonies connected with puberty.—When a girl attains her maturity, she is not located in a separate building put for the time being, but is allowed to remain in a separate room. She is bathed on the 7th morning and is anointed by seven young women who give offerings to the demons if she is possessed of them. They consist of the bark of a plantain tree made in the form of a triangle, on which small bits of tender coconut leaves are fixed. Small torches are also stuck to it. This is waved round her face several times, and as she bathes this is floated away on the water. This is believed to have the power of relieving the girl from the influence of demons. She is taken home after her bath. An *enangan* also may accompany her. Among them no washer-woman gives her a clean dress after bath. Friends and relations are invited and fed according to the means of her parents. In the event of her marriage before puberty, she would be going to the hut of her husband and staying there for a few days every now and then. If she attains her maturity during her stay there, the parents of the girl attend the ceremony in the bridegroom's house and pay two fanams for the expenses. This custom is in vogue among the Tzhavas also.

Thalickettu Kaliyanum.—The people of the caste are very poor and as such their ceremonies are very simple. An auspicious day is chosen for the performance of the ceremony, when the father of the girl invites his nephew or some relation of his, in the absence of whom any other boy of 12 or 13 years of age, is asked to pass round the neck of the girl, the conjugal collar *tali*. The Pseudo bridegroom, after the conclusion of the ceremony, stays in the house of the bride for four days and on the fourth morning, they bathe and go to the nearest temple to adore the deities. They both take their meals. Then comes the divorce from this fictitious connection. This is called *achgramkotukal*. The bridegroom receives a present of a *mundu* and a few annas for this ephemeral union. He is no longer the husband of the girl. It is the father of the girl that provides her with the *tali* and the cloth on the ceremonial day. The parents are not subject to any penalty if this is either put off or not performed. Many fail to celebrate it.

The real Marriage.—It is not the duty of the father to find out a suitable bridegroom for his daughter. The bride is selected for a young man by his parents. As in all other castes, the parents of the boys and girls arrange marriages with absolute authority and without consulting the parties interested. The preliminaries are shortly debated and settled between them in the presence of an *enangan* on each side, who is the part of a middle man. The *tali* and the wedding dress are brought by the parents of the bridegroom. On the day fixed, at the auspicious hour, the bridegroom purifying himself by a bath and neatly dressed, arrives with his relations and friends at the booth prepared for the occasion, where they are well received. The bride dressed in new garments is taken to the pandal. The *tali* tying ceremony is performed. Then follows the feast after which they chew betel. After this, each guest puts on a metal plate a few annas varying from four to eight and takes leave of the guest. This is called the *poli* intended to defray the expenses of the ceremony. The bridegroom with his bride, departs soon after, to his own hut. Usually a member from the hut of the bride

accompanies the girl. The newly married couple stays there for three days, after which they are invited back to the hut of the bride. After this, they live together as husband and wife.

Pregnancy.—When a woman is pregnant, *Puliyoonu* ceremony is performed during the seventh month in her husband's hut, after which she is allowed to accompany her parents home. When she takes leave of her mother-in-law, she obtains from her as present, a *kacha* called *enathuni* (a piece of cloth,) and a plate to be used for meals.

Delivery.—This takes place in her own house. The news of a male or a female issue is carried to the house of the bridegroom by her *enangan*, who receives for his services a fanam. In Palghat the sisters of the bridegroom or other woman related to him present the woman in confinement with two *kachas* on the 7th day for wearing after pollution. She bathes on the 7th day, and the pollution lasts for fifteen days. During her confinement, the inmates of the house stay out till the pollution is over.

On the sixteenth morning she bathes and the *Enangan's* wife sprinkles cowdunged water to cleanse her from pollution and gets eight annas for her services. There is also a feast that day.

The ornaments given her are *chittu mony* to be worn round the neck, *mukkuthi* for the nose, and *erinjal*.

A man can have only one wife. Neither can a woman allow herself to conjugal servitude to more than one. Should her husband die, she can join in the bonds of wedlock with any of his younger brothers.

Divorce.—A pulluva husband can repudiate his wife for adultery, sterility, immodesty disobedience or loquacity. He must in that case leave her in charge of her parents. He himself may go and explain to her parents, the circumstances under which he has been forced to do so. They may also separate by mutual agreement, the children sometimes following the mother and sometimes the father. Though the

man has always the right of repudiation or divorce, very often, the reciprocal right also exists. There is a curious custom to be noticed in this connection. Should the parents have no objection to their daughters being divorced, they give the husband a piece of cloth which is called '*Murikotukkuka*.' It means that the cloth he has given is returned and that the divorce has been effected. Should he have children, it is not at once allowed.

Inheritance.—They follow the Makkathayam law of inheritance. They have nothing worth calling property except perhaps their small thatched huts with a few earthen vessels. They are destined to live upon the charity of others. There is therefore nothing to be said with regard to the question of inheritance. They have their caste assemblies, (*Parishas*) which adjudicate upon adultery, theft and like offences. The members (*Parishakkar*.) are the principal ones of the 31 families, who settle disputes and decide on the fine or other punishment to be inflicted.

They swear by their parents and Gods.

Magic, sorcery etc.—Pulluvans fully believe in magic and sorcery. A man may become unwell owing to sudden fear or like cause. Every kind of sickness is attributed to the influence of some demon, the remedy for which lies very much in the power of a magician or a sorcerer.

In some cases the Village astrologer is consulted, who with his calculations, may rightly divine the cause of the illness. Among these people an astrologer can easily draw his conclusions from the particulars of the circumstances explained to him. He soon suggests, that the disease or the calamity may have been due to the provocation of their family or other Gods to whom sacrifices or offerings, may not have been given in time. Under such circumstances a *Velichapad* or an oracle is consulted. He may be one in their own family or somebody not connected with it. After bathing, and dressing himself in a new *mundu*, he enters on the scene with a sword in hand and his legs girt with small bells. Standing in front of the deity in pious contemplation, he, after a short time, advances with short steps and rolling

eyes and makes a few frantic cuts on his fore-head. He is already in convulsive shiver and works himself up to a state of inspiration, and in this state, he utters certain disjointed sentences, believed to be the words of their Gods. Believing them to be the means of remedy or relieving themselves from the besetting calamities, they reverentially bow before him and act as commanded by the Vellichapad.

Religion.—With no education and association with higher caste, they profess the lower forms of Hinduism. They worship the deities of the Brahmanic temples, from a distance. They have also crude ideas of religion and believe in spirits of all sorts and sizes. They adore the following deities viz, *Velayuthan, Ayyappan, Rahu, Muni* and *demons*, viz, *Chathan, Mukkan, Kandakaranan, Karinkutti, Thikutti, Parakutti, Kappiri, Kallatimuttan.*

Rahu is worshipped on Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays before they go for alms. All these deities are never located in any compound. A few stones representing some of them are often seen beneath a tree, on a floor slightly raised.

Muni.—This is a well intentioned deity. Once a year they contribute to him, offerings of boiled rice, parched rice (pori) plantains, and cocoanuts. Very often they perform the *pujas* during night. Meditating on the deity the following mantrams are uttered and the flowers thrown on it.

Prathishtaya swaha.¹

Pranaprathishtay aswaha.²

Manthraprathishtaya swaha.³

They then give beaten rice, plantains tender cocoanuts, jaggery as offerings which are distributed to those present

Mukhan.—*Karinkutty* other *demonical Gods.*

These are also adored. The offerings to these are generally given according to the means at the disposal of those who do the *pujas*. Sheep and fowls are offered. A *padmam*¹ is drawn on the floor with nine divisions marked by rice flour, on each of which are pieces of tender coconut

1. Be incarnated.
4. Floral diagram.

Be edified.

3. Be sanctified by mantras.

leaves. Small cotton wicks dipped in coceanut oil and lighted are placed in each of them. Camphor and frankincense are also burned to add to the solemnity of the occasion.

Parched rice (pori) boiled beans jaggery husk earthen cake, toddy and plantains are also offered.

If sheep has to be sacrificed, boiled rice is offered at 12 o'clock. The sheep is brought in front and water is sprinkled on its head and is then killed. If the sheep shake his body, so as to be free from water it is a good omen. The fowl is killed and offered to the deity

Ancestor worship.—On all new moon days, *Sankranti* in *Karkidagom* & *Thulam*, offerings are given to the souls of the departed. They consist of mutton, fowls, toddy and other preparations, which are served on a large plantain leaf. They prostrate themselves before it and offer prayers to them by saying “Ye dead ancestors, we offer what we can afford. “May Ye take them and be pleased to protect us. Even on the night previous to the new moon, the man who has to give offerings bathes and cooks for himself. On the new moon day he bathes and offers rice balls to the spirits of the departed.

Demons and the spirits of their ancestors.—Which is inclined to work more mischief? Due sacrifices have to be given to both the set of beings. Any slight dereliction or even indifference in regard to the sacrificial service is attended with great domestic calamities. Abortion, death of the new born baby, prolonged labour and sometimes death of the woman herself, are attributed to their malignant influences. They are therefore adored with much respect and fear. Their sacrifices are punctually given to their satisfaction. The other set of beings *prethas* are not very harmful, but are somewhat milder. They fully believe, that so long as they approach them by their worship and offerings, their desires are gratified. They court their favour at times by promising more sacrifices, if they will help them either in the achievement of their object or in the destruction of their enemies. Sometimes they pray for defence against their opponents when they try to harm them. With such prayers, they do

their *pujas* on a large scale, and at other times they pray in secret. They also consult *Telichapads* as to the result of their undertaking. They resort to a curious method of calculating beforehand, the result of a project in which they are engaged by piously placing before their Gods two bouquets of flowers one red and the other white and having one of them taken by a child with his eyes closed. The white one predicts happy results and the other quite the reverse. Among the demons' *Yakshi*, *Gandurran*, *Kappiri*, are beings of adoration, but they are not regularly worshipped; nevertheless, sacrifices are given to them. When women pregnant or otherwise, or even children walk alone during midday, they are possessed of them. Under such circumstances, they frequently fall in convulsive fits. Fever, want of milk in their breast, bloodlessness are all ascribed to their malicious influences. They always require bloody sacrifices of goats and fowls. When a woman is under the influence of such a demon a magician is sent for, who by his mantras and magic-songs, controls and gratifies her with suitable offerings and then commands them to depart by oath, and extorts a promise that they would never again enter her body. In this connection it must be said, that there are magicians among all castes in Malabar. The lower the caste the greater is the belief in the potency of their influence. In some cases the demands are so obstinate as not to set her free. A wooden figure or image is made and the tuft of a woman's hair is tied round its head. It is fixed to a tree and nails are driven through the neck and the breast. If men and children are under the influence, mere sacrifices will satisfy the purpose.

Means adopted to win the influence of demons.—A man who wishes to have the demon brought under his control must bathe early morning for full 11 days and cook for himself and be under a kind of religious vow. He should have no association with his wife during the period and be free from pollution of any kind. He should every night after ten o'clock, bathe in a tank or a river and stand stark naked in water up to his loins and offer his prayers to the deity, whom he wishes to get under his control. He mutters his

prayers thus :—" I offer thee my prayers, so that thou mayst bless me with what I want." Thus with his mind fully centred on the deity he should mutter them 101, 1001, 10001 times during the period. Should he, with firm resolution, in spite of all obstacles and intimidation from them continue to do so, the deity would after 41 days, be pleased to grant him the boon. He would even present himself in person whenever he is thought of. To achieve this, it would be better for him to have a training and guidance from a *guru* (preceptor); and in that case, he should proceed to act with permission. If proper directions are not followed, the results of his labour will drive him mad.

The pulluvans bury their dead bodies. The usual lamentation at death, by the members of the family, follows. The grave is dug from five to six feet deep. They have no special burial ground except either near a river side or in a retired spot, not far from their habitations. The corpse is covered with a piece of cloth and a cocoanut is kept at one end of it. It is then carried on a bamboo bier by the near relatives and placed in the grave, which is filled in with earth sufficient care being taken not to allow the deadbody from being disturbed by jackals and other wild beasts during night. The assembled friends and relations, after returning home, chew betel and take leave of the chief mourner. The members of the family and the nearest relatives fast during the nights and take *kanji* the next morning, and the rice ball offerings by his son begin and continue for fifteen days, when they are free from the pollution. On the sixteenth day, they invite their friends and relations who are sumptuously fed. Their priest is one of their own caste. They are very poor and do not resort to any ceremonies which involve any expenditure.

Offerings to the spirits of their ancestors are given on Saturdays, on new moon days and Sankranthies of *Karkidagom* and *Thulam*.

Their original occupation, is to go for alms to the houses of the members of other castes, especially in those of the Nayers, Izhuvas and Kammalars etc. The pulluvakutam is

taken, and a woman (either his wife or somebody) accompanies him, while going for it. They also preside at the ceremony of *Pambin Thallal*. A pandal is erected for the purpose by driving four poles to the ground; the tops of which are connected with a network of strings, over which a silk cloth or a red cloth is spread to form a temporary canopy. This pandal is well decorated on the floor below, which is slightly raised and made smooth by being well beaten out. A hideous figure of a large wooden serpent is drawn with rice flour, turmeric *curcuma longa*, kuvva *curcuma augustifolia*, powdered charcoal, and another kind of green powder. Five powders are essential, for the colours of them are visible on the necks of serpents. Some rice is scattered on the floor and on the sides. There are also coconuts and tender coconut placed on one *elanganthy* of rice and paddy on each side. A *pūja* for *Ganapathy* is performed to see that the whole ceremony terminates well. A good deal of frankincense is burned to add to the purity, sanctity, and solemnity of the occasion. A lamp is placed on a plate there. The members of the house come round the decorated pandal as a token of reverence and take their seats close by. It often happens that the members of several neighbouring families take part in the ceremony. The woman from whom devils have to be cast out, bathe and take their seats on the western side, each with a flower pot of arca palm. The pulluvan with his wife or daughter begins his shrill musical tunes (on serpents) vocal and instrumental alternately. As they sing, the young female members, already sanctified by bath and seated there, appear to be influenced by the modulation of the tunes and the smell of the perfume. They gradually move their heads in a circle, which soon quickens and the long locks of hair are soon let loose. These movements appear to keep time with the pulluvan's music. In their unconscious state, they beat upon the floor and wipe off the figure drawn and the anthurs all fall to the ground. As soon as this is done, they go to the serpent grove close by, where there may be a few stone-images of serpents before which they prostrate themselves. They recover their consciousness. They take milk, water of the tender coconut and plantain fruits and fast for the night. The pulluvan

terminates his songs. The ceremony is over. This is also called *kalam kottukar*. Not being able to maintain themselves and their families by their hereditary profession of the caste, they go for all kinds of day labour *viz.* sowing, ploughing, reaping, fencing, cutting timber and get the daily wages, four to five annas either in kind or coin. They are neither landlords, tenure holders nor occupancy ryots. They are mere landless day-labourers living in the huts of their own built on the waste lands of some landlord for which they pay a nominal ground rent. There are no hunters, artisans, fishermen nor sweepers among them.

Dietary of the caste

The routine dietary of the caste is said to be made up of the following article.

1. Rice kanji in the morning, and-boiled rice or kanji with some vegetable curry during night.
2. Toddy.
3. Monkey, pork, mutton, fowls, fish, when they can afford to get.

They abstain from eating snakes, lizards, jackals, rats, vermin and leavings of other people.

Their status among the Hindus. They have no objection to take whatever is prepared by the Brahmmins, Nayars, Kammalars and Izhuvas, but will never eat anything prepared by Mannan and Kaniyan. In point of pollution they are more like Izhuvas. Carpenters and Izhuvas bathe when they touch them. They are polluted by *Cherumas, Pulayas, Parayars, Ullatans* and others. Their approach within 30 feet pollutes *Brahmins, Kshathrias, Vaisyas* and *Sudras*. Their dress and ornaments.

Their dress is very simple. A small *mundu* two yards in length and a yard in breadth is worn round the loins. It hardly extends beyond the knees. A neat *mundu* is also taken when they go out. I have not seen any male member with rings or ear rings; for they are not able to satisfy even their prime necessity

Women wear *kacha* like Izhuva women. It is folded twice and worn round the loins. It is not worn like the Nayar women. Neither are they often seen with an upper cloth.

Their ornaments are very simple, and consist of the following:—*Mukkathi* for the nose (2) *yanthram* tied to a string to be worn round the neck (3) *Thoda* for the ear. The males have their knot of hair on the top of the head like the Izhavas.

The women on the other hand have their knots on the top of the head inclined towards the right hand corner of the forehead.

