

# The Marriage Ceremonies of the Christian Paraiyans of the Kumbakonam Area, India

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Paraiyans are a numerous low caste people in Tamil Nadu and are also found in numbers in Kerala and Mysore. They are residing mainly in North and South Arcot Districts, Tiruchirappalli and the southernmost area of Tamil Nadu. Edgar Thurston,<sup>1</sup> says, "Paraiyans are to be found throughout the Tamil country, from North Arcot to Tinnelvely and the southern extremity of the native state of Travancore. In the Telugu country, the Mālas and Madigas, and in Canarese country the Holeyas take their place."

Bishop Caldwell is credited with deriving the name 'Paraiyan' from the Tamil word *parai* which means a drum, because Paraiyans used to act as drummers for marriages and funerals. But at present only a small number of Paraiyans act as drummers. Perhaps the present-day Paraiyans were called Pulayans, because the word 'Paraiyans' does not occur in earlier Tamil poems, whereas the word *Pulayan* occurs in the 'Peria Puranam' or 'Long Epic'.<sup>2</sup>

Paraiyans have numerous sub-divisions. The main sub-divisions are Sozhia, Samban, Sanku, Kolian, Morasu, Tangalan and Valangamattu Paraiyans. The priests of the Paraiyans are called Valluvans. There are Christians from all these sub-divisions.

The Paraiyans numbered 1,358,420 in Madras State according to the Census of India, 1961. In Kerala they numbered 130,165,<sup>3</sup>

A small number of these people have been converted to the Christian Faith in the Kumbakonam area, which is in the centre of Tamil Nadu. The pioneer missionary of the Paraiyans was the famous Italian Jesuit,

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1. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols., Madras, 1909, Vol. VI, p. 79.

2. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

3. Cf. Census of India, Vol. I, Part V, A(i), 1961, p. 196.

Father Joseph Beschi (1693–1742). The Catholic converts at Yelakkurichi (the residence of Fr. Beschi), Vadukarpettai, Irungalloor and Purathakudi received their instruction from Fr. Beschi. The subsequent missionaries wore saffron-garb, carried hollowed gourds and had beads around their necks like the Hindu Sanyāsis. The missionaries learnt the local art of herb-medicine and attracted the people by their skill in curing many diseases. They were liked for their gentle manners. The kings, the rich and the poor alike lent a willing ear and a helping hand to them. Many of these missionaries mastered the Tamil language. Fr. Beschi is himself a proof for this because of his outstanding contribution to Tamil prose and poetry. His classic poem 'Thaembavani' is a literary gem today in Tamil poetry.

There are Christians also among the higher castes, the Vellalas, for instance. Vellalas are land-owning rich people of good caste. Vellalas and Paraiyans took up the new religion all the more readily because the missionaries did not insist on any external changes in ceremonies but only in a change of basic doctrine and belief. Thus even after becoming Catholics, the Paraiyans retained their own ceremonies, at least in the beginning. Therefore the early Catholic marriage ceremonies were the same as the contemporary Hindu marriages, except for the blessing in the church. It is only in the course of time that the Catholics evolved their own peculiar rites. Many symbolismes of the Hindus are retained to this day. The Catholic Paraiyans of the Kumbakonam area are called 'Valangai' Paraiyans. Perhaps this name is derived from 'Valangamattu' Paraiyan, whom Thurston refers to in his book.<sup>4</sup>

The places where they are found in greater numbers are Manakkal, Iyempettai Palayam, Perambalur, Purathakudi, Irungalloor and Vadukarpettai. There are also small communities of them in many other places. We shall now study their marriage ceremonies.

Youths seek marriage after they are 24 years old, and girls after they are 18 years old. About a hundred years back child marriage was prevalent, in agreement with the Hindus of the time. Now the age limit is more or less standardized. The bridegroom's parents quietly search for a suitable bride in the same village or in the neighbouring villages. They ask the parents of the girl whether they will give her as a bride for their son. All the arrangements are made quietly.

The Christians very often marry within their own relationship. Cross-cousin marriage is the most common form among them. The

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4. Cf. E. Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, p. 79.

children of a brother and sister can marry, however, only with the permission of the Bishop of the diocese. The children of two brothers or two sisters cannot marry, though their Hindu caste fellows marry even the daughters of their own sisters.<sup>5</sup>

While searching for a bride, more importance is given to the character of the girl than to good looks although a fair complexion is an additional asset. The bridegroom cannot marry elsewhere, if a daughter of his maternal uncle or paternal aunt is in marriageable age, because the parents of the girl will say, "Have I not been waiting with my daughter for this marriage?" Although the parents still arrange the marriage, the boy or the girl concerned are nowadays allowed to voice their consent or disapproval in the choice of a partner. The Hindu Paraiyans still do not allow their children to have any say in the choice of a partner. When the match is agreed upon, both the parties fix a day for the formal engagement ceremony. This engagement ceremony is the first public expression of the intention to marry. This is called 'Nitchayadaartham' in Tamil.

#### *Nitchayadaartham or Engagement*

Literally, *Nitchayadaartham* means 'making sure'. *Engagement* is also called *Parisam Poduthal* (fixing the brideprice), *Nahai Poduthal* (giving ornaments) or *Pakku Maatruthal* (exchanging of areca nuts). It is the formal and public manner of asking for a girl in marriage, in front of the village elders. The bridegroom's parents go to the bride's house and invite a few prominent village elders including the catechist, to gather at the bride's home. When all of them have arrived and are seated, the parents of the groom ask the parents of the girl, "Please give your daughter to our son in marriage". The bride's father answers, "Yes, we shall give our daughter to your son in marriage." Areca nuts and betel leaves are distributed to the elders. Once this is done, the girl is said to be engaged to the boy and the arrangement cannot be made undone. "Areca nut is exchanged" they say, meaning the engagement is performed. The engagement is usually honoured by Catholics whereas the Hindus break it sometimes either due to quarrels between the families over the dowry or if the bride or the groom do not like their prospective partners and elope with someone else before the marriage can take place.

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5. Cousin marriage is prohibited by the Catholic Church, but the Bishop can give dispensation. The Catholic Paraiyans are accustomed to ask for this dispensation in case of cross-cousin marriage, but they do not practise the marriage of straight cousins.

When the engagement is broken in Hindu marriages, the partners usually face a bleak future because people avoid the bride and groom who have broken their engagements once.

After the engagement has been pronounced formally, they discuss the exact amount of the bride-price. This is also done in front of the village elders. The bride-price is paid both in cash and in ornaments. The Catholics of the Paraiya caste are poor in comparison to the higher castes, though generally better off than their Hindu caste fellows. In wealthy families the bride-price is one to two thousand rupees in cash and ornaments worth about the same amount. In poorer families the bride-price is about five hundred rupees in cash and ornaments worth nearly the same amount. In very poor families the bride-price may be still lower. Many years ago the amount was fixed officially at  $7\frac{1}{2}$  *panams* (one *panam* was equal to two annas). In the course of time the bride-price has increased to  $7\frac{1}{2}$  rupees and it now stands at ten rupees officially. But in practice a much higher bride-price is demanded. It is the bride's parents who ask for the higher amount and argue about it. Once the bride-price is agreed upon, the elders disperse and the relatives have a dinner. There is no dowry to be paid. The date for the marriage is also fixed on the same day by common consent and convenience.

#### *Preparations for the Wedding*

Among other things, such as the purchase of the necessary amount of rice, vegetables and other provisions for the wedding dinner, the main preparation for the wedding is the erection of the *pandal* (a bamboo structure with a flat roof in front of the house). The first pole is erected in one corner and it is called *muhoorakkal* (the wedding pole). Mango leaves are tied to the top of the pole. They symbolize prosperity. While erecting the pole, a village elder usually says a prayer for the success of the marriage. A number of bamboo poles are set up at regular intervals, their number depending on the size of the *pandal*. At about the height of seven feet these posts are connected by thinner horizontal poles and tied together. Mats made of coconut leaves called *keetthu* are laid over the poles to form a roof and give shade to the whole courtyard in front of the house.

Then another ceremony is performed by the close relatives of the bride and the bridegroom. This is called *nallungu* which literally means 'to make cool' or 'cooling'. E. Thurston records it as *nallugu* ceremony.<sup>6</sup>

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6. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

The maternal uncles and paternal aunts of the bride and the bridegroom go to their respective nephew's and niece's house with a full-grown cock or hen, along with the necessary amount of rice, vegetables and other cooking materials. They give an oil-bath (cooling-effect) to the bridegroom while the bride is receiving the same treatment in her house. (Among the Hindus the bride and the groom go to their relatives' houses for the *nallungu* ceremony). Then a chicken dinner is prepared. The bridegroom is served first, then the guests and the hosts have their dinner. This, they say, is to 'fatten' the bridegroom in preparation for the great day. After dinner the uncles dress the bridegroom in a new loin-cloth (*Vetti* in Tamil). They also present new towels to him. The bride in her house is dressed in a new *sari* (a *sari* is a cloth two yards wide and about four yards long. This is wrapped around the waist and an end of it comes over to the left shoulder covering the chest). The new *sari* is ceremoniously worn over the one the bride is already wearing.

*In the Bride's House:* The wedding ceremonies take place in the groom's house. But there are some ceremonies in the bride's house as well. A *pandal* is erected in front of the bride's house two days before the wedding. On the morning of the day before the wedding, the bride is decked out with ornaments. Then she is led to the *pandal*. The relatives and the village elders gather also there. The bride is seated on a chair facing the people. The elders of the village come one after another to her and make the sign of the cross on her forehead and say words of blessing.

Then follows the ceremony called *moy poduthal* which literally means putting *moy*. The word *moy* is a short form of the word *mozhithal* which means 'saying'. *Mozhithal* later became *moythal* and now stands at *moy*. People who come for the wedding present money in cash to the bride. Their names are called out aloud, from which the rite takes its name. This proclamation of the donors' name is still practised. After *moy poduthal* there is a dinner for all the guests gracing the occasion.

#### *Fetching the Bride*

The people from the bridegroom's house have to go and fetch the bride officially. A party consisting of the near relatives of the groom sets out on the day before the wedding to the bride's village. The number of people going must be in odd numbers. They take along a basket which is smaller at the bottom and wider on top. The original description for this sort of basket is *adi siruthu nuni virindha* meaning 'short bottom and wider top'. This perhaps symbolizes the increasing prosperity.

In this basket they take seven *padis* (a *padi* is a little more than a litre) of paddy, seven coconuts, seven bananas, seven *jaggery* (raw sugar) pieces, seven packets of betel-leaves, a comb, a mirror, *pottu* (a dark cosmetic, for making the point on the forehead), sandal paste, two more ornaments called *kondai malai* and *thandai malai*. In the basket are also kept the wedding *sari* and blouse of the bride and the bride-price money which is tied in a piece of cloth and this will be carried by the relatives of the groom while going to fetch her. After reaching the house of the bride they open the basket and say, to impress the relatives of the couple and the elders of the village who have gathered there: "I have brought seven bags of paddy, seven bags of coconuts, seven bunches of bananas and seven bags of jaggery. . . ." They count up also the rest of the articles they have brought along, but without the earlier exaggerations. They hand over the money to the mother of the bride. The maternal uncle of the bride takes all the other provisions in the basket into the house and brings the bride in front of the audience. The bride bows in reverence with folded hands. This means that she is ready. After having a meal they take the bride to the groom's village. Before she leaves, the parents of the bride give her their last parental blessing, usually with many tears. The rule is that the bride must be in the village of the groom a day before the wedding, at least by evening. As the bride arrives at the outskirts of the village, the drummers receive the party and lead them to the church, which the bride enters for a short prayer. After this she will stay in one of the relatives' houses over night.

#### *The Day of the Wedding*

On the day of the wedding, early in the morning, the bridegroom and the bride are taken to the church accompanied by all the relatives and villagers. The drummers lead the procession. For the wedding, the Paraiyan couple and their witnesses alone are allowed to enter the centre aisle of the church, while the other accompanying Paraiyans must stay in the side wings only. For there is still caste-discrimination in most Catholic churches of this diocese. The Catholics of the higher castes, especially the Vellalas, watch jealously that the Paraiyans do not encroach on their privileges. The Vellalas, at a wedding, insist on the privilege of sitting on chairs, while a Paraiyan couple has to sit on mats on the floor. Nor are the Paraiyan boys allowed to serve at the altar. This happens even today in some places. Since the Bishop and most of the parish priests belong to the higher castes they seem reluctant to change the ancient customs and to grant the Paraiyans equal rights in church.

The priest, though of higher caste, does not treat the Paraiya couple as untouchables. He blesses the couple and says Mass for them. The symbol of the wedding union is the *thali*. The *thali* is a gold medal on a yellow thin string. It is yellow because it is dyed with turmeric (*Manjal*). During Mass the priest blesses the *thali* and hands it over to the bridegroom who ties it around the neck of the bride. (In Hindu marriages their Valluvan priest says some *mantrams* and blesses it.) The bridegroom has to make three knots while tying the *thali*. In olden days the groom made one knot and his sister made the other two knots. The priest also blesses two flower garlands and hands one each to the bridegroom and the bride who garland each other. During the whole time of tying the *thali*, the drummers beat their drums very loudly. At the time of the tying of the *thali*, two elders of the village stand near the couple as witnesses for the marriage.

After the wedding is over in the church, the couple go to the presbytery and there sign their names in the Church Register in confirmation that they got married in the presence of witnesses in the church before God and the priest. The witnesses sign after them. After this, with the drummers leading, the whole procession heads back to the bridegroom's house. As soon as the couple arrive in front of the house inside the *pandal*, the mother of the bridegroom steps in front of them and welcomes them with *arati* (blessing). Although the form of making *arati* is the same, the contents on the plate differ in different places. In this case there are three forms possible. But only the first form is practised. A plate containing yellow saffron powder, mixed with a little water and lime is woven in circles from left to right in front of them, after which the mother takes a little of the mixture on her right thumb and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the bridegroom first and then of the bride. After this she pours the contents of the plate on the ground, symbolizing the removal of bad omens. Then the couple enter the house. The bride has to enter with her right foot first. This is the auspicious way. The couple have a light breakfast after which they are called to the *pandal* for the social functions that follow now. The first of them is the singing of the song of the 'Praise of the Triune God'. This song is recited slowly in a dignified tone, wishing blessings of God over the new couple. The words are as follows:

Thaamayirukkum tharparan arulaal  
 Thenaar vulahil thirukkaal panindhu (twice)  
 Manamum maalaiyum maasara selutthi

Kunamudan Vazhka kuruparan arulaal  
 Thirumaangiliam siranthum irukka  
 Varum periyorkal vaazhthith thodave  
     Aathanum aevaium vanthum irrukka  
     Neethiyay vaazhnthu nirai maangiliam  
 Vundu suhittu, poosi mudithu  
 Endrinbhamaaha iruvarum potri  
     Vaazhka vaazhka neengal maintharaippetru  
     Thaazhvu varaamal samaadhanamudane  
 Iruvartham manathu oru manathaahi  
 Thirumarai adiyen dhevanaippanindhu  
     Vanodu polum varuthi manam pole  
     Meenathin thiram pole vehuvaippaluhi . . .  
     (repeat thaamayirukkum . . .)

The meaning of the words will be as follows:

"Bowing reverently to the Almighty God who is all by himself in  
 this world,  
 By God's grace may you live without blemish in character that is  
 like the garland,  
 And may your marriage be strong, may the elders touch you in  
 blessing,  
 May you live in justice a full marriage like Adam and Eve,  
 May you both eat and drink and live happily for ever,  
 Greetings, Greetings, may you beget children and live in peace  
 without want or trouble,  
 May you be like a house in the sky and may your goodness spread  
 in fragrance and may you multiply like stars. . . ."

Then is sung 'Song of Glory' called Mangalappaattu.

The words are rhythmic and they are sung in an elevated style. The words are as follows:

"Jeya mangalam subha sobanam thihalvaanavar vaazhka  
     Dhayavepuri kannimaamari annaiye keezhai soozha  
 Arani pari poorani enai aandarul dhayai neeye  
 Tharaniyil manam seyvorkku arul vuhanthaandarulvaaye  
     Andha maamanappanthalaamathil arusaadi neerthanaiye  
     Kantha maamathuvakave sonnai maamari annaiye  
 Annaiye parannaiye suraraanaval neeye  
 Vunnai nambiyor thamakkuhandaandarulvaaye".



The song can be roughly translated as follows:  
 “The angels who have victory, glory and goodness be praised.  
 And glory to the merciful Virgin Mother Mary,  
 You who rule the whole world and the universe,  
 Bestow mercy on those getting married in this world.  
 In that great wedding *pandal* you asked six jars of water  
 To be turned into wine, O Virgin Mother Mary,  
 Mother, and Mother of all creatures,  
 Take care of us who have believed in you”.

It is the village catechist who sings these songs. But he will not start singing unless five *padis* of rice and three coconuts are placed in front of him on a plate.

After the songs are recited, the elders of the village come in front of the couple and make the sign of the cross on their forehead and say words of blessing. After them the other people present the couple with the gifts they have brought for them. The maternal uncle or aunt presents a golden ring to the bridegroom. The bridegroom's sister, if he has one, ties a gold coin made specially for the purpose, with a string around her forehead. This is called *Naathippattam* or the ‘sister-in-law's badge’. The mother-in-law likewise ties a gold coin to the bride's forehead with a similar string. This is called *Maamippattam* or ‘mother-in-law's badge’. This symbolizes the new tie which now exists between the bride and her sister-in-law and her mother-in-law. Friends and villagers present money in cash. For every present given, the bridegroom's family gives a paper-bag containing a coconut, a fruit and a few betel-leaves in return. This is called *Thaamboolam*. When people give presents, they mention especially for whom it is intended, whether for the bridegroom, the bride or both. This is done because the bride's house claims all the presents given to the bride, whereas all the other presents go to the bridegroom's house. This ceremony of giving presents is called *Anbhalippu*.

After the *anbhalippu*, the bridegroom starts giving the presents he has bought for his relatives. *Vetti* and towels for his uncles and *saris* for his aunts and nieces. After this the crowd in the *pandal* disperses with the distribution of betel leaves and areca nuts. The bride and the groom leave the *pandal* and return to the house. These functions are over by 10 A.M. at the latest. The cooking of the festive dinner starts immediately.

It is customary that each family unit in the village has to cook one pot of rice for the wedding dinner. The necessary amount of rice and

other provisions are supplied by the bridegroom's house. The cooking is done on a common oven on a clearing outside the row of houses. usually a long pit one foot deep and several feet long is dug and on these the pots are kept. The firewood is inserted sideways, and although all the pots are in the same pit, each woman minds her own pot and thus the work gets quickly done. But there is plenty of hustling among the women when they all together prepare the curry and the vegetables.

Just before dinner, there is the *moy poduthal*, which is explained already. The *moy* in the bridegroom's house is a bigger affair than that in the bride's house. The names and the amount of money given are carefully noted down. The grand festive dinner starts immediately after it in the *pandal*. The village washerman spreads old *saris* in rows on the ground on which first the small boys and girls sit down. Banana leaves are placed in front of them. Young men of the village serve the whole dinner. Women are not allowed to serve. At one time five or six rows of people will be seated having their meal. After the boys and girls have finished their meal, the banana leaves are removed and the *pandal* cleaned and prepared for the second batch of diners.

In former times it was the task of the bride to remove the used banana leaves. But now this custom is dying out. Any woman of the house does it nowadays. Next the young and the old men are served their meal. Only after the men have eaten will the women start eating. Each set of dinners is called a *pandhi*. Usually the first *pandhi* is for the children, the second for the men and the third for the women. But if the crowd is too big there may have to be two *pandhis* each for children, men and women. The newly married couple and their closest relatives do not eat with the others in the *pandal*. They will be given their meal in the house, with special preparations.

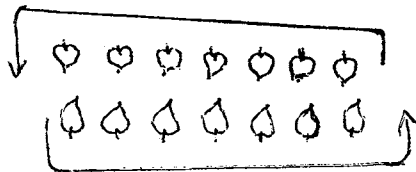
Meat is never served at the wedding dinner, because it is too expensive for so many people or it is out of place as there are many Hindu guests who are vegetarians. *Pāyasam*, a kind of thick sweetened porridge prepared with coconuts juice, tapioca, noodles, cashew nuts and resins is a favourite common dessert in every dinner. After dinner the guests are given betel leaves and areca nuts which they chew with lime. Children, young and old men who do not chew betel leaves do so on this occasion. It is a social custom just on the wedding day. After dinner there is occasion to chat with a relative or a friend who lives far away and has come for the wedding. Many men meet their relatives only on the occasion of a wedding.

*Fixing the Number of Days for the Couple to Stay  
in the Bride's House*

In the evening the elders of the village and the fathers and other relatives of the couple assemble in the *pandal* to fix the number of days the couple are to stay in the bride's house. This also is supposed to be an odd number of days, Three, five or seven days, as agreed upon by the parents of the couple. After the days are thus fixed, the couple with the members of the bride's family who attended the wedding, set out in the evening to the bride's village. It is held that Wednesday is not an auspicious day for the couple to start on the trip for the bride's house. Should the wedding have been on a Wednesday, the party leaves on the following day. However, the drummers take the couple on Wednesday to the boundary of the village, but then the party returns to the house to start early in the morning of the next day.

On their arrival at the bride's village they are received with a great welcome. The bride's family is eager to prove their good status by giving the best dinner parties on all the days that the groom is staying with them. At the close of their stay, the parents and the nearest relatives of the groom arrive at the bride's house to accompany the couple back. While they stay there, they are treated with a grand chicken dinner. This is called *Kavanithal* or 'taking care'.

The bride's parents do their utmost to treat the visitors with affection and hospitality. The parents of the bride and the parents of the groom call each other *Sambhandhi*. There is a ceremony to mark this new relationship. When the party from the bridegroom's house has arrived at the bride's house, they are seated on a mat on the western side while the parents and the relatives of the bride sit on a mat on the eastern side, both the parties facing each other. Between them are placed seven betel leaves on an oblong plate in two rows as shown here:



The groom's party takes hold of one end of the plate, while the bride's party holds the other end; then they turn the plate sideways and exchange their holds. This is called *Sambhandakkalam* or 'the joining of the *sambhandhis*'. This symbolizes the establishment of a new link

between the parents of the new couple. This new relationship is expressed by the *Kavanithal* which really is the grand chicken dinner that is served.

On the day following the arrival of the groom's party, they take the couple back to their house. The maternal uncle of the bride goes along and carries the so-called *Palahaarakkudam* which is a brass vessel full of sweet cakes.

#### *Palahaarakkudam*

Before leaving, the bride is given by her family some articles which come handy for kitchen, housework and dining, such as a brass vessel for carrying water (*kudam* in Tamil), silver cups, plates, jugs, tumblers and the like. The number of things given is an odd number from five to twenty-three. The number depends naturally on the donors' wealth. The poorest family gives only five articles but the richer ones give twenty-three articles. But all of them are bound to give a *kudam* which is very essential for a housewife. As it is considered a bad omen to give an empty brass vessel, they fill it to the brim with *Palahaaram*, the sweet cakes. That is why the ceremony is called '*Palahaarakkudam*.' The *palahaarakkudam* is usually filled with 120 cakes. Out of these five are meant for the groom's mother, five for the groom's sisters and five more for the other relatives. The rest are for the villagers. The maternal uncle of the bride has to carry the *palahaarakkudam* to the groom's house. For this he is presented with a *vetti* (loin-cloth) by the bride's family.

After the arrival of the *palahaarakkudam* and the different vessels at the village of the bridegroom, the groom's parents summon the village elders to their house. The names and the number of things brought are enumerated loudly in front of the elders, then the sweet cakes are distributed to all present. The couple stay three days in the groom's house. On the second day the parents of the bride come to the groom's house to fetch the couple and to return to their house, on the third day. After staying three days in the bride's house, the couple return to the groom's house all by themselves. With their return for the second time, the marriage ceremonies formally come to an end.

The joint-family system is still prevailing among most of the castes in this area and so also with the Paraiyans. Therefore the new couple stay with the bridegroom's parents.

#### *Conclusion:*

The marriage ceremonies of the Catholic Paraiyans have evolved slowly in the course of time. The Catholics have either changed or

dropped some Hindu customs, and added some typically Christian ones. For example, most Catholics do not look for omens when they go in search of a bride whereas the Hindus are very meticulous about it. They do not want to be most on their way by a widow, an oil-seller, a cat, a man carrying an axe or a woman carrying firewood. A bird called *Valiyan* should not fly over them, nor should the lamp in the bride's house go off when they are arranging for that girl. They give her up if any of the bad omens cross their path. They consult Valluvan priests and fix the day and hour for the wedding.<sup>7</sup> The Catholics have given up all these.

"The Praise to the Triune God" and the "Song of Glory" are perhaps the Christianized forms of the Hindu "Song of the God of Love" or *Maranpattu*. Offering flowers or coconuts for the ancestors on the engagement day has been abandoned by the Catholics. The Hindus sow nine types of grains in the hole that is dug up for the erection of the *Muhoortakkal* or the Wedding Pole. The Catholics have long ago given up this custom.

The *Sambhandakkalam* of the Catholics has its prototype in the *Sambhandam Kural*, in which the Hindu Paraiyans proclaim the relationship when they also exchange drinks of today.

Tying of the *thali* as the symbol of the marriage union, the wedding dinner prepared by the whole village, the erection of the *pandal*, the welcome with the *arati* and the attendance of the village elders for all the important functions are all remnants of their Hindu past. The preferential marriage of cross-cousins, not permitted by Canon Law, is definitely the tradition of their Hindu forefathers and it is so strong that the Church had to tolerate it.

This description of the marriage rites of the Christian Paraiyans shows that the missionaries who converted them did not insist on a complete change of all their customs, but tolerated those which could be reconciled with their faith, while they abolished a few and replaced others with typically Christian practices.

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7. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 95.