

# The Marriage Customs of the Christians in South Canara, India

By

SEVERINE SILVA and STEPHEN FUCHS<sup>1</sup>

The District of South Canara is situated on the western coast of India, half way between Bombay and Cape Comorin. It is incorporated at present in the State of Mysore. On its west it is bounded by the Arabian Sea, on its south by the District of Malabar, on its north by the District of North Canara and on its east by the Western Ghats.

The name Canara is the invention of European traders (Portuguese, Dutch and English) who for the purpose of trade came to this tract from the early 16th century onwards. The Bednore Dynasty, under whose rule this tract was at that time, was known to them as the Kannada Dynasty, i. e., the dynasty speaking the Kannada language. The letter 'd' being always pronounced like 'r' by the Europeans, the district was named by them Kanara (or Kannada). This name was retained by the British after their occupation of the district in 1799, and ever since this name has remained.<sup>2</sup>

The indigenous population called this district Tuluva.<sup>3</sup> It is

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1. The late Mr. Severine Silva, advocate at Karwar, collected the main material for this paper. S. Fuchs arranged it in proper order, added a good number of details and rendered the whole into readable English. He is also responsible for most of the footnotes and references.

2. Of course, the controversy over the meaning of the place-name 'Canara' does not end with this explanation. It is a complicated question which cannot be discussed here.

3. Probably from the Tamil *tolal*—one who roams or wanders about.

impossible to state at what period this name was introduced; but it is certain that it came into existence only after the coastal strip of Canara was reclaimed from the sea and populated.<sup>4</sup> The people who first settled here were called Tuluva. Since very little research has been done about the prehistory of Canara, it is difficult to know who the earliest inhabitants of Tuluva were. Possibly they came in very ancient times from Kerala.<sup>5</sup>

The Brahmins belonged chiefly to the Shivali, Havik and Kotaha sub-sections and represented not more than ten per cent of the total population. They lived very much for themselves and had only distant contact with non-Brahmin communities. It was a patrilineal community, and religion and ritual played an important part in their social life.

Among the non-Brahmin castes, the Bants (or Nadavaru, also Nadore) became very influential in Canara. They were among the most numerous and prosperous people in the district. As the chief land-owning and cultivating class, they cultivated their lands mainly through servants and slaves. Most of the agricultural lands of Tuluva they had taken on lease. The lease was known as *guttu*, and the lease-holders as *guttinayer*. Their servants and slaves were settled around their homesteads. A *guttu* was practically a feudal estate wholly managed and controlled by the Bant landlords. There were many such estates in South Canara. When Tippu Sultan of Mysore (1784-99) persecuted and deported the Christians who owned much land, the Bants readily took over these deserted lands and thus increased their holdings, which they retain to this day.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the Bants, there were other non-Brahmin castes, such as the Mogeyar (fishermen), Billavas (toddy tappers, even

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4. Even more ancient names for this tract are *Kol Kannam* (Tamil: no man's land) or *Parashuram Srashti* (creation of Parashuram). Cf. S. Silva: *History of Christianity in Canara*, vol. I, Kumta 1958, p. 74, n. 4.

5. Only the local Brahmins have a tradition about their origin. They claim that they came from Ahikshetra. But there is a heated controversy among the scholars where Ahikshetra is to be located; many places are proposed, some even in Assam. Ahikshetra is most likely only a Sanskritized version of Nagarkhand, which itself is another word for Malnad or Malenadu (land of hills). It would suggest that the Brahmins were immigrants from the upland (*upghat*) regions. They arrived after the fourth century A.D. Cf. J. Sturrock: *South Canara*, vol. I, Madras District Manuals, Madras 1894, p. 146.

6. Cf. J. Sturrock: *op. cit.*, pp. 156-61.

more numerous in Canara than the Bants), the artisan castes, the untouchables like Holeyas and Mahars, the hill-tribes (Koragas), and others. All these were important castes in South Canara and had special functions to fulfil. But they were generally landless, since their respective avocations, especially toddy tapping, fishing and navigation, and crafts, made the possession of extensive lands unnecessary. Tradition has it that the early Tuluvas could be found as navigators on all the seven seas (*sapta sagaras*).

In contrast to the Brahmins, who were strictly patrilineal, the other castes, including the Bants, were mainly matrilineal which organization was known in Tuluva as *Aliya Santana Kattu*, i.e., sister's son's lineage.<sup>7</sup>

Under the matrilineal code each non-Brahmin caste had its own independent social system. Their political organization was based on the village community. The head of the village community was called *gurkare*; he had a council of elders to guide him in all civic matters. The meetings of the council were regularly held to decide all problems and disputes of the community.

With regard to marriage, the non-Brahmins following the *Aliya Santana Kattu* had a fundamentally different conception. For the Brahmins and those following the Vedic conception, marriage has a religious as well as a social function. It is indissoluble. Remarriage for a Brahmin widow is unthinkable. Modern writers use to call this type of marriage a 'sacrament' in imitation of the Christian terminology.

The Brahmins also followed their own marriage ritual (*vivaha*). This was mainly of a religious character. Conservative as they were in all their ways of living, they conducted their wedding rites in their own circle and did not allow any outsiders to intrude.

For the matrilineal non-Brahmin communities only the first marriage (*madme*) had any religious significance. But this marriage was never consummated and a new marriage was performed with another partner which was called *kai-pattane* (join-

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7. It is almost certain that matriliney came to Canara from the eastern mediterranean regions. Whether it came to Kerala first and then travelled into Tuluva, or whether it came directly to Tuluva, is a question which research has not yet solved. Equally unknown is when mother-right reached Tuluva. A study of the history of Tuluva navigation might shed some light on this subject.

ing of hands). It was a mere social contract, without any religious significance and sanction. The wife was not irrevocably bound to her husband. The wedding was performed without priest and worship of the gods, under the auspices of the *gurkare* presided over by the parents of the marriage-partners.

It is unknown when exactly Christianity was introduced in Canara. It is possible that Syrian Christians settled in Canara, as they did in Kerala. But all records of an early existence of Christians were lost at the time of the deportation of the Christians from Canara by Tippu Sultan (1784). It is however certain that Christianity was established in Canara after 1526 when the Portuguese made themselves masters of Mangalore and the other coastal ports. In 1534 Canara was placed under the ecclesiastic jurisdiction of the bishop of Goa. Soon missionaries were being sent to Canara and gained a number of converts. Three churches were erected, one at Bolar, now the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, another at Ullal, now the Church of Our Lady of Mercy and a third one at Farangipet, a Franciscan monastery.<sup>8</sup>

While the number of local converts in South Canara increased only slowly, an immigration of Christians from Goa started on a vast scale in the second half of the 16th century. It coincided with the introduction of the Inquisition in Goa in 1560. The main object of the Inquisition being the eradication of heresy, this dreaded body dealt more severely with the Christians than with the Hindus or Mohammedans. The authorities of the Inquisition declared that the observance of any traditional Hindu customs after conversion was not in keeping with the true Christian faith and must cease. Newly converted Christians who were not prepared to give up completely their former Hindu practices were declared heretics and apostates and could be condemned to death. But many Christians of Goa were tenaciously attached to some of their ancient Hindu customs and refused to abandon them. Consequently they lived in constant danger for their lives. Those who refused to comply with the rules laid down by the Inquisition were forced to leave Goa and to settle outside the Portuguese dominion. They went to the neighbouring princely states, some to the Deccan, others to

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8. S. Silva: *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Canara.<sup>9</sup> The fact that these Christians fleeing before the Inquisition did not abandon their Christian faith after they had left Goa is a proof that they only wanted to observe their ancient social customs which had nothing to do with religion.

The Christians who left Goa for South Canara were skilled cultivators who had reluctantly abandoned their well tilled and irrigated fields in Goa for the sake of their freedom. At the time of their immigration Canara was ruled by Shivappa Naik (1540-60), the greatest of the rulers of the Bednore Dynasty. He evinced great interest in the development of agriculture in his domains and warmly welcomed these hard-working, skilled farmers and made them generous gifts of fertile lands.

The fact of this gift of lands to the Christians by the great Bednore ruler was confirmed by Dr. Francis Buchanan when he visited Canara in 1801. Buchanan stated that 80,000 Christians came and settled in Canara at the invitation of the King of Bednore. This is probably a misprint and should read 8,000. But even this figure is too high. Dr. Buchanan omitted to mention that a second emigration of Christians from Goa brought additional farmers to Canara. It was in 1683 when Goa was invaded by the Mahratta chief Sambhaji that many Christian Brahmins fled from the Bardes District in Goa and settled in Canara.

Many of the Christians who came to Canara from Goa were new converts. A large part of them belonged originally to the Saraswat subsection of the Brahmin caste though there were also non-Brahmin converts among the immigrants. The Christian Brahmins who came in the second immigration were mostly of the Shenvi sub-section.

The Christian immigrants were settled on lands distant from the strongholds of the local Brahmins and Bants, for there was ample land and to spare in those times in Canara.

The local Christians did not mix with the Christian immigrants from Goa. These Christians were called *Padval*. *Padval* is evidently a Jain word *Padival*, and so it can be assumed that the *Padvals* in the Christian community were Jain converts. The converts from the fisher-caste residing around Ullal, Kuloor and other places along the sea coast or the rivers were called Gaudis though they were not really from that caste. Very few

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9. Cf. A. K. Priolkar: The Goa Inquisition. Bombay 1961, pp. 23-34.

high-caste people were converted to Christianity in Canara; the Brahmins of the Havik, Shivalli and other sub-groups as also the Bants refused to be drawn into the Christian fold.

This was probably due to the reluctance of the Goan priests who had accompanied the Goan immigrants to Canara to learn Tulu and the other local dialects. They obstinately continued to speak Konkani, and the local Christians had to learn Konkani if they wanted to converse with these priests. Moreover, the Goan priests refused to mix with the local people. Under these circumstances naturally there were few conversions.

The Christian community of South Canara therefore consisted in those days of both immigrants from Goa and local converts. They were scattered throughout the district, and in comparison to the vast Hindu population they were a tiny minority. Nor was it a closely-knit, united community; on the contrary, the Christians were separated by caste, origin and language. Later, when Protestant missionaries entered the field and made converts, there was also the disunity of belief.

The Hindus left the Christians severely alone. The local Brahmins ignored the Christians, even those of Brahmin origin. On account of their change of religion they refused to associate with them and did not admit them into their houses. This ban on social contact between Hindu and Christian Brahmins survives in some of the interior villages of South Canara even to this day. With all their Western education and learning, the Brahmins of South Canara are still very conservative and unapproachable. They are reluctant to give up their traditional privileges and for the sake of social prestige refuse to associate with non-Brahmins, particularly with Christians.

A closer contact was kept, however, by the Christians with Hindus of the same caste who were, like the Christians, refugees from Goa. The Christians used to invite their Hindu relatives to festivities such as birth celebrations, weddings and funeral feasts. The Hindus accepted such invitations.

Like the local Brahmins, the Bants also kept aloof and never associated with the Christians. They were largely self-sufficient and never interfered with the people outside their own *guttus*.

This was the situation in which the small Christian community was living in South Canara from the 16th century onwards. The Christians formed an isolated group due to their foreign origin, their religion and their language. The only language spoken by the Christians and their priests was not the

local Tulu but the Goan Konkani, which the local converts also had to learn if they wanted to speak to the Goan priests. The women too never bothered to learn any local language, either Tulu or Kannada; they knew only the Konkani which they had brought from Goa.

The Christians also retained the same caste system which they had had in Goa. There had been four castes in Goa among the Christian converts, namely, the converts from the Brahmin caste, who called themselves Bamons (the Konkani word for Brahmin), the converts from a mixed Kshatriya and Vaishya caste, who called themselves Charodis, the artisan converts who were Shudras, and the Vakkals who were called Gaudis. Similarly in Canara, the Christians were divided into Bamons, Charodis, Shudras and Gaudis, to whom belonged also the local converts of the original fisher castes.

Since the Christians of South Canara belonged originally to the patrilineal Brahmin stock and to the matrilineal non-Brahmin stock they had no uniform marriage ritual. The Christians of Brahmin stock observed largely the Brahmin ritual, but they introduced certain changes. Some of the religious Vedic rites were dropped and replaced by the Christian marriage ritual. But the purely social rites remained those of the Brahmins. In addition they also adopted some local Canarese marriage customs. Thus the marriage rites of the Christians in Canara consisted of a curious mixture of Hindu and Christian rites.

The new settlers experienced many difficulties in the maintenance of a proper Christian life. First of all the priests were few and many Christian settlements were left without priests. For a long time the whole district had only two parish churches. One of them was located at Ullal among the Gaudis, the local converts, and was therefore not much frequented by the high-caste Christians. Practically the only parish church reserved for the high-caste Christians was the church of Our Lady of the Rosary at Bolar in the town of Mangalore.

The image of Our Lady of the Rosary placed on the high-altar of this church had a special history. An old song describes its history in the following verses:

1. Our mother came from Goa.  
It was the mother of the Rosary.  
She was with loose hair on her head.

Thus attired she went down in the sea.  
The mother was drowned in the sea.

2. She came to Mangalore.  
She came to Mangalore  
And went to Bolar.  
She has made her home in the Bolar region,  
And with the grace of God  
Has given us shelter.
3. Let us all here meet together  
And build a shrine  
In honour of our mother,  
Lady of the Rosary.
4. A shrine is built, and in it what sound  
With the ringing of bells!  
All is splendour there.  
On the spot where the shrine is built  
How much light is there,  
With the burning of candles!
5. All are jubilant.  
What noise in the shrine!  
The prayers are recited  
With much singing and music,  
All are at her feet.

This church at Bolar was originally the church of the old Portuguese factory. Tradition says that the image on the high-altar was found in the sea and was caught by fishermen in their net. It was brought to the church and installed there. The Bolar church was in fact the first parish church in Canara. The Goan immigrants always had the greatest veneration for this church and for the image of Our Lady of the Rosary. This image played an important role during the war with Sultan Tippu. It was carried into the fort and did much to strengthen the resistance against the onslaught of the Muslim hordes.

Old records confirm that most of the Bamon Christian immigrants in 1683 came originally from the Bardes District of Goa which had been the centre of devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary. When the Bardes people came to Bolar and found the image of Our Lady of the Rosary on the high-altar, they at once felt at home in this church and their devotion to Our Lady became all the stronger.



A reference to the Rosario church and its parish priest is found in the wedding songs (*vovyos*) of the Christians and gives proof of the importance which this church had for the immigrants. A few lines of the song may be quoted here:

Mother Milagres<sup>10</sup> is a relation,  
And Mother Rosario is of the family;  
Let her bless our bride.

It was impossible for the few priests who had accompanied the Christian emigrants to Canara to look after them properly. They therefore made use of the *gurkar* system, well established in Canara but also in Goa among Hindus and Christians, and appointed men of good moral character as headmen in the Christian settlements. To these *gurkars* they entrusted the work of social and religious supervision and guidance in their absence. The *gurkars* became the confidential advisers of the priests. They had to report to them all the scandals in the village and suggest means and ways to eradicate them. They had to see to it that Christian prayers were recited in every house every evening and if possible had to lead the prayers. They had to inform the people when a death took place and had to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral. All disputes among the Christians were referred to them. It was very rare in those days that recourse was taken to the civil court. The *gurkars* were recognised as the social leaders of the Christian community. Such a leader was appointed for each village.

The institution of *gurkars* in South Canara among the Christians was not a new invention, for this institution existed also among the Hindus. It is known that during the Bungar administration (800-1200 A.D.) four *gurkars* were selected to assist in the coronation ceremonies of the king and had important functions to perform. But in the Christian villages the *gurkars* had also to replace the absent priest and in consequence they acquired more influence and importance.

Gradually a whole set of rules was thus evolved for the Christian community of South Canara which was essentially a blend of Goan and Canarese customs and which was also recognized and supported by the Church. Of course, even this

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10. This refers to the church of Our Lady of Miracles built in Mangalore by Bishop Thomas de Castro (a Goan Brahmin by caste) about 1675. The two churches were about a mile apart.

Christian code accepted and recognized the caste distinctions and grades though they were modified and mitigated by Christian charity. This new codes had also its impact on the Christian marriage ritual.

In the regional languages of Tuluva or South Canara various terms are in use signifying 'marriage'. The Tulu-speaking people use the term *madme*. This word signifies for the Brahmins the strictly religious ceremony of marriage which according to Hindu standards is indissoluble and more than a social contract. It is the permanent union of two persons of the opposite sex for founding a new family and procreating offspring. According to Hindu belief the happiness of a couple in the next life depends on the birth of at least one son.

The non-Brahmin castes of Canara use the term *madme* for the first marriage of a virgin boy to a virgin girl while for the subsequent marriages they commonly use the word *kai-pattane*, i.e. joining of hands. The essential rite which consists in pouring water on the joined hands of bridegroom and bride is called *dhare* or *kai-dhare*. While the *madme* marriage has a religious significance, the *kai-pattane* marriage is for the non-Brahmins merely a social contract and can easily be dissolved.

In the Kannada language the word for marriage is *maduve*. The Konkani Hindus call it *lagna*. This word has found entrance also into the Kannada language. The Konkani-speaking Christians use also the word *kazar* which is a Portuguese word imported from Goa. It was also used by the Portuguese missionaries working in Canara.

In South Canara, however, Konkani Hindus as well as Christians use the word *vordik*. This term is not found in the neighbouring districts nor even in North Canara. The word is probably derived from the Sanskrit *vri* which means 'to choose' or 'to select.' It is used first for 'marriage' in the *Gnaneshwari* (tenth century).

From this root *vri* several other terms have been coined, all connected with marriage. Thus the bridegroom is called *voreth*,<sup>11</sup> the bride is *vokol*, the invitation to a wedding *voulik*, the wedding party *voran*, a female wedding guest is *vouli*, a male wedding guest *voulo*, a wedding song is *vovi* (plural: *vovy*), while the wedding procession is called *vor*.

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11. Another word in common use for 'bridegroom' is *novro*, from *nanha*, small. In Hindu marriages the bridegroom is often a little boy.

Most likely the terms from the root *vri* were imported into Canara by the Shenvi Brahmins of the Bardes District in Goa who after their conversion were forced to emigrate into South Canara. In fact, the marriage rites of the Christians in South Canara show many similarities with the marriage rites of the Shenvi Brahmins in Goa.

A short description of these rites would not be amiss. The ancient Shenvi marriage lasted nine days. On the first day was the *Simant puja*, the worship on the boundary of the village. When the party of the bridegroom arrived from his village it stopped at the boundary of the bride's village. Here an offering was made. Its main purpose was to drive away all evil spirits and to prevent them from entering the village and disturbing the wedding ceremonies.

On the second day the essential marriage rite was performed surrounded by the usual Hindu rites of deep symbolic meaning. The essential rite consisted in taking seven steps around the sacred fire by bride and bridegroom their clothes tied together. The Dravidian rite consisted in pouring water on the joined hands of the couple. On the third day the bridal pair remained at the bride's house being feasted and entertained throughout the whole day. On the fourth day (*chouthandan*), at night, the bride was given to the bridegroom and they left for the bridegroom's house this very night. On the noon of the fifth day the bridal pair returned to the bride's house. This was called *panch parthana*. During the night and on the following sixth day the couple remained at the bride's house. On the seventh day a dinner was given at the bride's house. This was called *gaun jevan*. The night was again passed in the bride's house. At noon of the eighth day the bridal pair returned to the bridegroom's house. On this day there was a big dinner (*gaun jeven*) in the bridegroom's house. On the ninth day the two remained in the bridegroom's house. On the tenth day the wedding ceremonies came to an end. The *vasana* (leave-taking) ceremony took place. The bridegroom removed his coronet (*basing*) which was tied to the wedding post (*kol khambo*) in the marriage shed.

In the eyes of the Brahmins it was essential that a wedding took ten days, just as the birth and death ceremonies were also celebrated for ten days. It is evident that many of the ancient Hindu customs were retained by the Christians after their conversion. Of course they were modified; the sacrifices to the

various gods and the blessings through the Brahmin priest were omitted and the blessing of the nuptials in the church by the Catholic priest was inserted. But many other rites were retained. It were mainly these marriage rites which the Inquisition found objectionable and prohibited in a "Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in the Kingdoms of Portugal," published in 1640 by Bishop D. Francisco de Castro.<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Ceremonies Preparatory to the Wedding

Some considerations preliminary to the marriage deserve our attention before we can begin with the description of the rites. The first point to be considered is the marriageable age of both bridegroom and bride. The ancient Hindu writers disagree considerably about this point. In ancient times it was the rule that a girl married after reaching puberty. In the *Griha Shatras* the marriageable maiden is referred to as *nagnika*.<sup>13</sup>

But this rule of marriage after reaching puberty was changed in the Muslim period; henceforth the Hindu girls of high caste were being married off before reaching puberty. It was generally feared in those troubled times that girls still unmarried after reaching puberty were in danger of being forcibly abducted by the Muslims. Goa, being for a long time under Muslim rule, adopted the same custom. But the practice of marrying girls before puberty became general in the whole of India. The Sonda kings (1698-1763) even passed a decree that girls unmarried after reaching puberty were to be sold by public auction. It was generally permitted to search the houses for such girls. If they could be found they were forcibly brought out and sold to the highest bidders.

Following the custom of the high-caste Hindus, the early Christian converts too married their daughters off very early. It is well known that similar customs prevailed in those days also in Europe. Only after Canon Law had fixed the marriageable age of the bride at fourteen and that of the bridegroom at sixteen was the age limit raised also in Canara. After the down-

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12. Cf. A. K. Priolkar: *op. cit.*, pp. 87-103.

13. Cf. Hiranyakesi Gri. 1, 19, 2. The word *nagnika* signifies a girl fit to be undressed for cohabitation with her husband (from *nagna*, undressed).

fall of Tippu Sultan in 1799 when all fear of the Muslims was gone, it became the general rule to marry the girls off after attaining puberty. The usual age of a girl at her marriage was fifteen, that of a boy several years higher.

As among the Hindus, it was also among the Christians the rule that practically every girl got married. But exceptions were permitted. If a girl wanted to remain unmarried her wish was granted. But woe to her, if she broke her vow of virginity. She was driven out of the house and all contact with the family forbidden. No food could be given to her, no fire. She had to fend for herself in future and seek work anywhere, for nobody showed her any mercy.

In the choice of marriage partners the Christians of South Canara had to observe certain rules, such as the law of consanguinity and affinity. These impediments were not only laid down by Canon Law but also by Hindu Law which generally was stricter than Canon Law. The Hindu Law, modified by the Christian Law, was brought from Goa and became valid also in Canara.

There was another principle which came into play in the choice of marriage partners. It was the affiliation to the so-called *Bokt*. The literal meaning of this word in Konkani is 'saint' (in Hindi: *bhakta*). During the early days of Christianity in Goa the Christian converts were attached to parishes dedicated to certain saints. The Blessed Virgin became under various titles the patroness of many parishes. These parish patrons were held in great veneration and all the people attached to one particular parish felt like members of one body and close relatives. Thus no marriage could take place between members of the same parish. It was a kind of territorial exogamy.

To exemplify this there is an old Konkani song still current in South Canara under the heading *Bardesachi Sima*—The Boundary of Bardes (a district of Goa).

First, father, Shiroda  
Is the boundary of Bardes.  
The administration is strong.  
Salvador is *swami* (lord).

Second, father, is Haldane;  
It is full of round boulders.  
It is a place of rest  
For Bhakt St. Thomas.

Third, father, is Calangute;  
It adjoins the sea.  
Its Bhakt is St. Alex.

Fourth, father, is Candolim;  
Twelve ships have arrived here  
And have spread their wings  
Over the new town.  
Bhakt is St. Francis Xavier.

Fifth, father, is Nationola;  
Here are many mango trees.  
Here we get peace and happiness  
From St. Anne.

Sixth, father, is Salgaon;  
The fields here are lower than the tank.  
Here the fame was spread  
Of the Blessed Virgin.

Seventh, father, is Asagaon;  
The vines have got leaves.  
We shall send the *bido*<sup>14</sup>  
To Bhakt St. Michael.

Eighth, father, is Poroli;  
Where Rukma<sup>15</sup> trees grow.  
Everybody asks a favour  
From our Divine Mother Candoi.

Ninth, father, is Pomburpa;  
Here boats are made of Rukma trees.  
Patron is of her own wish  
Our Mother of the Rosary.<sup>16</sup>

It is quite clear that in former times the patrons of the parishes were named *Bokt* or *Bhakt*. And the name of the patron saint was at the same time equivalent to the clan name. No marriage could be arranged between the members of the

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14. *Bido* is an areca nut cut in pieces and wrapped into a betel leaf.

15. *Rukma* is the thorn-apple tree, *Mesua Roxburgii*.

16. These songs lose much in translation. In the original text they are full of allusions which only the local people can understand and relish.

same parish.

When the Christians settled in Canara they came from different parishes of Goa. It happened that members of one parish settled in one new village; but sometimes they were spread over several villages. But all remembered exactly to which parish they had originally belonged in Goa. Persons of the same parish in Goa continued to practise exogamy even after settling in Canara.

However, this practice has long since been given up. It is possible that it did not survive the deportation of the Christians under Tippu Sultan. But even in present times it is considered preferable to marry a girl living in another village. One of the reasons is that when two families are related in marriage the members of the one family are invited by the other family on the parish feast-day. On this day the bridegroom has to present a full banana bunch to his mother-in-law.

Another reason why marriages of persons living in the same village are usually avoided is that such marriages often lead to difficulties. When a young married woman feels unhappy, often on account of an unsympathetic mother-in-law, she can easily run away from her husband's house and return to her parents. If they live in a distant village she cannot leave easily, and the parents do not interfere often. This fact is illustrated by the following proverb:

“A girl should be brought from a distant place;

But a pair of bullocks should be bought in the neighbourhood.”<sup>17</sup>

If the bride is brought from a distant place, she is not easily tempted to run home; if bullocks are bought from a neighbouring village, they can easily be brought back when they run back to their former owner.

Another principle that restricted the choice of marriage partners was caste. No marriage was permitted between persons of different castes. A Bamon boy was obliged to marry a Bamon girl; a Charodi boy had to marry a Charodi girl, and so forth. This rule was strictly observed. Mutual attraction played no part in those times in the arrangement of a marriage match. The marriage partners had no say in the matter. All

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17. *Chedum adijai poishilen,  
Ani jot adijai lagshilen.*

marriages were arranged by the parents with the assistance of the *gurkars*.

In the choice of the bridegroom, various factors were considered by the bride's party. One chief consideration was his physical constitution and his capacity for work. He was expected to be a strong, healthy man, able to maintain a family by the work of his hands.

To test his physical appearance and strength various means were devised. A man of the bride's party was asked to observe the bridegroom. Among the Shenvis the family priest (*purohit*) had to perform this task. He was supposed to stay with the bridegroom day and night and to observe him closely. He was to stand at his side even when he went to urinate. The prospective bridegroom was expected to bore a hole in the ground by his forceful ejection of the urine!

Another highly desirable qualification in a prospective bridegroom was the possession of land. There were practically no artisans among the Christians. Carpentry was practised, but every farmer practised it and it was quite primitive and unskilled. Other crafts and industries were non-existent. Consequently, the only possible occupation of a Christian in Canara was agriculture. It was desirable that the fields were not lying in the lowlands which were frequently flooded by the monsoon rains. Fields on elevated sites beyond the reach of floods were much preferred.<sup>18</sup>

The bridegroom's party had its wishes concerning the bride. Not every girl would do. She had to be of a respectable family and lineage. As the Konkani proverb says:

"Take the girl after looking at her mother;  
And take the she-buffalo after looking at the milk."<sup>19</sup>

Another proverb demands that a girl should be chosen from a poor family and should marry into a rich family.<sup>20</sup>

The Christians in South Canara had in the old times many such proverbs full of wisdom. A boy was likened to a coconut

18. These are the best lands in Canara, capable of yielding three crops in a year. These crops are known as *yeneI*, *suggi*, and *kolkem*.

19. *Avoik polovn dhuvek vhor*  
*Dud polovn moshik vhor.*

20. *Dubleachem chedum adizai*  
*Grestak chedum dizai.*



tree, and a girl to a plantain tree.<sup>21</sup> The Hindus too have many such proverbs and pithy sayings based on the regulations laid down in the *Dharma Shastras*. The main consideration, for Christians as well as for Hindus, was the economic security of the young couple. Considerations of beauty and love did not influence the arrangements of a match. This was naturally so because in the time of the early Christians the marriage was arranged not by boy and girl, but by their parents, the *gurkars*, and the village council of elders. In this the Christians followed the example of the Hindus.

The family of a boy in the marriageable age usually employed a professional go-between to find the right bride for him. He was called *malo*. When he found a suitable girl he informed the boy's father. This man asked: "Where is the girl?" The *malo* gave the required information and they decided to see the girl. They fixed a day for the visit and on the day the father, the bridegroom, a maternal uncle and one or two others went with the *malo* to see the girl. When they arrived at the girl's house, they were welcomed with *pan-pod* (pieces of areca nut wrapped in a betel leaf) and a vessel of water. Then the girl was called under some pretext. She was asked to fetch water from the well, or to place some object in the courtyard or to serve coffee to the guests. The bridegroom and his father had thus an opportunity to observe her. The girl of course knew the reason why she had been called and felt very shy and embarrassed.

When all the preliminary questions were settled the amount of dowry (*dot*) was discussed. This was done in the house of the bride's parents to which the bridegroom's father, a few relatives and the *gurkar* were invited. In the old times the dowry amounted to between two and four *varahas*.<sup>22</sup> The dowry was raised, however, gradually with the growing wealth of the Christians and the higher price of gold. At the present time at least a thousand rupees are demanded; wealthy people may have to pay up to 20,000 Rs. Because of the evil effects of the dowry system the Indian Government has forbidden the payment of

21. *Chedo mada bori*  
*Chedum kelmya bori.*

22. A *varaha* is a gold coin of the Bednore kingdom (1498-1763); it was called *Ilkeri Varaha* (*Vora*). Its price was equivalent to Rs. 4.00. The largest amount ever demanded in early times was twelve and a half *varahas*, never more.

dowry. It is now being paid in the form of a donation (*denem*). A family with several daughters is practically ruined financially if there are no marriageable sons to offset the loss by the reception of dowry.

The dowry had to be paid by the bride's father at least fifteen days before the wedding. From this amount the bridegroom was supposed to make the silver bead (*moni*) which he had to tie around the neck of the bride. The dowry money was handed over to the bridegroom's party with great solemnity in the presence of many witnesses in the house of the bridegroom.

In honour of the occasion, it was customary to distribute *pan-pod* or *bido*.<sup>23</sup> A plate with the ingredients betel, areca nuts cut into pieces, *patri*(?), and cardamom was passed from the bridegroom's side to the bride's party, and another plate with the same ingredients was handed from the bride's side to the bridegroom's party. This exchange was called *badalchen* (changing hands).<sup>24</sup>

A packet of *pan-pod* was also sent to the parish priest, and to other relatives of the marrying parties. This was the final seal to the engagement.

In modern times an engagement became an even more intricate matter. Questions of sickness, physical and mental defects, etc., in the family and in even remote relationship were minutely discussed. These inquiries were often so protracted that they gave rise to the proverb: "To fix an engagement the soles of the feet are worn off twelve times!"<sup>25</sup> Both parties never ceased making inquiries and it took much time till a final agreement could be reached. But once the engagement was concluded it was not easily broken. Only very cogent reasons could induce one of the parties to break off an engagement.

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23. *Bido* is the small packet of pieces of areca nut wrapped into a betel leaf with the addition of several spices, as it is sold in the shops. *Pan-pod* is the same, but loosely placed on a plate, so that each guest can prepare his own *pan*. The areca nut, uncut, is called *popal*, cut into small pieces it is *pod*.

24. In the past Canara was famous for its spices. And so, *pan* and *pod* were generously supplied on all festive occasions. The spices were not mixed with lime (*chuno*). In fact, in every house a copper or brass plate was always kept ready for a *pan-pod* party. Whenever a guest arrived at the house it was customary to offer him this plate with a fresh betel leaf just picked from the vine. Also a betel nut was prepared and placed on the brass plate (*tobak*).

25. *Bara kathi jhartalyo*.

After the settlement was made, the date of the wedding was fixed. Certain days of the week were considered inauspicious, and in old times no weddings were celebrated in a leap year. These superstitions have now widely disappeared.

After the day of the wedding had been fixed the new bride and bridegroom were invited for dinner by their respective friends, relatives and neighbours. But bride and bridegroom never went together to the same house. The girl was dressed up nicely for the occasion and wore red flowers in her hair. After her return from dinner she put fresh flowers into her hair. Sometimes she was invited by her hosts to stay over night and a bath was prepared for her. Such an invitation expressed the affection and respect which the hosts felt for the family of the bride. Near relatives could not easily excuse themselves from such invitations. Of course, the invitation had to be returned when an engagement took place in the family of the hosts.

The wedding was to be celebrated within two or three weeks after the formal engagement. The families of both bride and bridegroom were kept busy with the necessary preparations for the wedding. Clothes had to be purchased, ornaments made, and food had to be collected for the wedding dinners.

The main item of the bride's trousseau was the upper garment, the *sari* or *sado*,<sup>26</sup> a long veil wrapped in carefully arranged folds around the lower part of the body and the end thrown over one shoulder. Some female wedding guests were also presented with *saris*; even male guests received presents of clothes.

In early times the wedding *sado* was simple, but it became ever more costly and expensive. *Saris* are known for their variety by special names, such as *katari*, *shilari*, *gulabi*, etc. One wedding song describes how a bargain was made for a *katari*, later a *shilari* was selected as the best, and finally a *gulabi* was purchased.

The earliest bridal ornament was the *pirduk*<sup>27</sup> around the

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26. *Sado* is the name of the bride's *sari*. It had to be a Benares *sari* in later times. After the wedding was over, it was well preserved and worn only on high feast-days or for weddings. Sometimes a particularly precious *sado* was handed down from mother to daughter and considered a valuable heirloom. The cost of a *sado* was reckoned in *varahas*.

27. The Hindus call it *mangal sutra* (the auspicious necklace). It is the symbol of the married state.

neck. It was a necklace of black glass beads strung on a thread made of the fibres of dried pineapple (ananas) leaves. This necklace was to be worn as long as the husband was alive; a widow had to take it off. It was highly prized by the women as the symbol of their married state. The *pirduk* could consist of a single row of beads, but in old times it often consisted of three rows. The beads were black probably because black never fades or changes. As the years passed more lustre was added to the beads.

The ordinary crude pattern of the *pirduk* was improved in the course of time. Later longish beads of gold were inserted between the black glass beads and a pendant was added. The earliest pendant was a round disk of silver. It was called *tali*.<sup>28</sup> Later it was changed into a golden pendant. Finally the pendant was replaced by a gold medal bearing the picture of Our Lady. This ornament is still in use in some places. Elsewhere in South Canara the *pirduk* has now the form of a half-moon surmounted by a cross and studded with pearls or precious stones. It is worn on the chest on a string of pineapple fibres on which gold and black glass beads are strung alternately. Another form of the pendant consists of a cross studded with precious stones. To the top of the cross is attached the figure of a dove, symbol of the Holy Ghost. While the former pendant is called *minin*, the latter shape is called *sorpoli*. It is worn on a gold chain without glass beads.

Besides this main ornament a bride used to wear the following other ornaments:

1. On the neck: the *kanti*, a necklace of red coral beads and gold beads, between eight or ten coral beads a larger gold bead being inserted, hung down to the breast; the *chakrasar*, consisting of a series of small round gold plates woven one into the other and forming a long chain; the *fugodor*, a necklace of large green stones mounted in gold.

2. On the ear: The most ancient ear ornament was called *kap*. It consisted of a round disk inserted into the lobe of the ear. It is still the typical ear ornament for married women in Canara. The weight of the *kap* extended the hole of the earlobes so much that the earlobes of old women hang down very low.

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28. This was probably imported from Kerala where the *thali* is the symbol of the married state. The bridegroom has to tie it around the neck of the bride during the wedding.

In the course of time the *kap* fell into disuse among the younger generation and was replaced by a more elaborate ornament, the *pespes*, which is similar to the *kap*. In the present time the ear ornament most commonly worn is the so-called *kudar* (pl. *kudkan*), a round gold disk surrounded by precious stones. Another ear-ornament was the *karap*, inserted in the middle ear. A thin gold chain was attached to it which was fastened in the hair. On top of the ear the bride wore the *mugud*, a gold disk surrounded by pearls. The *mugud* too was attached to the hair by a golden chain.

3. Head ornaments: First was a gold pin struck through the bun of hair at the back of the head. For a bride it was a silver pin with a gold head, often ornamented. It was called *kanto*.

The bride wore a pair of combs (*dantoni*). Two ordinary combs were purchased and the upper part of each one was plated with gold. They are worn in the hair on both sides of the head over the ears. Two more combs were worn by the bride, with a figure of a fish in gold inserted in each comb. These combs were therefore called *masli* (fish).

In the centre of the forehead where the hair is parted, a gold chain was placed with a pendant. This chain was called *bang*. It was also used by the Hindu bride.

4. Arm ornaments: Every bride formerly wore three pairs of gold bangles; in addition she wore bangles of red glass.<sup>29</sup> A bride must also wear one or several gold rings on her fingers.

These were the traditional ornaments for a bride on her wedding day. The less sophisticated country brides still wear them though in the towns they have been replaced by modern jewelery. The modern tendency is to wear a lesser number of ornaments, but the few ornaments worn are more valuable through the addition of precious stones and through a more refined workmanship. After the wedding the ornaments were kept in a box and only worn on festive occasions, such as weddings. If a family was not wealthy enough to buy all these ornaments for the bride, they were borrowed from a rich family for the day and returned after the wedding was over. But each family set its pride in the provision of as much jewelry as it could afford.

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29. Some fifty years ago the old women still wore black glass bangles and even copper bangles. The Vakkal women wear bangles of black glass on both arms even at the present time.

A Canarese proverb says: "There is no end to decorating a girl and the soil."<sup>30</sup>

It was the common practice to call the goldsmiths to the house to prepare the ornaments. Everything had to be ready for the wedding-day.

The first official invitation was made immediately after settling the date of the wedding between the bridegroom's family and that of the bride. First the father of the bridegroom and some other relatives went together to the bride's place and invited all to the wedding. Then the father of the bride with some relatives proceeded to the bridegroom's place and invited all to the wedding.

In the past the bridegroom and a near relative of the bride, accompanied by two elderly men of either party, had to go the rounds and invite the guests personally. The bridegroom and the representative of the bride extended first a more general invitation, then the bridegroom's companions gave the necessary information about the celebrations in the bridegroom's house, after which the companions of the bride's representative gave the details about the celebrations in the bride's house. This invitation had to be carried out in the proper manner. If any detail was omitted, it was taken as an insult and could lead to a refusal to accept the invitation.

If it happened that the members of the family to be invited were absent, a *pan* and betel nut were left at the main entrance of the house as an indication that the invitation party had come. This system was in vogue until recently, and in the more remote villages in the interior of South Canara it is still the custom. But now the bridegroom's and the bride's parties go in separate groups to invite the guests. More sophisticated people send printed invitation cards.

The invitations to weddings were not restricted to members of the same caste. A Bamon family would certainly invite Christian friends and neighbours of the Charodi, Sudhir and even of the Gaudi castes though members of the lower castes had to observe certain restrictions in regard to sitting and eating. People of lower castes felt honoured if they were invited

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30. *Chedwak ani mathiek surngar kelle  
titlen pavana.*

By "decorating the soil" is meant the tilling of a field. As true farmers the Canarese Christians were never satisfied with the labour spent on their fields.

to a Bamon wedding feast, but Bamons usually did not attend the weddings of the lower castes, even if expressly invited.

Non-Christians were usually not invited to Christian weddings. Only if a celebrating family had Hindu relatives, were these invited. Special arrangements were made for their accommodation in a separate wedding booth. In fact, in Bamon weddings there were often two wedding booths, one for the Christians and one for the Hindu guests.

A further step in the wedding preparations was the erection of the wedding booth (*matov* or *pandal*). The neighbours were specially invited to help in the erection of these temporary shelters. This invitation was called *matvachi vovlik* (invitation to put up the *matov*).

The wedding booth was essential. Generally two such booths were erected, one in front of the house, the other at the side of it. The front *matov* was erected in the courtyard which was properly levelled and given a smooth coating with cowdung. It was enclosed all round with parapets. The posts consisted of the stems of areca-nut trees (*madi*); the same kind of wood was used for the connecting roof-beams. The roof was covered with the leaves of the coconut tree. The wedding booth had only one entrance. The number of posts supporting the *matov* had to be of an odd number. In front arches were erected of plantain trees with the bunches of plantains hanging down.

The wedding booth had to be erected of *madi* trees because no bamboo was available. Areca nut trees were, however, plentiful in South Canara, so that a proverb says: "There is no wedding booth without cutting *madi* trees."<sup>31</sup>

The erection of the wedding booth was an occasion for much fun and merry-making for all who took part in it. Afterwards all the workers were invited for a meal.

The other booth erected at the side of the house was called *rashyo*. Here the hearths were newly formed for the cooking of the wedding dinner. The posts of this shed also had to be in odd numbers. This shed was built in an angle to the house and screened, the entrance was located on the left side.

A few days before the wedding day the women of the house and of the neighbourhood met in the *rashyo* to grind all the various spices required for the wedding dinner. The spices were first fried and then ground to powder. This powder was called

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31. *Madi katherlya shivayi matov noi.*

*karpō*, from the word *karap* (shell).

In former times a special dinner was served at noon of the last day before the wedding in remembrance of the deceased of the family. Prayers were recited for them and then dinner was served. In present times this dinner is omitted, but a requiem mass is offered for the souls in purgatory, particularly for the souls of the deceased members of the family.

The eve of the wedding day was an occasion for great rejoicing for the whole neighbourhood. Every neighbour sent a gift to the celebrating family. These gifts consisted mainly of various kinds of food required for the wedding dinner. These gifts were called *vojin* (sgl.: *vojen*). The gifts consisted of rice, vegetables like pumpkins and gourds, fruits, especially jackfruits and plantains, and plantain leaves. These latter were used as plates for the wedding dinner. Those who could not offer any food contributed money.

Wealthy and influential people brought their gifts in a most solemn manner. They were accompanied by a band and a group of male dancers brandishing swords or wooden staves. Such a group was called *talim*. A long line of bearers followed carrying the gifts. Though the pomp and ceremony of the rich Hindu weddings was generally absent in Christian celebrations, a certain degree of solemnity was displayed when the wedding gifts were handed over.

The bearers carrying the gifts were also Christians, but generally of low caste (Mahars). They were given a cash present and some rice which they took home to eat with the family. They were not supposed to eat in the house of a Christian of respectable caste.

The gifts of food were naturally very welcome and reduced the expenses of the wedding considerably. They were really loans without interest. The family accepting such gifts was obliged to return them in larger measure when a wedding was celebrated in the donor's house. Regular accounts were kept of the gifts which each donor brought.

The donor was received with some solemnity by the master of ceremonies (*yejmani*) in the celebrating house. The master of ceremonies and his wife (*yejman*) appear on the scene for the first time on this occasion. From now on all ceremonies are performed by their orders and under their guidance, and they expect full obedience and all respect.

By right, the office falls to the parents of the bridegroom,



or of the bride; but if one of the parents or both have died the closest relative of the parents assumes this function. No widower nor widow can act as master of ceremonies. A bachelor and a virgin, however, could.

Now when a donor arrived at the house of the wedding party he was received by the master of ceremonies and his wife, often the parents of the bridegroom, or of the bride. The donor greeted him saying: "God bless the master of the house!" (*Dev borem korun ghorcha yejmanyak!*) The *yejmani* acknowledged the greeting saying: "God bless!" (*Dev borem korun.*)<sup>32</sup> Then the donor was handed a vessel full of water to wash his feet. Then he was offered *pan-pod* on a plate. He took from the plate areca nut and betel leaf, prepared himself a *pan* and chewed it. Then only he handed over his gifts.

All the gifts of food were stored in the *rashyo*. It derived its name from this fact; *rashyo* means *ras*, a heap.

On the eve of the wedding day the bangle seller is also invited to the house. The bride is first presented with bangles. She is made to sit in the front wedding-booth assisted by her bridesmaids (*dhedio*) on either side. Generally the younger sisters of the bride act as bridesmaids. The bride receives four red bangles on each arm. It is said that in the past black bangles were put on this day, but in present times the colour of the bangles is red.

The elder female relatives of the bride also receive a pair of bangles, but only if their husbands are still alive. For this occasion the bride is dressed nicely and red flowers are stuck into her hair.

In the evening when the sun is already down a ceremony is performed which is called *ros*, anointing. With this the wedding ceremonies really begin. First both bride and bridegroom are given a bath in their respective homes. The bridegroom sits in the wedding booth on a low stool (*monoi*) or on a bench, surrounded by some friends. The *yejman* (wife of the officiating master of ceremonies, often his own mother) enters the wedding booth with two plates; on one is coconut oil and on the other coconut juice. The *yejman* pours the oil into the ears and on the head of the bridegroom and rubs it into his hair. Then the coconut juice from the other plate is poured on his body

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32. These words: *Dev borem korun* are also used as a blessing when they sit together and drink liquor.

and softly rubbed in. The two companions of the bridegroom, his bestmen, are similarly anointed.

The same ceremony is performed in the house of the bride.

It is characteristic that the different ceremonies of the wedding are accompanied by songs (*vovyo*) sung by women. Only women whose husbands are still living may sing. The procedure is that one of the women, usually the *yejman*, leads the song while the rest of the women say "*voi, voi*" (yes, yes) at the end of each verse and then repeat the last verse.

It is well remembered that in ancient times the wedding songs expressed very lofty sentiments and gave vent to the feelings of the people about the marriage partners and their families, invoking the blessing of God on them. Unfortunately many of these songs are now lost and completely forgotten. The few which are still remembered are recited to this day at weddings. The verses sung in our days have been composed a few centuries ago, and parts of them may be even older. Other songs are made up by the women on the spur of the moment, and are as easily forgotten as composed.

While the anointing is carried out, women whose husbands are still living stand around and sing. The song during the anointing is usually started by the *yejman*. She sings:

1. The plate of the juice is at the right or left side;  
Your mother applies first the juice to you.

But reference is made also to the other women assisting in the anointing:

2. Martha breaks a coconut and Mornal a nut,  
With St. Isabel four apply the juice to you.
3. The plate of juice is surrounded by rows of ants,  
Four women with husbands living rub the juice on you.

The anointing is started with a prayer. While the *yejman* pours oil into the ears and on the head, she makes the sign of the cross with the same oil on the forehead and sings:

1. As we pour oil into the ears we make the sign of the cross  
on the forehead;  
May Jesus Christ of heaven bless the bride (or bridegroom).
2. Make her (or him) sit on the bench while pouring oil  
into the ears and on the head.  
And the first honor be given to God, the Father in heaven.

3. The oil of the ears and of the head is dropping down over the whole body;  
Our bride (bridegroom) is a lovely doll.
4. The pure juice of the coconut is on the bangles of the *yejman*;  
There is a strong rumour in the *pattana* (town) that the *ros* ceremony is being performed here.
5. The *karadgi* grass of Jerusalem is sent by Jesus  
To supply light to the *ros* ceremony.
6. Where is the *yejmani* of the house gone?  
He is gone with the *cherel* (palanquin) to fetch  
Our mother, the Lady of the Rosary.
7. O my mother, Lady of the Rosary, do not go far;  
But take a seat and sit near while this ceremony is performed.
8. Our Lady of the Rosary comes by the straight road;  
Give her the seat according to the class of Naiks.<sup>33</sup>

The mother of the bridegroom (bride) too is eulogized:

1. In the cooking shed fuel is put in the oven;  
The bones of the mother of the bridegroom (bride) are emerging.
2. In the cooking oven fire is burning brightly;  
Do not forget the love of your mother.
3. There is a wall in front of the *yejmani's* house,  
The father is a strong support to the bride (bridegroom).

Similarly the brothers of the bride, or of the bridegroom, are mentioned:

1. Mutton is like sweets made of coconut juice,  
Remember the favours done by the father.
2. The four brothers, o bride (bridegroom), are ornaments (*til*) on the forehead,  
Let light be burning in their house.
3. The elder brother, o bride (bridegroom), is the light and the younger is the stand;

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33. The Naiks belong to the warrior caste and maintain a high rank.

The wick of that light is our bride (bridegroom).

4. The plantain tree has got a shoot;  
Because the daughter gets married the mother received  
a shock.

The distant relatives who cannot attend the wedding are also remembered:

1. The mat is rolled and a bundle is made,  
But the esteemed brother is in another country.
2. The coconut leaf is rolled and placed in the ear-hole,  
But the honoured sister is away in a distant country.
3. Dear bride, your father is detained in a distant country,  
The letter we wrote must have reached Belgaum.
4. Milk drawn in the morning becomes curd in the evening,  
Dear bride, all people are here, where is your father?

The dead are also remembered:

1. The flowers placed in the morning fade in the evening,  
The souls of the deceased are approaching the *ros* ceremony.
2. The well of heaven has a golden lid,  
Dear bride, the call came to your father very early.
3. Your brother is giving you the same love as to a flower  
Because there is no father, do not mourn, dear bride.
4. Pure coconut juice is flowing down the body,  
Dear bride, your father is looking down on you from  
heaven.
5. Dead ones, who are in heaven, for what are you longing?  
Your daughter is giving you the gift of a mass and office.<sup>34</sup>
6. The procession came in the morning and stays till the  
evening.  
Our dear bride was always obedient to a call.

The bride is also given due praise:

1. The *voval* flower has blossomed on the branch in the  
sky,

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34. It is customary in Christian families of Canara to offer a mass and have the office sung for the dead at the time of a wedding.

Our bride has an affable nature.

Some suggestions are made to the bride not to forget her family after marriage:

2. After doing all your work sit a while,  
Ask your father-in-law and your mother-in-law and come home.

After applying the oil and the coconut juice the bridegroom (or bride) is taken to the bathing place and there given a bath.<sup>35</sup> Even here the singing is continued:

In a copper pot water is boiling,  
The bride takes today her last bath as a maiden.

For the bridegroom they have another song:

Bring, kumbhar (potter), the fresh pot from the kiln,  
The bridegroom takes his last bath today as a bachelor.

The *ros* ceremony is an impressive rite. By this ceremony the bride, or the bridegroom, takes leave of the unmarried state and enters a new period of life (*saunskar*). The blessings of God are invoked on both and their dead ancestors remembered. The ceremony is in fact a ritual purification. This ceremony is clearly a survival from the Hindu past. For the Hindus perform a similar anointing previous to the wedding.

After the *ros* ceremony on the eve of the wedding day there is much merry-making. Practically nobody goes to bed this night. It is the last night for the bride as a girl; all guests want to celebrate with her.

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35. In former times no arrangement for bathing was made in the house; a shed was erected at a distance from the house. Near the shed a *tendli* creeper was planted whose leaves hid the bathers. The bathing water watered the *tendli* plant which grew luxuriously and produced fruits which were used for the curry. The bathers always smeared the body first with coconut oil and washed it off with hot water. The hearth for warming the bathing water was near the shed.

A description of this creeper is often made in the wedding songs:

After applying the pure juice,  
Let a bath be given at the bottom of the *tendli* creeper;  
Let word be sent to her ancestors.

## 2. The Nuptial Blessing in Church

The morning following the *ros* ceremony the marriage was blessed in the parish church. This was the essential part for a Christian marriage. In the early times when there were only three parishes in the whole of South Canara the wedding parties often had to travel a long distance to reach the church. It was most difficult for the high-caste Goan settlers whose marriages had to be blessed practically only in the Rosary Church at Bolar.

If the distance to the church required more than a days' journey, the ceremonies usually performed after the church marriage were continued at home and the nuptial blessing by the priest was obtained one or two days later. The famous Fr. Joseph Vaz who was in South Canara from 1680 to 1684 related a number of instances of couples living as husband and wife and even having children without marriage in church. He blessed the marriages and baptized the children.

In cases when the nuptial blessing in church was postponed, the marriage ceremony was performed by the *gurkar*, the relatives and neighbours. It took place before 10 p.m.

In the castes where motherright prevailed, the wedding took place in the house of the bride. When the bridegroom arrived accompanied by his relatives and friends, a younger sister of the bride welcomed him and poured water on his feet and washed them. Then the wedding rite was performed.

It is not known in what the ceremony consisted if it was performed without priest in the house. No wedding songs have survived describing this ceremony. Most probably the father of the bride poured water on the joined hands of the couple.<sup>36</sup> The water which the father of the bride poured on the hands of the bridal pair was caught in a plate and poured at the root of a plantain tree.

When the custom of going to the church for the priest's blessing of the nuptials came into force, the original marriage rite performed by the father of the bride or the *gurkar* was omitted, and even the wedding songs describing the rite are now forgotten.

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36. This would be, however, the essential marriage rite common among the Bants and not that of the Brahmins who walk seven steps around the sacred fire. The ceremony of pouring water on the joined hands of the bridal couple is the Dravidian form of marriage.

In present times practically all the Christian weddings are performed in church and the blessing by the priest takes place on the morning after the *ros* ceremony. The parties of the bridegroom and the bride proceed in separate groups to the church. The mother of the bridegroom, or of the bride, does not accompany the procession. The father of the bridegroom and the father of the bride, however, go along.

Bride and bridegroom wore the dress of the unmarried on their way to the church. They were dressed in their proper bridal attire only after the marriage in church.

Early in the morning a Hindu barber was called and the bridegroom got a haircut and a shave.<sup>37</sup> His fee was given to him on a winnowing-fan. It consisted of some rice, a coconut, a bath towel, and *pan-pod*.

Then the bridegroom was dressed for the church. His dress consisted in the early times of a short loincloth (*dhoti*) of handwoven cloth, a shawl to cover his shoulders and a red handkerchief on the head. This dress was gradually improved and up to this day the bridegroom in the interior of South Canara is dressed in a white loincloth with a red and gold hem (*todop*), a shirt with gold buttons and a coat (*kutav*). A shawl is placed over his shoulders. On the head he wears an *urmal* (towel). In his left hand he carries a red handkerchief and an umbrella.

The *kutav* is a long coat reaching down to the ankles. It is held together in front by two strings at two places, one set above the breast and one below it. Later, buttons often replaced the strings. The coat also became shorter and only reached to knees. The word *kutav* is a Portuguese word. In present days the *kutav* has given place to a modern coat in the cities; but in the villages it is still worn.

The *urmal* is a long white piece of cloth with a golden hem and is tied around the head like a turban. The Konkani Catholics of Mangalore had a peculiar manner of tying the *urmal* around the head by which they could easily be recognized as Catholics. At present this turban is rarely worn by Catholics.

The bride wore in early times a *kirgi* and a *baju*. The *kirgi* was a piece of cloth, usually not longer than four feet and about three feet broad. It was tied around the body from the waist down. The upper part of the body was covered by a jacket

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37. In present times the barber is called before the *ros* ceremony. He is paid a few rupees.

called *baju* with long sleeves.

The bride wore on her head a red cloth, three feet long and as many broad. Gold ornaments in those days were absent. The bride went to the church dressed as a virgin girl.

In present times the bride wears in place of the *kirgi* a *sari* of red, but the end of the *sari* is not thrown over the shoulder, it is wrapped around the waist. (Only married women cover the shoulder with the end of the *sari*.) She wears a few gold ornaments, some rings on the fingers, earrings and at least two of the golden combs (*dantoni*). The hair is well combed and parted in the middle of the forehead. This fashion is strictly observed. A girl parting her hair in any other manner was regarded a loose girl. On the way to church she wears some white and red flowers stuck in the hair. None of these ornaments are worn on ordinary days.

Before the wedding parties started on their way to the church, both bride and bridegroom received the blessing of all the elders. The bride, or the bridegroom, had to stand with folded hands in a prominent place in the hall of the house dressed for the church. The elders now approached one after the other and spoke a blessing.

During this time the women sung some wedding songs:

1. The bridegroom (bride) is going to the nuptials,  
He (she) asks the blessing of God the Father, Son and  
Holy Ghost.
2. The bride starts, goes in and out  
And asks blessings from father and mother.
3. The bride starts, goes in and out  
And asks blessings from all the people.
4. The nuptial tie is tied with a string,  
O Mary, virgin mother of heaven, bless the bride.
5. The bridegroom is going to the nuptials with a firm in-  
tention,  
O Lady of Conceicao, give thy blessing.
6. Who accompanies him? It is the Second Person of the  
Trinity.  
The bridegroom is going to his nuptials.
7. As the bridegroom goes in the sun  
His head becomes hot with the sun.



8. The parish priest of Rosario Church  
Gave him his umbrella.
9. To the house of the wedding, boiled rice is taken in  
baskets.  
The sacristan rings the bell for the nuptials.
10. After you get up in the morning wash your face in the  
spring;  
The Vicar of Rosario Church is blessing your nuptials.
11. In the church-garden a creeper is blossoming,  
Give your right hand at the nuptials.
12. We pay tax once a year,  
For your wedding there is a high-mass with three  
priests.<sup>38</sup>
13. While the bridegroom goes to the church  
He complains that he cannot walk so far.  
Arrangements are soon made for a palanquin.
14. May the bridegroom sitting in the palanquin look behind  
himself,  
His sister's husband is engaging a Bhoi for the palan-  
quin.<sup>39</sup>
15. The band is playing its tunes, letters are seen on the  
book;  
The Vicar teaches thirty words, think about them.

Before the wedding parties left the house, the feet of the bride, or of the bridegroom, were sprinkled with water ostensibly to give them the feeling of coolness for the walk to the church. In former times it was probably a blessing. The bridegroom on his way to church was accompanied by some bestmen (*dhede*). His father and some other close relatives also went along. The first bestman was by right either a brother or the sister's husband.

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38. Up to this day the Christians of South Canara want the most solemn form of High Mass for their weddings.

39. The professional palanquin carriers belong to the Bhoi caste, but in present times the palanquin has come out of use. Nowadays a car is hired or borrowed for the bride's and bridegroom's parties, and often a bus for the other wedding guests, accompanying the bride or bridegroom to church.

The bride was similarly accompanied by her bridesmaids, her father and other relatives.

Usually a band went along. It consisted of some drummers and a man playing an old type of clarinet, but most conspicuous was the comb player. His instrument was a long curved horn. The band played now and then on the way to church.

A special servant was engaged to hold a damask umbrella over the head of the bridegroom (or bride). It was a large red umbrella, generally used in Hindu temples and held over the deities when they were taken out in procession on the road. These umbrellas were generally hired from the temples for the weddings, together with the man who had to carry them. He was a temple servant (*sapalya* or *ganig*). If such a temple umbrella was not available the parish priest was asked to lend an ordinary black umbrella which was promptly returned after the function. In former times only the parish priests were the proud possessors of umbrellas.

It was the privilege of the parish priest to bless the nuptials. This was usually done during a High Mass assisted by deacon and sub-deacon. However, in early times when priests were few, it could happen that the parish priest was absent when the wedding party arrived. The story goes that once at Bantwal the parish priest was suddenly called away on an urgent sick call when the wedding parties arrived. They waited many hours, and when the priest still did not arrive they got tired and went home without a church wedding. It is said that the bride took it so much to heart that she went mad.

### 3. Rites Performed after the Wedding in Church.

After the blessing of the marriage in church both parties proceed to the house of the bride and spend the day there. Also the wedding dinner is taken there.

The arrangements for the dinner are already in full swing. The cooking, commenced early in the morning, is done in the *rashyo* shed. First the rice is taken from the grain bin (*pet*). This is done with a certain display of solemnity. All the women helping with the cooking are standing around the large bamboo basket on raised ground around which the *rashyo* shed had been erected. Each woman (*dayad*) is given a vessel and the *yejman* measures out the rice and gives it to the woman. The woman

takes it to her allotted place, cleans it and begins cooking it. It is of course important that a sufficient quantity of rice is cooked so that all the guests get some to eat.

All other provisions, especially the vegetables brought by relatives and neighbours, are placed near the hearths to be prepared and cooked for the wedding dinner. Many women help with the cooking.

Even during the cooking the women sing their *vovyo*s. First of all they invoke the grace of God for the dinner that it may be a success:

1. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.  
On this day of grace the *yejman* is preparing the dinner.
2. May the *yejman* at the *pet* make the sign of the cross.  
May the rice be sufficient for all  
And may yet the *pet* remain as full as before.
3. The *yejman* has emptied the *pet*,  
May Our Lady honour it by her visit.
4. The *pet* with raw rice is opened,  
Our Lady is coming to bless it.
5. Jesus and Mary come by the main door,  
Relying on them, the *yejman* has opened the *pet*.
6. In Jerusalem there is *karagdi* grass,  
Jesus has sent wax to give light to the place.
7. Blessed Virgin, on thy feet are sandals,  
There are six and three hundred vessels around the place.

After the distribution of the rice the cooking begins. Each helping woman takes her allotted place in the cooking shed (*rashyo*) and carries out the task assigned to her. The *yejman* and her *dayads* (maids) are supposed to do the main work while the others help. During the cooking more songs are sung:

1. In our garden we have tied an ox,  
Keep a frying pan (*kail*) now for frying the spices.
2. On the arms of the *yejman* are golden bangles,  
O *yejman*, keep fuel in the oven.
3. For noon meals, the curry is of tender jackfruit,  
O *yejman*, call your *dayads* to make fire together.
4. On the fire the *rashyo melghor* is fried,

In the air is the perfume of *jeera* and of other spices.

5. Let the pack-bullocks from the *upghats* come to the house,  
And may God send down bags of spices.
6. O *yejmani*, our *pandit* father,  
In your house all the lentils (*dal*) are ground.
7. What is the intention in this cooking shed?  
O God, bless these spices (*sambhar*).
8. On the hearths of the *rashyo* is water kept in pots,  
And Mary begs pardon from her Son.
9. On the crown of Our Lady is a golden string,  
Our *yejman* is preparing food with her maids.
10. In our garden lilies are in bloom,  
O *yejman*, distribute the pots to all the maids.

The boiled rice is spread on mats and carefully guarded that no cat or dog may come and spoil it. Not even a child is allowed to take anything from the *rashyo*.

In the meantime the wedding party returns from the church after the ceremony is over. As soon as the party reaches the *matov*, the bride is led into the house. The bridegroom is left in the *matov* with his bestmen. The bride does not join the bridegroom in the wedding booth.

At this time a peculiar ceremony takes place in the bridegroom's house. All the bridal clothes including the *sado* (the principal *sari* worn at the wedding) and all the jewelry worn by the bride at the wedding are brought to the *matov* and exhibited. The women whose husbands are living stand around the wedding gifts and sing their *vovyos*:

1. The *sado* is brought and kept on the bench.  
May God the Father come from heaven and bless it.
2. With whose permission was the *sado* brought here?  
That permission was obtained from Jesus.
3. The *sado* is brought and placed on a low stool.  
May the heavenly Virgin come and bless it.
4. Around the crown of the Virgin is a golden string.  
The *yejman* is arranging the *sado* with all its splendour.
5. Brother bridegroom, large is your *wado*.

Let us prepare the *sado*.

6. The archangels have arranged the folds.  
In the midst of the folds the *yejman* has hidden the *pirduk*.
7. The Virgin steps in front and behind her are *vovlyo*  
Who distribute coils of *karmbalo*.<sup>40</sup>
8. In front of our house is the vine of *thoushin*,  
Nine hundred *varahas* were paid for this *sado*.
9. From one *supari* nut are made pieces,  
And our *yejman* is paying *varahas* in the Gujarati bazar.<sup>41</sup>
10. He had no acquaintance with the Bhatkalkar (merchant),  
He really swooned when he heard the price of the *sado*.
11. In our cow-shed is a calf of the red cow.  
O *yejman*, with the permission of all tie up the whole  
bundle.

This bundle of clothes and gold ornaments was tied up in a silk towel, and referring to this they sing:

1. On either side are chairs, in the centre sat the king.  
The *yejman* wants permission to tie up the *sado*.
2. The daughter of the king has passed through the *matov*,  
The *yejman* is given permission to tie up the *sado*.
3. What is the figure in this *matov*?  
It is a silk towel for this *sado*.
4. In the bazar of Codial (Mangalore) dried ginger (*sunt*)  
is sold.  
Now tie up the *sado*.

Along with this bundle goes a bunch of flowers. They mostly used pink flowers, called *abolim* (amaranth) in weddings. These flowers were woven into strings of plantain fibres, each string being about nine feet long. These strings were tied around the forehead of the bride and woven into her hair and allowed to hang down at the back to her waist. The whole back of the

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40. *Karmbalo* are sweet smelling roots which were kept in the folds of costly *saris* to keep away moths destroying them.

41. In the early times the Gujarati and Bhatkal merchants had the best cloth-shops in Mangalore and were selling costly *saris*. This verse refers to them.

bride was thus covered with flowers.

It was the general practice in South Canara that no woman whose husband was living entered the marriage booth without bringing at least one such string of flowers. If amaranth flowers were not available, jasmin (*mogrin*) could also be used, but at least one string had to be of amaranth flowers.

There is no religious significance in the prominence given to the *abolim* flowers. The only reason why they were so profusely used is that they did not fade quickly. The other flowers, like jasmin, fade by the evening and during the night they are gone. But the amaranth flowers remain fresh for two or three days. Moreover, they are the only kind of flowers available throughout the year.

The custom to adorn the bride profusely with flowers is illustrated by the following proverb: "The food of the woman at her confinement is on the *yedo*<sup>42</sup>; for the bride the flowers are on the *sado*."

Consequently flowers were always taken along with the clothes and the jewelry when the wedding party proceeded to the house of the bride. The precious bundle was left in charge of a woman, usually a younger unmarried sister of the bridegroom or a cousin, if he had no sister. If the younger sister was too small to carry the bundle an older girl carried it for her and handed it over to the younger sister at the entrance of the bride's house. The bundle was carried on the head.

The *sado*-carrying girl is accompanied by the whole party and a band. The mother of the bridegroom who did not accompany the party to the church is now the most important person in this procession. She goes now for the first time to the bride's house during the wedding.

As soon as the procession reaches the bride's house, the bridegroom and his bestmen leave the bride's house and with a band go to meet the procession. During this procession the following wedding songs are sung:

1. From outside comes the procession;  
We could not know the time when they would come.
2. We would have sent on the way the dancing archangels.  
The archangels are near; in the hall there is music and  
the tune of the violin.

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42. *Yedo* is the long strip of cloth that is tied around the abdomen of the woman in labour.

3. In the house there is light, the light of the virgin and of the bachelor;  
All the nine choirs of the angels will come to bless them.
4. The procession has approached the house and the earth is laden with its weight;  
Let the first greeting (*namaskar*) be to God the Father.
5. The betel tree is raised and on it is painted St. Anne, The Mother of the Rosary is coming in all her glory to bless the couple.
6. The procession has approached the house and the children have gone to watch it.  
The angels have thrown lotus flowers on the couple.
7. The procession has approached the house and the young boys have gone to see the sight.  
And the angels have thrown *kale* on the couple.
8. The procession has approached the house and the people on the road have gone to see it;  
And the people have thrown *shivuntin* on the couple.
9. The procession has reached the house and the *yejman* is very glad;  
We are sending ahead the plate of *champa* flowers.
10. The procession has arrived with the blessing of God the Father,  
And touches the door, the descendants of Jacob.
11. Let the first shot be fired, and the next gun be filled with powder!  
And let the procession in, singing *Laudate*!

After that the procession is admitted into the house of the bride, while the band plays its liveliest tune, crackers are fired off and the people sing at the entrance into the house the psalm *Laudate Dominum*.

The bundle is deposited in a prominent place in the *matov*. The bride is then led into the hall of the house and, surrounded by singing women, she is stripped of her *kirgi* and *baju*, the dress of an unmarried girl. Then she is dressed in the *sado* and all the jewelry purchased for this occasion by the bridegroom's father with the money which the dowry has brought in.

The mother of the bridegroom has the first right to dress

the bride. If she is dead or a widow, the *yejman* does it. Now for the first time the end of the *sado* is laid over the bride's shoulder. This has to be done always by the mother-in-law. To wear the *sari* with its end thrown over the shoulder, known as *worl*, is the exclusive right of a married woman. A virgin girl has no right to wear the *sari* in this fashion.

During this dressing of the bride wedding songs are sung by the women:

1. I am spreading out the *sado*, look all of you,  
The whole *matov* has the perfume of roses.
2. O bride, take off your dress of girlhood,  
The small end of this *sari*  
Will fit well the bride, our virgin.

Then the *pirduk* is tied around her neck. This is the emblem of the married state. Prayers to God are recited that this *pirduk* may be kept on the neck of the young woman, implying thereby that the husband may stay alive for many years to come.<sup>43</sup> According to tradition, the *pirduk* can be worn only as long as the husband is alive; on his death the widow has to take it off. It is tied by the mother-in-law. At any rate, it must be tied by the nearest female relative of the bridegroom, a woman whose husband is alive. In a recorded instance at Mulki it so happened that there was no closely related Christian woman present whose husband was living. But a Hindu woman was present who was a close relative. She was asked to tie the *pirduk*, and she gladly did.

During this rite the following songs might be sung:

1. I tie this *pirduk*, addressing God the Father.  
In His name accept, o Bride, this emblem of the married state.
2. Black *pirduk* necklace on a string of *ananas* !  
To the Son of prosperity, o Bride, pray for a long life.
3. Black *pirduk*, be it of the smallest coin, or of a mustard seed in value,  
But it is blessed by Our Lady of Conceicao on the altar.
4. When the strings of the *pirduk* are worn,

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43. The Hindus express this wish in Sanskrit with the words: *sanbhogya vati Bhava*.



Let the married life also be woven, o Lord, in this world !

5. The string of *pirduk* is heavy when held in the hand,  
Married life with the husband living is grand in this  
world.
6. In the workshop of the goldsmith lights are burning dur-  
ing the day,  
The sun and the moon are playing on your *pirduk*.

When the custom became general that the *pirduk* should contain the picture of the Blessed Virgin, the songs were changed accordingly:

1. In the goldsmith's workshop a *kurjat* is made liquid,  
Your father-in-law, o Bride, has made a golden effigy  
(*minin*).
2. In the goldsmith's workshop gold is weighed,  
And the effigy is made with the correct weight of gold.
3. We pay assessment (*kist*) over a year,  
Let the *shisth* (order or custom) for this *minin* be of  
Goa.
4. The Kammar carves the tusk of the elephant.  
On the *sado* is the comb of gold.

The flowers that are brought also come in for praise:

1. On the *sado* are brought bunches of flowers, sixteen or  
seventeen.  
They are insufficient for all our *gotras* (relationships).
2. On the *zai* flowers is put *kasthem*,  
Now let down the string of that *kasthem*.
3. In the inner room are ants;  
We have brought flowers of *zai* and *zui*.
4. A thin veil is put on the water,  
And now let us garland her with *abolim* flowers !

The bride is adorned with flowers in a special manner. Strings of jasmin (*mogrin*) flowers are wound around her head till they cover the hair completely. The ends of the strings hang down at the back to the waist. Finally a string of *abolim* flowers is tied over the forehead from ear to ear. But care is taken that the golden combs and the golden pin (*kanto*) can

well be seen.

When the bride is fully dressed and adorned with flowers, she is brought out into the *matov* and made to sit with the bridegroom in a prominent place. This is called *sovo* (from the Sanskrit word *sez*, a place to sit). Another word is *baithak* (seat).

The women crowd around in front of the bridal pair and sing *vovyos*. The sentiments expressed in these songs are pious and elevating ones. The first song is in praise of God:

1. Glory, glory to God and glory, glory to His Son,  
The first song I sing to the Blessed Sacrament.
2. The first is the Our Father, the second the Hail Mary,  
The Virgin Mary of heaven is coming to bless.
3. After the nuptials you dip your hand into the vessel of  
holy water,  
God the Father of the seven heavens is blessing you.
4. Bridegroom and bride are His children, due to the sacra-  
ments.  
And so they thank God, the Father in heaven.
5. The priest is saying mass, his vestment is flowing,  
The infant Jesus is playing with the gospel book.
6. The priest is saying mass,  
And God sent a small angel from heaven.
7. Mass on the altar and sermon from the pulpit,  
Our bridegroom is a member of the confraternities of  
Rosario and Milagres.<sup>44</sup>
8. Mass is going on on the altar, and in that mass a bless-  
ing is given,  
And that is the intention of the bride.

Then the praises of the bridal pair are sung:

1. The bridegroom went for a stroll with seven umbrellas.  
He had a diamond to play with.
2. After the wedding, he knelt down in the sacristy,  
God sent down the pot of holy water.

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44. This verse can only have been composed after the erection of the Milagres Church, possibly in the 19th century.

3. Let the day dawn, and at dawn it is red,  
Our bridegroom is the mirror of the moon.
4. The bride and the bridegroom are playing *gurpolin*,  
They are tied together with double chains.
5. The bridegroom is tall with long legs,  
He is the *zamb* fruit in the *almirah* (cupboard).
6. The way is dark and there is fear of snakes,  
Our bride is the queen of Europe.
7. On the Kammar's (goldsmith) workshop is the pair of  
*karap* (jewels),  
Our bridegroom is the king of Europe.
8. In the sky is a ripe mango, and above it a squirrel flies,  
The bride says she is the queen of your kingdom.
9. A table and a cupboard are made, and on the table is  
a weight.  
The bridegroom says he is the king of your kingdom.
10. In the upper chamber is a lamp on long chains,  
O bridegroom, your bride is of royal blood.
11. The jackfruit is ripe on the tree, at its bottom is a cow,  
On the *sovo* has blossomed a *zai* flower, which is the  
bride.
12. On the road to Goa the *canery* fruits are harvested,  
O bride, you are the jewel that is on the ring.
13. On top of the rose-tree emerges a bird,  
Our bridegroom is the pillar carrying a light.
14. A shell is picked up hiding between boulders and rocks,  
Our bride is the little plant of pomegranate.

Many similar verses are sung on this occasion. Bride and bridegroom are compared to all sorts of wonderful things that a woman's mind can conceive. Here the poetic imagination of the Christian women of Canara is allowed full play. This is certainly the most pleasing part of the whole wedding ceremonial. The bridal pair sit in state and are eulogized by the women crowding around them.

During this time the wedding guests come and present their gifts. The bride is presented with a *sari* which is called *dharma sado*. It is the present of her parents. This *sari* ranks second

only to the *sado* and should be very expensive.

The parents of the bride also present *saris* and other clothes to the elder married sisters of the bride. These are seated for the occasion according to age and position, and the presents are made to them in a solemn manner. If any of the sisters is a widow she is seated in the hall of the house when she receives the *sari*. After the parents of the bride have handed over their presents, the other relatives and friends who wish to make presents do it now.

When the presentation of the wedding gifts is over dinner is served. The party that brought the *sado* is seated in seats of honour in the first row and served first. Long rows of mats are spread in the *matov* and the guests sit on the mats in rows back to back. The lower part of a betel leaf serves as a plate. This leaf is about a foot broad and two feet long. It serves its purpose well because this leaf has no holes. Plantain leaves also are used as plates. In fact, in modern times the wedding dinner is often served on plantain leaves. Even for ordinary meals food is often served on plantain leaves.

Dinner was served according to certain rules. First a little water was spilled on each leaf to clean it. Next a little salt was served, then pickle. It was generally mango pickle, and on each plate was put one piece. Then followed several different dishes of vegetables. Finally rice was served. Wealthy people provided the guests with a dish called *sanna-mas*. It was rice cooked in steam and meat, followed by rice and curry. Less wealthy people served only rice and curry and when this was eaten they served a porridge called *vorn* in Konkani and *payasa* in Tulu. The dinner was completed with a sweet called *soji*. It consisted of a mixture of wheat flour and raw sugar (*jaggery*).

In early times the men were served first, after them the women and the children. But this order was changed at some date because abuses had crept in. The men began to drink liquor after their dinner and often caused scandal. Sometimes it also happened that the men ate so much that nothing remained for the women and children who had to go hungry.

At wedding dinners ordinarily no liquor is served, nor is anybody allowed to bring his drink along and sit down with it for dinner. The only drink permitted is a concoction of pepper, *jire* and *conpir*. It was called *casai* and favours the digestion.

In the early days food was completely vegetarian. No meat

was served. But later, when the Christians had become more westernized, meat began to be eaten by all and wealthy people were expected to provide a dish of meat at the wedding dinner.

It was the rule to start the wedding dinner with the recitation of the prayer "Hail, Holy Queen!". The same prayer was recited at the conclusion of the wedding dinner. Only after this prayer was recited did the diners get up, wash their hands and depart.

The order of sitting at dinner was arranged according to caste. If members of other castes attended the dinner they were made to sit in a separate row, at the right angle to the rows of the wedding guests who were caste fellows of the bridal parties. Even Hindus were allowed to take part in the wedding dinner, but they too had to sit in separate rows.

When dinner is over, the diners are given a basin. A boy pours water on their hands, they wash and then may get up and leave.

The leaf on which the food was served and all the food left over was carried out by some servers and given to Mahar women waiting outside the wedding booth. They collected the leavings from the plates and took the food home. Though Christians, they were not allowed to enter the *matov* or to eat with the high-caste Christians.

The food that the bride had left on her plate was carried into the house by a server and later given to the Mahar house-servant or another specially favoured Mahar family. Mahar women considered it a privilege to eat the leavings of the bride.

After the dinner was over a short ceremony was performed in the bride's house. The bridegroom was asked to stand in the wedding booth alone. The bride's mother presented him with a ring and by this act declared herself as his mother-in-law. From now on she had to be addressed by the bridegroom in the honorific plural, and not in the singular. She was addressed by him as *Mai*, mother. Other women, closely related, like the sisters and cousins of the mother-in-law, were addressed by the bridegroom as *fagor mais*. And any even distantly related woman could become his *fagor mai*, if she donated on this occasion a ring to the bridegroom.

Soon after the presentation of the rings the bridegroom takes the bride home to his own house. A regular procession is formed. The band leads the way. Bride and bridegroom walk hand in hand, their fingers intertwined. Her father and

other near relatives accompany the bride to her husband's house; only her mother stays behind.

When the procession starts the women sing the following song:

1. Go, bridegroom, to the sound of the horn, and  
When you return, come with the bride.
2. O *yejman* of the house, allow to leave  
Your son and daughter; they are going in a grand style.
3. O *yejman*, step before the house and see  
Your son-in-law and daughter leave with your own eyes.  
Bridegroom and bride, they are like two children.
4. They crave blessings from God, the Father in heaven.  
O bridegroom, the bride is your left-side rib,  
For God's sake, love her.
5. But high up is a jackfruit and below are its nuts.  
Don't listen to the talk of your wife.

The procession comes to a stop at the entrance to the marriage booth in front of the bridegroom's house. The women of the family step in front of the door and welcome the bridal pair. The women who are in the marriage booth begin a song of welcome.

After the song is over, the bridal procession is admitted into the marriage booth while the band plays a gay tune and crackers are shot off. It is a solemn occasion. On entering the marriage booth the psalm *Laudate Dominum* is sung.

Bride and bridegroom are seated on chairs placed in a prominent place and all the guests of both wedding parties gathered crowd around them. This is the first time that the newly married pair shows itself in public to all the people in the bridegroom's village. Again wedding songs are intoned.

Now the next and final ceremony takes place. It is the solemn transferment of the bride to the bridegroom's family. The father of the bride with his closest relatives steps forward, takes his daughter by the hand and presents her formally to the bridegroom's father and his relatives. The bridegroom himself is not present at this moment. The parting words uttered by the bride's father on this occasion are traditional ones. He says: "Up to this time we have loved this girl. Today we hand her over to you in the hope that you will love her in the same

measure.”

Usually at this moment the bride breaks into tears, for now she realizes that she has to part from all her dear ones in all earnest. The women start a parting song which brings tears into the eyes of all:

1. Don't weep, dear child,  
Dear child, don't allow your eyes to swell.
2. Within eight days, be sure,  
Dear child, we shall fetch you home again.

Several more stanzas of this type are sung.

The bridegroom's mother takes the bride by the hand and leads her into the house, accompanied by the other women. While the bride steps over the threshold of the door she must take care to do it with the right foot. In this auspicious manner she enters a new phase of her life.

The marriage is not consummated this night. There is no time and opportunity for that. The whole house is full of guests. Bride and bridegroom sleep apart, each in the company of his or her friends and companions.

On the following day the newly wedded pair returns in the afternoon to the bride's house. This return is called *porthapon*, from *porthen apone*, 'calling again.' The bridegroom is this time accompanied by twelve of his friends. His father too comes along with four close relatives. The bride is accompanied by four of her relatives who kept her company during the night in the bridegroom's house.

After their arrival at the bride's house, late in the evening, a grand dinner party is given by the bride's people. The guests are treated in the best manner possible. To this dinner also those are invited who had served during the wedding dinner or had been useful in any capacity during the festivities.

After dinner the guests are entertained practically during the whole night. The young men in particular are sitting around a large pot of toddy each with a *gumat*<sup>45</sup> drum, and they sing. The party consists usually of eight to ten young people sitting in a circle. One singer leads and the rest sing the chorus, but each one has a drum to accompany the song.

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45. The *gumat* has the form of an earthen pot but is open at both sides. One end is covered with the skin of some wild animal. It is tightly fastened to the pot's neck. The drum is beaten with the fingers.

On this occasion some exquisite old songs are sung which have come down from the forefathers through many generations. One of these songs, for instance, deals with the Seven Sacraments:

1. Jesus Christ gave us His word,  
Of that word we are very fond.  
The Son of God taught us seven sacraments.
2. The first sacrament, father, at the beginning, is Baptism.  
The fall of Adam and Eve  
Is made good by Jesus, father.
3. The second sacrament, father, is Confirmation.  
By it Jesus has broken  
The strength of Satan.
4. The third sacrament, father,  
Is the joy of the angels and the food for the soul.  
It is Holy Communion.
5. The fourth sacrament, father,  
It is sorrow for sin and a ladder to heaven  
Let down by Jesus.
6. The fifth sacrament, father,  
It is sacred oil, no doubt,  
It fills heaven, for each one of us.
7. The sixth sacrament, father,  
Is no doubt Holy Orders,  
A good path for us to go to heaven.
8. The seventh sacrament, father,  
Is the union of Adam and Eve.  
This sin came to us, to every one of us.
9. Both Adam and Eve went to the forest,  
There they dressed in leaves  
Of the tree *sandana*.
10. Both Adam and Eve  
Went to a corner;  
The fruit stuck in Adam's throat.
11. "Adam, Adam!" called God.  
Adam concealed himself.  
Behind the *sandana* tree.



12. Both Adam and Eve went to a place;  
There they fell into disgrace  
Of heaven and earth.

Another song was called: "What is that? Tell me!" It runs as follows:

Fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.  
Fourteen thousand children.  
Thirteen miracles of St. Anthony.  
Twelve Apostles.  
Eleven thousand virgins.  
Ten commandments.  
Nine choirs of the angels.  
Eight blessings of the holy virgins.  
Seven sacraments.  
Six vessels of liquor.  
Five stones of David.  
Four Evangelists.  
Three patriarchs.  
Two flags of Moses.  
One true God (first time).  
One Holy Church (second time).  
One Catholic Faith (third time).

This song was sung in various combinations and could be prolonged and enlarged at will. Its recital often took the greater part of the night. It was probably imported from Goa. It is most likely the oldest song that has come down from the forefathers.

Only after many hours of singing the local people go to sleep and the guests get ready to leave. At the final leave-taking they play some pranks, pulling out some leaves from the roof of the marriage booth and even uprooting some pillars. The marriage booth will be demolished anyhow.

The bridal pair returns the next day to the bridegroom's house. There is an almost continuous visiting and re-visiting between the two homes. The following day the two again proceed to the bride's house. This time they stay for four days. For this reason the bridegroom is called the *choundisacho novro*, the "four-day bridegroom." During these four days the pair is feasted by the relatives. On their arrival at the bride's house the two are offered a meal of fowl's meat. The bridegroom is given toddy and some liquor too, though only a little. During

the four days the bridegroom is given an oil bath daily. His own companions and the bride's sisters assist in giving the bath. They at least have to touch his body once. The bridegroom is treated so well to make him stay, for it is believed that if he left a day earlier his mother-in-law's eyes would suffer and she would get blind.

It was usually during these days that the marriage was consummated. In early times the couple was led to the bedroom by the relatives, they were covered with a cloth, asked to drink from the same cup or to share the same fruit or dish.

After the four days' stay in the bride's house the young couple again returns to the bridegroom's house. Two male and two female relatives of the bride accompany them. The male companions return soon after their arrival at the bridegroom's house. But the two women remain there for eight days, and on the completion of the eighth day the newly wed pair returns with them to the bride's home.

These women staying for eight days with the bride at the bridegroom's house have a special mission to fulfil. They are sent along to accustom the bride to her new home; to give her proper instructions and to find out how she was treated by the new family. They have to advise the bride also if she finds some difficulties in her intimate life with her young husband.

In modern times all these customs are not observed so faithfully as in the past. The bride and bridegroom have received a much better education and are no more so subservient and obedient to their elders. Marriage is usually somewhat later and the two are more mature when they get married.

After a day's stay at the house of the bride the two return to the bridegroom's house, but visit the bride's house again a week later. Again on the 30th day a visit is paid to the bride's house.

The newly married are invited by the bride's family for all feast-days for the period of one year. The chief feasts when they are supposed to come for a visit are the parish feast, the feast of St. John the Baptist, Minin Jesus (Infant Jesus), and Nativity of Our Lady.

Outside these visits the bridegroom was as a rule not expected to visit his in-laws uninvited, except in cases of necessity. If such a visit had to be paid, he was not to come alone, but always in the company of his father or of another relative. There were some good reasons for this rule. An instance is

quoted as an illustration. Once a young man went to pay a visit to his mother-in-law unannounced. The mother-in-law got pale when she saw her son-in-law, for when he arrived meal-time was just over and as the inmates of the house had eaten up everything not a morsel of food was left in the house to be served to the guest. He sat around in the house for some time and returned home covered with shame because he had inconvenienced his in-laws.

In the early days a woman was forbidden to call her husband by his name. It was curious what replies women had to give sometimes when asked the name of their husbands. Many of course simply did not give any answer. Others replied that such and such a saint had an altar in this or that church. Even this reply was not directly addressed to the inquirer, but was spoken as an aside. In modern times the Christian women of South Canara feel no such inhibitions anymore.

When the bridegroom pays these periodical visits to his in-laws, his mother does not accompany him. But about a year after the wedding the mother of the bridegroom is formally invited for a dinner. If the mother is no more alive, the closest relative taking her place in the house of the bridegroom, usually the paternal uncle's wife, is invited. Similarly, the bride's mother is invited into the bridegroom's house within a year after the wedding. This dinner is called *yenicho saman*.

As it happens all over the world, also in South Canara daughters-in-law were not always treated very kindly by the family of their husbands. Some proverbs refer to this:

"The work that was given to the daughter was winnowing,  
And that to the daughter-in-law pounding (grain)."<sup>46</sup>

This shows that evidently the heavier work in the house was usually allotted to the daughter-in-law. Another proverb says:

"What is to be eaten is shown to the daughter-in-law,  
But it is actually given to the daughter."<sup>47</sup>

There are many such proverbs current about the harsh treatment which a daughter-in-law received in the house of her young husband. But of course, there were also kind mothers-in-law. But if the mother-in-law treated the young woman un-

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46. *Sunek kandunk galla kai,*  
*Ani dhuvek asdunk galla kai.*

47. *Sunek dakovche—dhuvek khavonche.*

kindly, even her husband could not do much about it. In a joint family a son, even a married son, has no voice in the family. All orders are given by the parents, and the son and his wife can do nothing but obey. In modern times conditions have changed considerably in the towns where independent employment is possible for the sons, but in the country-side life has remained the same up to the present day.

A word may be added here about widow marriage. The high-caste origin of the Christians in South Canara asserted itself in this case very clearly. Since high-caste Hindu widows cannot remarry after the death of their husbands, the Christians too considered the remarriage of a widow as something unnatural. It was a thing that was not respectable and therefore simply not done. It was considered most praiseworthy for a widow to remain single after the death of her husband and to devote herself wholly to the support of her children. No doubt, a widow had to wear a black *sari* all her life, was not allowed to wear ornaments and had to remain indoors practically for the rest of her life. But such a life found the approval of her community and was in accordance with sacred traditions.

Canon Law did allow remarriage for widows and therefore there was no direct prohibition for widows to remarry in the society of the Christians of South Canara, but few women had the courage to go against the strict conventions of their community. A widow who remarried was looked down upon, pitied and shunned as unlucky. But she was not ill-treated or made an outcast. No stigma was attached to her husband.

Thus we see that though the Christian Faith had taken deep root in the community of the Christians in South Canara, many Hindu customs and beliefs have survived among them and reveal their existence especially during the celebration of a marriage. Of course, in modern times the Christians were perhaps more than the Hindus exposed to western influences and have abandoned many of the old customs and ideas, and replaced them by western ideas and customs though still of the Christian tradition.