

## **CHAPTER - I**

# **ORIGIN OF NAYAR SOCIETY**

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Kerala, ideally called as "God's own country" is a land of beauty, customs and traditions. This beautiful land has got many places of tourist importance. Foreigners as well as tourists from other Indian states flock the state of Kerala during festivals and vacations. The famous Thrissur Pooram and the Annual boat races like [Nehru Trophy Boat Race](#) attract a lot of tourist to this small state.

Most of the tourists who visit Kerala will like to have a stay in the Kerala house boats and an enchanting voyage through the serene backwaters. So the [Backwater Tourism](#) is prominent in areas like Alappuzha, Kumarakom, Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikkode<sup>1</sup>.

Kerala festivals like [Onam](#) and Vishu have a great attraction. The traditions and customs followed during these festivals attract a lot of foreign tourists. They can enjoy and become part of these celebrations by residing in the [Home Stay Resorts](#) where the visitors and the home owners stay together and the guests are served with the home food and homely comforts.

The artforms of Kerala like [Kathakali](#), Koothu, Koodiyattam, Mohiniyattom and Ottan Thullal are also liked by the visitors. Many

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1. Logan William, **The Malabar Manual**, Vol. I, Madras , 1906, p.187.

foreigners stay in Kerala to learn the artforms like Kathakali and Ottan Thullal.

## **The Nayar Heritage**

K. M. Panikkar justly remarks: "The Nayars [Nayars] were not a caste, they were a race." Few historians will reject this contention because many customs and traditions distinguished the Nayars from the other Keralites. They had their own marital customs (*Sambandham*), their own form of inheritance (*Marumakkathayam*), their own art of warfare, their own war goddess (Bhadrakali), their own cult of ancestor worship, and their own art form, the Kathakali. (dance drama). In swordsmanship and suicidal squads (Chavers), they are similar to the Samurai of Japan and as the warrior class they used to look down upon manual work and entrust their lands to tenants to till and plant. Though Nayars were once technically classified by the Brahmins under the name of the pure Sudras of Malayala, they were always an honored caste.<sup>2</sup> Some think Nayar is the honorific plural of nayan which is derived from the Sanskrit *nayaka* (leader). Others derive Nayar from the *naga* (snakes) which they worship.<sup>3</sup> The Brahmin-inspired Keralolpathi regards them as the

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2. Velu Pillai, T.K., **Travancore State Manual**, Vol. I, 1940, p. 258.

3. Sobhanan, B., **A Decade of Crisis in Travancore**, Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. VI, March-June, Part I and II, 1979, p. 23.

descendants of the Sudras who accompanied the Brahmin immigrants from outside Kerala.

Obviously, like all Keralite tribes, the Nayers came from outside. There is a great deal of truth in the theory that they came from the Nepal Valley, adjacent to Tibet. Some consider them to be early descendants of the Newars of Nepal. The *Kathakali*, is a Nayar art-form is closely related to Tibetan dances.<sup>4</sup> Nayar polyandry is very similar to Tibetan marriage customs and in the mode of inheritance the Newars are like the Nayers. Like the Newars, the Nayers are distinguished by their lighter color, Mongolian features, and smooth hair. The most remarkable thing about the Nayers is their style of pagoda-like temple architecture and house construction which are almost identical with the Newar style of temples and houses found all along the Kulu and Nepal Valleys. Serpent worship is another common custom between the Newars and Nayers.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the settlers of Kerala came from the northwestern parts of India and the Nepal Valley. Groups of Newars who were partially Aryanized and later Dravidianized joined the Munda exodus and finally settled down in Kerala after a long period of sojourn in the eastern plains of Tamil Nadu. It is the Newar-Nayar builders who had

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4. Faw Cett, F., **Nayers of Malabar**, New Delhi, 1985, p. 285.

5. Srinivasadas, M.N., **Social Change in modern India**, Madras, 1966, p. 28.

given Kerala both the pagoda-type architectural style of the Hindu temples and the angular roof and dormer of Kerala houses.<sup>6</sup>

One fact appears to be certain that the Nayars were in Kerala before the Brahmins arrived in the seventh century A.D.<sup>7</sup> The Chera kings were Nayars, and the Nayars were also Dravidians and not Kshatriya Aryans and the Brahmins, in fact, considered them as Sudras.<sup>8</sup> However, the younger sons of Brahmin families could form morganatic relationships (*Sambandham*) with Nayar women, the children remaining Nayars and thus introduced a new element in the race. This helped the junior members of the Brahmin family to be relieved of their life-long bachelorhood without the responsibility of supporting their wives and children from their family property. It does not mean that the Nayars had loose marriage morals; it only means that this type of relationship was tolerated as an exception for the advantages of the Brahmins and Nayars; the rule of real marriage was endogamous monogamy between Nayars especially between the daughter of a maternal uncle and his nephew.<sup>9</sup>

The original inhabitants of Kerala were probably shepherds, agriculturalists and fishermen. The early inhabitants are Erulans, Katans, Kurumpans and Malapandarams. The origin of the **Nayar caste** is uncertain. Some anthropologists are of the view that the Nayars are not

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6. Walter Hamilton, **Description of Hindustan**, Vol.II., London, 1820, p.79.

7. Malabaar Marriage Commissions Report, 1891.

8. Sreekumar, T.T, **Urban Process in Kerala**, Trivandrum, 1912, p.78.

9. Puthenkalam, J., **Marriage and the family in Kerala**, New Delhi, 1956, p.160.

indigenous to Kerala. One theory is that Nayars are actually the descendants of the Newars of Nepal.

There exists another disputed view that the Nayars and Rajputs (A dominant Hindu military caste in northern India) were related.<sup>10</sup> There is no real proof behind this claim, which may or may not be true.

Yet another theory is that the Nayars are indigenous to Kerala, but gained the sharper features and fairer complexion due to intermarriages with the Namboothiris (The namboothiris are the brahmins of Kerala....) In short we can clear the fact - the Nayars are a large matrilineal warrior caste of Kerala State in India. Traditional Nayar families are headed by a woman, with whom lives her siblings, sisters' children and other matrilineal relatives. In Nayar tradition, a man moves back to his mother's residence shortly after his wedding ceremony and his children belong to this mother's lineage.

Now the exceptions are coming as social order is changed and families are becoming nuclear and the purpose of living with their children and wives make Nayar youths to take steps to find a way to live out side the family arena and try to lead a life by themselves than the common big combined tharavadus.

The rise and decline of the Nayars of South Travancore represent an exciting epoch in the caste history of South India. The

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10. Velu Pillai, T.K, **op.cit.**, p. 257.

Nayars, as a community developed a composite culture which had been enriched through the ages. Their history is the story of synthesis, assimilation and fusion of traditions of Dravidianism and practices of Brahminical social systems. In South Travancore, the Nayars moulded a cultural synthesis and helped the other savarni communities to follow their family organization and social customs and manners. Being predominant community, the Nayars, enjoyed a pre-eminent political status, social identity and economic prosperity.<sup>11</sup> But the social transformation that emerged out of the political development in the princely state of Travancore threatened their, political position. The agrarian reforms, western contacts and depressed class movements established novel phases; in the social history of Travancore that eventually affected -the social position of the Nayars. In a changing process, the family organization centred around collectivism which challenged their economic progress. The subsequent communal solidarity move among them strikes a conspicuous theme in the history of the Nayars of South Travancore.

### **The State of Travancore**

Travancore is an oriental microcosm, a representative land and a country of striking contrasts, the most Southern of Indian States.

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11. **Ibid**, p. 403.

Travancore is unique with its physical features, social structure and cultural complex. It is a most caste ridden and custom ridden part of the Nation.<sup>12</sup>

Travancore is one of the most picturesque portions of India. Nagam Aiya called it a panorama of expressible grandeur.<sup>13</sup> Lord Curson, the Viceroy of India said, "Since I have been in India, I have had a great desire to visit the state of Travancore. I have for many years beared so much of its exuberant natural beauties, its old world, simplicity and its arcadian charm. Here nature has spread upon the land her richest bounties and the land is capable of culture"<sup>14</sup> Sir M.E Grant Duff described it. as "one of the fairest and most interesting realms that Asia has to snow". Lord Connemara another Governor of Madras, compared it to Italy and called it a fairy land.<sup>15</sup>

Travancore along with Cochin states and Malabar districts of the Madras presidency constituted the ancient Kingdom of Kerala. Travancore is scheduled by its geographical position and distinguished from other part of India by many peculiarities. The Geographical insulation provided by the natural, boundaries on all sides, Arabian sea on the west,

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12. Mateer, S., **The Land of charity**, London, John Snow, 1871, p. 13.

13. Nagam Aiya, V., **Report on the Census of Travancore**, Trivandrum, 1881, p.19.

14. Quoted in V.P. Menon, **Story of the Integration of the Indian States**, Trivandrum, p. 274.

15. Velu Pillai, T.K, **The Travancore State Manual**, Vol. I, Trivandrum, The Govt. Press, 1940, p. 3.

Indian Ocean on the south and the Western Ghats on the east and north had indeed exercised a considerable restraining influence on the outlook and way of life of the people of Kerala.<sup>16</sup>

The state was bounded on the north by the princely state of Cochin and the Coimbatore District of the Madras presidency, on the east by the Western Ghats and the districts of Madurai, Ramnad and Tinnevely of the Madras province.<sup>17</sup> Travancore attracted the attention that it deserves by reason of its wonderful and varied scenery and its cultural and political individuality....<sup>18</sup> Travancore forms an irregular triangle, with its apex at Cape Comorin between 8° 4' and 10° 22' north latitude and between 76°13' and 77°38' east longitude.<sup>19</sup>

## Theories of Origin

Indian (Kerala): Hindu (Nayar) name denoting membership of the Nayar community, which is from Malayalam *Nayar* 'leader', 'lord', 'soldier' (from Sanskrit *naya(ka)* 'leader' + the honorific plural ending *-r*). The Nayars were regarded as protectors of the land.  
Northern Irish: reduced form of *McNayar*.

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16. Kunjan Pillai, N., (Supt.), **Census of India**, Travancore, Part I, Vol. XXVIII, 1931, p.14.

17. Nagam Aiya, V., **The Travancore State Manual**, Vol. I, Trivandrum, 1906, p.3.

18. Sir. Ramaswamy Aiyar, C.P, **Broadcast at Bombay**, 1936, Quoted in Velu Pillai, T.K, **op.cit.**, p. 2.

19. English Records, Trivandrum Chief Secretary File No. 714. Watts M.E. memorandum on Travancore administration, 25 January 1929, p. 2.

Ancient South Indian history, historians, and foreign travellers referred to the Nayars as a dignified martial nobility. The earliest reference to Nayars comes from the Greek ambassador Megasthenes. In his accounts of ancient India, he refers to the "Nayars of Malabar" and the "Kingdom of Chera". However the earlier origin of the Nayar caste is uncertain and several alternate and sometimes conflicting theories exist.

Some sociologists are of the view that the Nayars are not indigenous to Kerala, as many customs and traditions distinguish them from other Keralites. According to one theory, Nayars are descendants of the Newars of Nepal, who joined the Munda exodus and later migrated to Kerala. The most prominent arguments given in support of this theory are the presence of distinct pagoda like architectural style of Nayar Tharavaadus and Temples and the practice of Marumakkathaayam (matrilineal) system of inheritance similar to both Nayar and Newars.<sup>20</sup>

There is also a hypothesis on the basis of mythology that the Nayars are Nagas and were *Kshatriyas* belonging to the Serpent dynasty (Nagavanshar who removed their sacred thread and migrated south to escape the wrath of a vengeful Parashurama. The affinity of the Nayar community towards serpent worship, their martial past, and the absence of the sacred thread lends support to this theory. In addition, the Travancore

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20. Fuller, C.J., **The Nayars Today**, Cambridge, 1976, p. 126.

State Manual states that there were indeed serpent-worshipping Nagas in Kerala who fought with the Namboothiris till they reached a consensus.

According to Chattampi Swamikal, who interpreted old Tamil texts, the Nayars were Naka (Naga or Snake) Lords who ruled as feudal lords in the Chera kingdom. Therefore this theory proposes Nayars to be descendants of the rulers and martial nobility of pre-brahmin Kerala who, after the arrival of the Namboothiris (and establishment of the Varnas/Caste System), were categorized as *sat Sudras*. One finds mention of the Nayars during the reign of the King Rama Varma Kulashekhara (1020-1102) of the second Chera dynasty, when the Chera Kingdom was attacked by the Cholas. The Nayars fought by forming suicide squads (Chavers) against the invading force. It is not clear whether the Cheras themselves were Nayars, or if the Chera employed the Nayars as a warrior class.<sup>21</sup>

Irrespective of the different theories that seek to explain the origin of Nayars, it is clear that till the early 20th century, Nayars exerted their influence in medieval Kerala society as feudal lords and owned large estates. Nayars dominated the civil, administrative and military elite of the

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21. *The Kerala Mahatmayam, an ancient Sanskrit Purana, calls them the progeny of Namboodiri men with Deva, Rakshasa and Gandharva women. The 17th century Brahmin-inspired Keralolpathi and Grama Padhati describes the Nayars of Kerala and the Bunts of Southern Tulu nadu as descendants of the Sudras who accompanied the Brahmins to Kerala and Tulu nadu respectively from Ahichatra/Ahikshetra in southern Panchala. In addition, Manual of Madras Administration Vol II (printed in 1885) notes that the Nadavas/Nayars of Malabar and the Bunts of Southern Tulu nadu are same.*

pre-British era in Kerala. The decline of Nayar dominance came about in multiple stages. During colonial times, the British perceived that Nayars were an inherent threat to their hegemony in the region and therefore outlawed their right to bear weapons and by banning the Nayar martial art of Kalaripayattu. Weapons were integral to the Nayar psyche and power, and combined with repressive legislation led to a loss of social standing for Nayars. Later during post-colonial years, the Land reforms of 1950's led to massive loss of land-ownership by Nayar feudal Lords and some Nayar gentry were relegated to poverty overnight. Thus the decline of Nayar dominance came to a full circle by the mid of 20th century.

## **Etymology**

The word *Nayar* lends itself to two etymological interpretations. The first interpretation is that the word *Nayar* could have been derived from the Sanskrit word *Nayaka* which means leader. The Sanskrit word *Nayaka* which appears in various forms in southern India (*Nayakan/Naicker* in Tamil Nadu, *Nayak* in Karnataka and Maharashtra, and *Nayudu* in Andhra Pradesh) could have been corrupted as *Nayars* in Malayalam. The second interpretation is that the word *Nayar* is a corrupted form of the word *Nagar-* serpent men because *Nayars* practiced snake worship. The word *Nayar* also occurs in other parts of the world - although no direct linkages with the Nayars in Kerala have been established.

## Typical Nayar End Names

Nayar surnames were traditionally carried through matrilineality, although most modern Nayars follow patrilineal nomenclature. The surname **Nayar** is commonly used by all sub-castes belonging to Nayar caste. However, there are surnames which are reminders of the honours conferred upon individuals the powers that befall from time to time in acknowledgement of exceptional act of valour, erudition and scholarship, or excellence in chosen field of endeavour. The families of these individuals inherited the titles. It is also possible that in the majority of cases, such honours were bestowed by the loyalty in return for services rendered and in recognition of a display of loyalty. In general, the system of conferring honours points to the ruling Monarch's dependence on the Nayars who provided them with military and administrative support. While most of these are ranks and positions in a feudal set up (similar to the Mughals' Mansabdari system), such royal patronage was crucial to the development and promotion of strikingly singular forms of dance and drama such as Kathakali of which, the Nayars were exponents.

- Achan
- Adiyodi
- Asan

- Elayidom
- Eradi
- Ilayidam
- Kaimal
- Karnavar
- Kartha
- Kunnath
- Kitavu
- Kurup
- Mannadiar
- Menokki
- Menon
- Nambiar
- Nayanar
- Nayar
- Nedungadi
- PadaNayar
- Panicker
- Pandala
- Pillai
- Saamoothiri

- Thampi
- Thankkal
- Unnithan
- Valiathan
- Vallilath
- Vazhunnor
- Vellodi

### **Subcastes**

The Nayars come under the head of Malayala Sudras as per the Jati Nirnayam which mentions eighteen such castes included within the term. V.Nagam Aiya, Dewan Peishcar, Travancore, in his **Travancore State Manual** states that although all the Malayala Sudras were classed under the general head of **Nayar**, in reality there were only five "genuine" Nayar castes. These included:

- **Kiryathil Nayars**<sup>22</sup> : They are the highest class of Nayars found usually in Malabar and Cochin and rarely in Travancore. The 17th century *Keralolpathi* states them to be descendants of warrior Naga tribes who came to Kerala from the north along the western coast. It may be noted that the earlier *Keralamahatmayam*, a Hindu Purana, did not make mention of

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22. Faw Cett, **op.cit.**, p. 194.

any subcastes among the **Nayars** but only states them to be the military caste of Kerala.

- **Illathu Nayars** : They were brought in by Parasurama, as per the *Keralolpathi*(it's a 17th century book written by Namputhiris to protect the caste interest of them), to serve the Brahmins as tenants, servants, warriors, cultivators etc. Purificatory rites by the Marars and priestly service from the *Elayatus* distinguished the *Illathu* Nayars.
- **Swaroopathil Nayars** or **Cherna Nayars**<sup>23</sup> : These Nayars were the warriors of Kshatriya Royal Households known as *Swaroopams*. In Malabar they are classed as *Akathu Cherna* Nayars and *Purathu Cherna* Nayars.
- **Padamangalam Nayars** : They were the Nayars appointed by Parasurama to serve in Temples. They migrated from Tamil Nadu of the Pandyan kingdom as it was then known.
- **Tamil Padam Nayars** : This class of Nayars, as the name indicates, were migrants from Tamil Nadu who were embraced into the Nayar community.

## **Beginning of the Nayar Dominance**

In the social ladder, the Nayars or Sudras were below the Brahmins. They formed the nobility, the magistracy and officials of the

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23. **Ibid.**, pp. 214-218.

Government, the military and police wealthy farmers, the merchants and the skilled artisans. However, their main duty was to carry on war. As the ruling class the Nayers enjoyed great privileges.<sup>24</sup> By the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries society in Travancore had become feudal in nature. The Nayers formed the feudal aristocracy owning most of the land.<sup>25</sup> With the rise of the Nayar mobility there arose the class of madampis or Nayar Jenmies who leased out their lands on tenure to inferior caste men whom they in return reduced to bring their tenants<sup>26</sup> Henmam right originally meant right during life time. Only by 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D., it began to mean inheritance right through birth. But it was an undoubted fact that a considerable portion of upper class Nayers were Jenmies. About the origin of the Jenmi system Elamkulam writes "Before the trusteeship of temples became hereditary, there was an interim period when that position was held by person during his Jenmam or life time."<sup>27</sup> It was from that Jenmam that the term Jenmi was derived. This may be clarified further. In the beginning some prominent persons were appointed as trustees. This appointment was for a fixed tenure. Either by selection of otherwise, they were reappointed again and again. So that it was possible that a person could be trustee for

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24. Yesudas, R. N., London Missionary Society of Travancore, 1806 - 1908, Trivandrum, Kerala Historical Society, 1977, pp. 8-9.

25. Joy Gnanadasan, **A Forgotten History**, Madras, 1994, p. 22.

26. Rajayyan, K., **History of Tamil Nadu, 1565-1982**, Madurai, 1982, pp.568 - 571.

27. Saradhamoni. K., "**Agroscopic Slavery in Kerala in the 19th century**", Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. I, part IV, December 1974, p. 456.

life later it became the rule for a trustee to hold the post for life time. The right of few trustee over the property under their control were limited to their Jenmam right. Still later it became customary for a trustee's legal heir to be appointed his successor to the trusteeship also and this led to the trusteeship becoming hereditary. It was lightly probable that the Nambudiri Jenmies were very lenient to Nayar tenant through the matrimonial alliances between Nambudiries and Nayars. Their social existence as was extremely bound of with that of their tenants.

Marthanda Varma's annexation of minor principalities into Travancore resulted a situation in which a large number of tenants and subtenants under Nambudiri Jenmies became sirkar land holders.<sup>28</sup> This was an indirect help to Nayars. The Jenmi system in Travancore was changing owing to this direct. Government control on land. It created more and more sirkar jobs and the Nayars were the beneficiaries of this change. From top to bottom the revenue administration was under their control.<sup>29</sup>

In the latter half of the 19 century, the Jenmies used to collect various levies like arukhazhecha, utsarakopu, purannal, chumadu etc. From the tenants in addition to janapattom and verumpattom etc. The Jenmies had complete right to evict the tenants.

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28. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, P.N., **Studies in Kerala History**, Trivandrum, 1970, pp. 348-361.

29. Calendar of Travancore Government, 1951, pp. 6-10.

It may be correct to say that the predominance of Nayers in law holdings dwindled very much. The immediate effect of land reforms of Travancore was thus favourable to Nayers. But in long run these reforms became detrimental to Nayers as a large amount passed from Nayar taravads.<sup>30</sup> Because of the Jenmi system, the Nayers rose to aristocratic family, and they dominated upto the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nayers belongs to the Dravidian race with considerable admixture of Aryan blood.<sup>31</sup> The Keraolpati is more rational and says that the Nayers are the descendants of the Sudras who accompanied the original, Brahmin immigrants from outside Kerala.<sup>32</sup>

There are different theories about the origin and migration of Nayers. One view is that Parasurama, the legendary hero reclaimed the land of Kerala from the sea. After the creation of the region he brought Nambudiri Brahmin and gave them ownership of all the lands. Along with the Nambudiri Brahmins he brought another group of people called Sudras to act as the servants and body guards of Nambudiries. This Sudras latter came to be known as Nayers.<sup>33</sup>

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30. English Records, Travancore Government, Trivandrum Secretariat, Travancore, Cover File No. 4801, p. 4.

31. Administrative Report of Travancore, 1901-2, Appendix, p. 26.

32. Gopinatha Pillai, **Socio Economic changes in the Nayar Community in Travancore from 1900-1947**, Kerala, 1984, p. 1.

33. **Ibid.**, p. 32.

In the book Kerala Mahatmyam the Nayars are referred to as the offspring of the junior member of Nambudiri family where the eldest son alone was permitted to marry in his own caste with Deva grandarra and Rakshasa women brought by Parasurama.<sup>34</sup> Edgar Thurston observes that "the original Nayars were undoubtedly a military body holding land and serving as a militia". They are described as the "Lords to the Land" ; the best soldiers in the world and courageous, extremely skilled in the use of arms.<sup>35</sup> The Nayars were the "Protectors" of the country and as such crystallized readily into the existing caste of Nayars with numerous branches.<sup>36</sup> Mr. N. Subramania Aiyar writes in a note on the Nayars of Travancore "derived from Naga (Serpents) as the Aryans so termed the earlier settlers of Malabar account of the special adoration which they paid to snakes". The Travancore Nayars are popularly known as Malayali Sudras -term which contrasts them sharply with the Pandi or foreign Sudras.<sup>37</sup>

The Nayars were divided into several sub castes according to the occupation. Each sub division performed a separate function. In general the Nayars were agriculturalists and soldiers in the traditional

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34. **Ibid.**, p. 34.

35. Velu Pillai, T.K., **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 556.

36. William Logan, **Malabar Manual**, Vol. I, Madras, The Govt. Press, 1906, p.111.

37. Edgar Thurston, **Cases and Tribes of Southern India**, Vol. V, Delhi, 1975, p.22.

society. Yet all Nayars were not soldiers and there were Nayar groups who concentrated on land owning. There is evidence that only certain sections of the Nayar caste were allowed to bear arms. None the less the great majority of Nayar: probably spent some time under arms.<sup>38</sup>

Among the five genuine Nayar castes (i.e. Kiriyaathil, Illakkars of Illathu Nayars, Swarupam, Padamangalam and Tamil Padam) the occupations of the Padamangalam Nayar is temple service such as sweeping cleaning, carrying lamps during processing etc.<sup>39</sup>

Vathi or Vattu : This name is not found in the Jatinirnaya, probably because it had not been differentiated from Maran. They used a peculiar drum called nantuni. They follow the makkathayam system of inheritance (in the male line).

Itacheri : They are called as Pantaris in South Travancore and they are seems to be closely related to Idaiyan caste of Tamil country. Most of them vendors of milk, butter and curds.

Another group of people : Karuvelan commonly found in Kappiyara and Thiruvattar. They serve at Maharaja's palace and they are the custodians of kings treasuries and other valuables. It is believed that about 52 families are originally brought from Kulatha Nadu.<sup>40</sup>

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38. Fuller, C.J., **Changing Cultures Nayar's Today**, Cambridge, 1976, p. 6.  
 39. Nagam Aiya, V., **op.cit.**, Vol. II, p. 42.  
 40. Edgar Thurston, **op. cit.**, Vol. V, p. 29.

Arikuravan : A division who reduce the quantity of rice from paddy given to them to husk at the temple Kazhayakkuttam near Trivandrum.<sup>41</sup>

Pallichenan : They were appointed as the Palanquin bearers for Brahmins and Malabar chief cains. They are supposed to carry their shields, swords etc. before them.

Vandikaran : are those who supply fuel to temples and cleans the vessels there :

Kuttina : The only heiress of a Swarupam taravad is said to have been a maid servant in the Vadakketam Brahmins house. Talikettu ceremony also have been celebrated in her masters newly built cow shed.

Mattavar : Who are believed to have been good archers in former times. They are also known as Puliyaattu, Veliyaattu and Kallur Nayars.

Otatu also called kusa : Their occupation is to tile or thatch temples and Brahmin houses.<sup>42</sup>

Vattaykkatan : They are the lowest sub division in many respects and are better known as Chakla Nayars in Travancore. They were not allowed to take the title 'Pillai', and are obliged to stand out side the

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41. William Logan, **op. cit.**, p. 34.

42. George wood Cock, **Kerala - A Portrait of the Malabar Coast**, London, 1967, p.103.

sacrificial stones of a sanctuary 'Pulva' is a title of distinction among them. A section of them were engaged in oil pressing which is a hereditary occupation and occupies a lower position in the social scale than the other.<sup>43</sup>

Various titles were given to the Nayars by the kings of Travancore. The most common title in Travancore is 'Pillai', which was once a distinction granted as a mark of royal favour. Now the Vellelas of Tamil country and the Nayars of South Travancore are called as Pillai from very early times. The ceremony of investiture was known as Thirumukkam Pitikkuka and the honour conferred on the person was so highly esteemed that even a Brahmin Dewan Sanku Annavi had it bestowed on him and his family. It is enjoyed to this day by his descendants now living at Vempannur in the Eraniel Taluk.<sup>44</sup> If this title is used as a suffix it is denoted as Pillai or if as prefix it will be as kanaku. The title Pillai and Kanaku are never used together.<sup>45</sup>

A higher title Chembakaranam : Corresponds to the knight - hood of medieval times and was first instituted by Maharaja Marthanda Varma in Memory, it is said of his great Prime Minister Rama iyen

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43. Census of Travancore, 1891, p. III.

44. Nagam Aiya, V., **op. cit**, p. 36.

45. Sreedhara Menon, A., **Social and Cultural History of Kerala**, New Delhi, 1979, p. 83.

Dalavai.<sup>46</sup> The honour is now rarely conferred still there are several ancient houses in Travancore to which the honouric title is attached in perpetuity.

Thampi is a distinctive title given to the Nayars of Travancore by Sovereigns as a mark of rare merit and devotion. The Thampies alone among the Nayars are allowed to use Pallan Quins and permitted to appear before the king without head dress. The title karu is attached to the names of several families in North Travancore.<sup>47</sup> The Tekkumkur and Vadakumkur Rajas in Malabar as said to have first conferred the title Karta on certain influential Nayar families. In social matters authority of the karta was supreme. All the kartas belongs to the 'Illam' sub division of Nayar caste.<sup>48</sup>

The title 'Kurupu' denotes an ancient section of the Nayars charge with various functions like instructions in the use of arms while others were superintendents of maid. Servants in royal house-hold. Now Kurupu is assumed by other castes then Nayars.

The word Panickars is derived from "Pani" means work. The Panickars formely kept Kalaris, in North Travancore. But now they have taken up the teaching of letters. But the name at present does not indicate any particular section of Nayars.<sup>49</sup> The Kailmals :- were recognized

46. **Ibid.**

47. Nayam Aiya, V., **op. cit.**, p. 368.

48. Velupillai, T.K., **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 857.

49. Ramantha Aiyar, **Progressive Travancore**, Kottayam, 1924, p.85.

chieftains in former times. Some were in charge of royal treasury which according to custom could not be seen even by the kings except in their presence.<sup>50</sup> **Unnittan** and **Valiyatan** were the sons of those Kshatriyas who had no territorial sovereignty and were called **Valiyattan** and **Unnittans**. Eman is another title affixed to the names of certain influential families in central Travancore.<sup>51</sup> The title Menon has been conferred upon aristocratic several Nayar families by the Rajas of Cochin and corresponds to Pillai in Travancore. They are superior, and generally they are writers and accountants.<sup>52</sup>

Ettu Vittil Pillamar belonged to Nayar community who were originally the farmers and tenants of Porri Jennies.<sup>53</sup> In 1050 A. D. the right to govern Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum was handed over to yogakkar (councillors). The temple land was divided into eight districts<sup>54</sup> and over each district a Nayar was placed with lot of administrative power and these Nayars were called Ettu Vittil Pillamar. They belonged to eight houses situated in different districts viz. Kullathoor, Kalakuttam, Cempalanti, Kudaman, Pallichall, Vannanur Ramanatham and Martanda Nadha.<sup>55</sup>

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50. Krishna Iyer, L.A., **Social History of Kerala**, Vol.II., Madras, 1970, p. 91.

51. Nagam Aiya, V., **op.cit.**, Vol.II., p. 369.

52. William Logan, **op.cit.**, Vol.I, p. 134.

53. Nagam Aiya, V., **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 50.

54. Panikkar, K.M, **A History of Kerala**, Madras, 1960, p. 226.

55. Panikkar, K.M., **Malabar and the Dutch**, Bombay, 1931, p. 58.

Shangoonny Menon states, "the king having little authority over them and they rose in power and importance and gradually became lords in their villages.<sup>56</sup> It is inferred that the people were more loyal to the Pillamars than the kings.<sup>57</sup> The tyranny of the Pillamar was unbearable and so the people of Nanjilnad revolted against them in 1702 A. D.<sup>58</sup> They held a series of five meetings and passed resolutions which protested against their tyrannical activities and demanded redressal of grievances.<sup>59</sup>

The king Ravi Varma (1684 to 1718) took quick steps and determined to put an end to these obnoxious factions of the Pillamars.<sup>60</sup> The power and authority of the Pillamars assumed menacing proportions during the short period of Aditya Varma.<sup>61</sup> Again in 1726 King Ravi Varma made consultation and on the advice of Prince Martanda Varma, his nephew entered into a treaty with the Madurai Nayaks and agreed to pay a sum of rupees 3000 as tribute annually. The Nayaks in turn offered to supply a contingent of troops to help the Venad king in his fight against the Pillamars and other rebels.<sup>62</sup>

It was a period of terror for the Pillamars and their confederates. They took a unanimous decision to put an end to the life of

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56. Shungoonny Menon, P., **History of Travancore**, Madras, 1878, p. 97.

57. Nagam Aiya, V., **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 311.

58. **Ibid.**

59. Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. V, p. 210.

60. Sreedhara Menon, A., **A survey of Kerala History**, Kottayam, 1967, p. 243.

61. **Ibid.**, p. 18.

62. **Ibid.**, p. 24.

Martanda Varma and thereby anoint Thambi as his next successor.<sup>63</sup> Many battles were fought between Thampimar and Pillamars and Azhakappa Mudaliar.<sup>64</sup> While the fortune was smiling on the side of the Thampimar, the king bribed the commander.<sup>65</sup>

The fall of Ettu Vittil Pillamar was attributed to many reasons like their arrogant nature and treacherous activities. As they had no steady policies and programmes for the causes of their country they could not get the support of the people for a long time. Though they were powerful they failed to offer any resistance to the invaders. Their oppressive policy, with heavy taxation system turned the common people against them. Their support to Thampimar and their attitude against kings fetched Marthanda Varma's immortal enmity. Added to these, the betrayal of Mudaliar in the wars frustrated the Pillamars. When Marthanda Varma succeeded to the throne all their conspiracy were brought to light and they were forced to pay heavily for their sins. The Ettu Vittil Pillamars vanished with the rise of Marthanda Varma.<sup>66</sup>

The appearance of the well nourished Nayar is perhaps one of the finest in all over India. The climate and nature of their occupation

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63. Maheswaran Nayar, K., **Oru Tiruvitamkur Charitham**, (Malayalam), Trivandrum, 1975, p. 33.

64. Raman Pillai, C.V., **Martandavarma**, (Malayalam), Kottayam, 1981, p.49.

65. Natarajan, T., and Sarveswaran, P. (ed.), **Thampimar Kathai**, (Tamil), Madurai, 1971, p. 57.

66. Justin Wilson, A., **Rise and fall of Ettu Vittil Pillamars in Travancore**, Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. V, Trivandrum, p. 431.

added to the situation of their houses which nestle as it were under canopy trees promote their complexion and general appearance.<sup>67</sup> One of the conspicuous features of the Nayers of both the sects is the scrupulous attention of their personality, cleanliness in which they differ from their brethren of other castes.<sup>68</sup>

The dress of the Nayers is extremely scanty. The women cloth themselves in a single white of fine texture reaching from the waist to the knees, and occasionally while abroad they throw over shoulders and blossom, another similar cloth. But by the custom, the Nayar women go uncovered above the waist. The men wear a white cloth and another clothe is also occasionally thrown over the shoulders.<sup>69</sup>

The Nayers do not wear much jewellery. As rule ornamentals own by Nayar women are few and cannot be considered expensive as compared with those of their sisters in the neighbouring provinces. For the neck they have the Kantasaram Addiyal, Ponnunool, Nagapatham, Arimbumani, Jana-Kuzhal, Nalu-Panthi, Maniyam, Arasilai-Tali, Pacchakkal-Tali, Puli Nag-Tali, Kasu Malai, Kulalmalai, Rasi-Tali, Padakka-Tali etc.<sup>70</sup>

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67. Travancore Census Report for 1901, p. 11.

68. William Logan, **op. cit.**, Vol. I, p. 35.

69. **Ibid.**, p. 50.

70. Nagam Aiya, V., **op. cit.**, Vol. II, p. 51.

Nayars ranked high in the social hierarchy of Kerala. They came next to the Kshatriyas and broadly speaking the Nayars enjoyed second position next to the Nambudiries in the Malabar and they occupy the same position in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore.<sup>71</sup> In the pre British period, the Nayars had enjoyed many privileges and exercised powers. Although they probably never accounted for more than 20 or 25% of the population, as far as ritual status was concerned they were graded only as Sudras. The Nayars were a privileged community till middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The chief land holders in most villages were Nayars and Nambudiries. Nayars had slaves who belonged to the lower caste servile community. Nayars were responsible for maintaining the law and order in the society. In the administration of the land also, they had a prominent place. The matrilineal system of inheritance helps them to keep lands of the family intact. In Travancore Nayars enjoyed the privilege of being the most numerous upper class Hindu.

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71. Balakrishnan, V., Leela Devi, R., **Mannathu Padmanabhan and the Revival of Nairs in Kerala**, Delhi, 1982, p. 9.