CHAPTER - III

NADAR/SHANAR : A SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The Nadar/Shanar is a caste or cluster of related jatis, found throughout the South Indian State of Tamil Nadu. According to the estimates of some members of the community, Nadars numbered between four and eight million by 1990 - a figure almost certainly inflated by their own appraisal of their economic and political significance.

Territorial Distribution of Nadar/Shanar

The total population of Nadar/Shanar was estimated by the Second Backward Classes Commission headed by Ambashankar through a survey and it was 23,06,209, with main concentration in Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and Ramanathapuram districts.

The highest concentration of Nadar community is mainly in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, from Kanyakumari district at the tip of the Indian sub-continent and as far north as Madurai district. However many Nadars have traditionally lived outside this region, for example in Tanjavur district and a growing number resides in urban centres such as Chennai and Coimbatore. Within this region, the Nadars are divided into two main geographical divisions. Those traditionally resident in Madurai district and Virudhunagar are refer to themselves as "Northern Nadars" and those who live in Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts are the "Southern Nadars". These terms were generally recognised by Nadars from both divisions. The southern districts were the original home land of all the Nadars.
Even today the Nadars are concentrated predominantly south of the Tambaraparni River, which crosses Tirunelvelvi district roughly from Ambasamudram to just south of Tuticorin on the coast. Although the origin of the Nadars is obscure, the family deities of most Nadars throughout Tamilnadu are to be found for the most part in the "teris, the sandy palmyara topes of Tiruchendur and western Nanguneri Taluks. Some tradition among the Nadars cite Ceylon and the southern portion of Travancore, now Kanyakumari district, as the home land of the community. It appears more likely that they migrated at an early date from the Tiruchendur region to these more hospitable areas.

The southern districts of Tamil Nadu are bordered on the west by the western Ghats rising in height from three thousand to five thousand feet and dividing Tamil Nadu from Kerala. From the foot of the Ghats the country then slopes gently toward the sea and is punctuated by detached and scattered hills. To the South of Madurai and in Ramand and Northern Tirunelvelly, there is poor soil, precarious rainfall, and an absence of perennial rivers. Well water is often so high in alkaline content as to be opaque. The black soil of these areas yields cotton and groundnut, but the lack of irrigation has left vast tracts as virtual waste, capable of growing little beyond the natural growth of the brambles "Udai" scrub and the Palmyrapalm. Further to the South, the Tambraparni River cuts across the center of Tirunelvelly District from the Ghats to the sea at Punnakayal, between Tuticorin and Tiruchendur. Winding through the district, each side of the river is bordered with a ribbon of green, irrigated paddy fields, the
wealth of Tinnevelly, Tirunelveli in tamil meaning "Sacred Paddy Hedge".

To the south east, the rich soils of the Tambraparni give way to the teris, the vast sandy tract of the palmyrah forest (Hard Grave; 1969; 17).

The south eastern portion of Tinnevelly District including Tiruchendur and the great portions of Srivaikuntam and Naguneri taluks. The teris ranges of deep, loose, red sands, are peculiar to the region and are often destitute of vegetation. The teri originated according to local tradition by the showers of earth which in ancient times covered certain gritty cities. Beneath the teri, many Nadars claim, lay the ruins of the once great cities of a Nadar kingdom.

Mythological Origin of the Community

There are many legends and ballads which refer to the early history of the Nadars. Though there are variations in these stories, the core of the legends is the following.

The first members of the caste were the sons of seven maids Kannis. The celestial virgins who, while bathing in a stream, caught the eye of the god Narayana. Collecting their saries, Narayana sat down behind a bush to watch and wait for the virgins to emerge from the river. The virgins could not bear the cold and lastly emerge from the water and ran towards the fire. This fire was made by the priest (Munivar) who was conducting a yagynam. He was disturbed by the Kannis and gave them 'Sabam' (curse) by saying that they will all become pregnant and deliver kids. The seven
virgins delivered seven boy babies and left the kids on the earth and returned to their home of heaven. Nadar/Shanar also believe that they are borne out of the eye sight of the God Narayan. God Narayan asked his sister Bhadrakali to look after these seven kids. The Goddess Bhadrakali took pity upon them and brought them up as her own sons. As they were growing, the milk was insufficient and Goddess Bhadrakali created a new pond full of milk. But she asked them not to put their feet inside the pond. The children followed her words and enjoyed the milk. But unfortunately, one day a Brahmin family - a father, mother and his only child - was going by that side and as the child was feeling thirsty the Brahmin entered the pond to drink the water. But as soon as he entered, whole pond become dirty. So from then onwards the Nadar consider that Brahmins are their rivals. One day, the tale goes on, the River Vaigai near Madurai breached, and as the city was threatened with floods, the Pandyan King ordered all men to carry sand in baskets upon their heads to rebuild the bund. The seven sons refused to obey the king, although they were not rich. They said that "we are meant to carry crowns upon our heads, not baskets", the young men cried. The king was furious and ordered that one of the boys be buried in the sand up to his neck and that his head be kicked off by an elephant. The order was obeyed and the head, as it was cast into the flood water cried, "I will not touch the basket." On a rage, the king ordered that the second boy be treated likewise, and as the head floated away, it cried the same as the first. The king was greatly frightened by these strange things and freed the remaining five sons and from these the Nadar race came forth. To this day, the Nadar say, they will not touch the basket.
Historical Origin of the Community

The Nadars have at present only a limited knowledge of the origin and early history of their community. The origin of the community appears to be a riddle because the term Nadar or Shanar is available neither in records and inscriptions nor in literature before the fifteenth century. The repeated mention of the terms Nadar, Nadalvam, Sanror, Sanrar, Gramani Ilavar, and Shanar which are related phonetically or semantically to Nadar during different periods has further complicated the issue. The term Nadan during the medieval period was used to denote a ruler. When poet Kamban is called Kamba Nadan, it is obvious, that he was neither a ruler nor an administrative head but was conferred a title for his proficiency in writing an epic in Tamil. The seventeenth century ballad Vengalarajan Kaviyam refers to the hero Vengalarajan as the sons of one Veera Chola Nadan.

By the eighteenth century, some of the Nadars became land owners due to the transition which had taken place in the political set up in South India. The name like Chandra Marthanda Nadan supports the view that they enjoyed all privileges as rulers in their landed possessions.

The term Nadan had been used as a title and not as a name of any caste or community up to the fifteenth century. Only the Kallidaikkurichi inscription first refers to it when it talks about the punishments offered to three vellai Nadars in 1453 A.D. (Sarada Devi, 1985: 39-41).
Hardgrave (Jr) (1969) and Pate (1879) pointed out that Nadars were tax gatherers with civil rights under the Nayaks and also under the Tenkasi Panday during the period between the fifteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. This term *Nadan* was assigned as a title to a set of people belonging to various castes, who enjoyed civil as well as revenue rights in stipulated area.

**Shanars and Nadars**

The Nadars trace their origin from the word *Sanrors* of Tondaimandalam. The term *Sanror* is a synonym of Shanar, who claim that Shanan is derived from Sanror, meaning learned or noble.

Historically it is claimed that the Nadars were treated as sanror or *Sanrar* due to their noble qualities. The terminological similarities bring out the fact that the *Sanror* or *Sanrar* were the ancestors of the Shanars. To treat the term ‘Shanar’ as having its roots in ‘Sanru’ or ‘Shanar’ (a span of fibre) or *Saru* (juice) is untenable as there is no authentic record to prove that the term *Shanan* was derived from the term *Saru* (juice) or *Channar* (fibre).

It is stated that the Shanars or the Nadars have called themselves *Sanror* or *Sanrar* just to postulate an antique origin or to show an elevated position for their community, because it is believed that the communal strife of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries between the Nadars and Maravars would have compelled the Nadars to employ such tactics to assert
their superiority through the claim of a eulogistic background. It is now commonly accepted that the word Sanror means warrior by occupation and that there is possibility that the word Sanror became corrupted to Shanar.

The Shanar are grouped under Valangai or right hand division and Ilavars who were grouped under Idangai or left hand division formed two different sets of people who are engaged in the same profession of toddy-tapping. But no traces are available which would enable us to connect the Ilavar with the Shanar.

The Shanar believe that they went to Ceylon and learnt the art of coconut tapping would have brought the coconut to South Travancore and they would have named as Ilavars as they came from ‘Elaro’. Most of the customs of Ilavars resemble those of Shanar.

The people who live in the red sandy teri areas of Tinnevelly with a few exceptions call themselves Shanar. There are other communities also such as vellals, Maravas, Parayas and Pallars. But undoubtedly about half of the entire population of Tinnevelly district consists of the Shanars. A group of Shannars acted as servants for the wealthy landlords and Nadars and some of them serving as a palanquin carriers for the Nadars. Present day Nadars claim a royal status for them on the basis of arguing that Palanquins a royal prerogative. However, Turston (1909:366) states that palanquins were not used by Nadars until the second half of the nineteenth century. The shanars were regarded as unclean or ritually polluting by other jatis they and were ranked at the lowest and most highly ‘polluting’
level of the shudra or non-Brahmin jatis, but at the same time they were not as low as the Pallar or Paryar who constituted as Dalit population of the region.

Hardgrave (1969:34) describes the Shanars as occupying a "sort of limbo" in the caste hierarchy. Because of their lower status though the shanar and Nadars originated from the same region, they behaved as though there were two section of one community from seventeenth to nineteenth Century.

Gramani and Nadar

Gramani which in also treated as a branch of the Nadars in the Chennai region of Tamil Nadu. The term Gramini in associated with village administration. The term Gramani in a Sanskrit word and has no connection with the Nadar or shanars in the Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu. But people who reside in Tondiarpet area of Chennai city were migrants from Tondaimandalam and would have named that place as Tondiarpet. Since there are certain similarities in their cultural practices they were also clubed to gather with the Nadar community.

Religious Division

A majority of the Nadars/Shanars are Hindu in faith and roughly 10% of Nadars are Christian. Some are Catholics, particularly in the coastal village of Tirunelveli where Portuguese missionaries concentrated their efforts from the 1530 onwards. But the bulk of Nadar are protestants. The
first protestant baptism of Nadar men was performed in 1797 by missionaries of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which was connected to the church of England. The first permanent Shanar christian settlement, *Mudaliar*, was established two years later but substantial number of Shanars had converted to Christianity only after the complete cessation of Tirnelveli to the British in 1880. Hindu Nadars claim that such mass conversions happened because the converts sought favours from the British. Within the Christian Nadar Community there are two sects namely Catholic and Protestant. The Protestants are not members of Nadar local associations and their churches serve as "caste" associations of sorts for them (Templeman, 1961: 29).

During the Sivakasi riots at the end of Nineteenth century a Nadar reportedly embraced Islam in order to escape attack (Thurston 1909: 364; Hardgrave, 1969: 117). They might constitute a very small portion of the Nadar community today but it is not clear whether they retain a district Nadar identity.

The Hindu Nadars worship a number of deities. In their religious traditions, the mother Goddess occupies the prime of place. The worship of Goddesses like Muthumariamman of Aruppukottai and Palayampatti, Parasakthi Mariyamman and Veiyilukanda Amman of Virudhunagar, Kottai Mariyamman of Theni, Valavanda Amman of Aruppukkottai, Pethanatchiamman of Melmandhai and other deities such as Kamatchi Amman, Malaiamman, Semandiamman by the Nadars revels that during the early period they were worshippers of the Mother Goddess. *Esakki,*
another Goddess similar to Kali, in also worshipped by the Nadars. The Shanar believe that Goddess Bhadrakali was responsible for the creation of the palmyrah tree for the sake of helping the shanars to earn their livelihood by toddy-tapping.

The Nadars make vows and in fulfillment of vows they perform many rituals during festive period. Animal sacrifice is common. They offer clay models of human figures or parts of human body to the deities. An afflicted person is asked to lie flat inside the temple and on his chest lamps made of rice flour are placed. This tradition is called Pukkulu Irangudal. Walking on fire spread in a rectangular pit is a common custom prevailing in some areas. The unique tradition of carrying a bow and arrow on Vijayadasami day among Nadars is known as Vithanthuvila.

So far as Kali worshipping is concerned, though it is seen in different areas, this cult seems to have attained great popularity in Sivakasi than in other places. In that town during the Tamil month of Vaikasi (May-June) the Nadars celebrate the festival of Kali for ten days. On sixth day of the festival Aranthiruvike is celebrated on a grand scale. On that day the devotees carry on their bare palms earthen vessels containing fire to fulfill their vows. This is known as agni chatti eduttal.

Another important female deity worshipped by the Nadars is Mariamman. She in worshipped as a benevolent deity protecting her devotees from epidemics like small-pox which are common during the summer season.
Apart from the worship of local and pan-Indian deities, the Nadar worship their ancestors. In reality their religion is demonolatry, and the cult of devil and demons is particularly vigorous among this community. Demon worship and ancestor worship are carried on with animal sacrifices along with offerings of fruits, flowers and even the converted christian Nadars have not departed much from this traditional worship. The first day of the Tamil month adi is a significant day for the Nadars because they believe that if the dead enters the eternal place and in return for this service the spirits would shower blessings on the existing family members.

Every Kuttam (an exogamous clan) has its own ancestral temple in its ancestral village. Most of the temples are situated in the tert region of Mannar. Some of the temples are found in places like Sivakasi which are linked with the earlier temples in Tiruchendur. Hence as the people migrate, they take a handful of soil from the original temple and enshrine it in their new home. Sivakasi is the town of where many of the Kuttams have their ancestral worship. During a marriage the first invitation card is placed in front of the family deity. Only after worshipping the family deity, the traders used to write their new accounts for that year. On a stipulated day in the year, all come and join their exogamous clan to worship their deity. The existence of different clans has yielded a multiplication of clan deities like Pethanatchiammn, Malaiamman, Karukkuvalai, Karukkuvel Ayyanar and Perianad are a few notable clan deities among the Nadars. All these deities are mostly worshipped during the Tamil month of Masi (February - March) and this custom is called Mathasamy Kumbidal i.e the
worship of the mother of the clan. This tradition throws light on the fact that the Nadars were inclined in the matriarchal system. The worship of the Mother Goddess would have encouraged the Nadars to believe that their ancestors were the sons of Bhadrakali.

Ayyanar alone seems to be the local male God worshipped by the Nadars. But Ayyanar, who is also worshipped as a protective deity, has been referred to by different names such as Karukkuvel Ayyanar, Arunjunaikatha Ayyanar, Thuduvalay Ayyanar, Mumopnuainkatha Mudisudum Ayyanar, Ponvandi Ayyanar and Vembar Ayyanar. The worship of Ayyanar shows that the Nadars who treated their ancestors as warriors should have been tempted to have a heroic deity going by the name of Ayyanar. Only with the above assumption Ayyanar portrayed as a warrior on horse back makes lot of sense. In due course Ayyanar being a warrior would have given rise to an array of folk deities such as Kuruppan, Madan, Sudalaimadan and Veerabhadran, being a protective deity, he was placed at a height on horseback and given a closed appearance. The weapons of Ayyanar also remind us of the influence of the martial tradition. Ayyanar was placed there along with other ancestral deities. It should be remembered here that priority is given only to kali who is installed in that place.

In their worship they follow the traditional custom of having their own Pandarams as priests in temples for Kaliamman, Mariamman and Ayyanar. During the Mariamman festival of Virudhunagar, even children below eleven or twelve years are found carrying out their vows by a custom
all considered to be toddy-tappers/Palmyrah climbers, there was significant occupational diversity within the community. There is no recognised rule of hierarchy among those five groups.

Dennis Templemen (1996) categorised Nadar into two territorial groups; Northern Nadars and Southern Nadars. The Nadras became a geographically mobile group, moving about in order to take better advantage of business opportunities in various localities which lead to the break down of old territorial or occupational divisions. Despite the in location of post divisions, however, the distinction between the Northern and Southern Nadar is far from absolute.

During the most intense phase of Sanskritisation in the late nineteenth century the segregation between the Nadars/Shanars become obvious. The sub-division which is economical sound regarded the other as a threat to their hopes of higher status and tried to dissociate themselves with the lower economic group. Later the Northern Nadars became particularly associated with the self-respect movement, a development which led them away from high caste practices. They also developed more economic interest rather than social

**Occupational Division**

The traditional occupation of the community was toddy-tapping. Even today some of them continue to practice their traditional occupation. They began a campaign against toddy-tapping within the community and
called *Kayarukuttudal*. The custom of walking on fire and carrying pots containing fire are unique forms of worship during this festival. Bunches of margosa leaves are hung in front of the house to notify that some one is fulfilling his vows. The Nadar have hereditary families of priests in the caste itself known as *Aiyar Pandaram*.

Nadars wear very simple dress ie the men wearing dothi around their waist, towel on their shoulders and now-a-days they also wear shirts. Women wear sarees. The breast clothe controversy of mid nineteenth century in Travancore reveals that the above mentioned dress was worn by the Nadars of that area only after the struggle. During the nineteen century when the Kshatriya movement was in full swing the Nadar wore the dhoti in the Panchacancharm fashion and had turban on their head and wore long shirt with gold buttons. They consume flesh and fish, but the abstain from liquor and beef.

**Social Structure among the Nadar/Shanar**

Nadar/Shanar believe that there were originally five endogamous groups within their community. The principal segmentation was based on occupation, sect, territory and the like. Thurston(1909:376-7) identifies the five original sub-divisions as *Karukku-pattayar, Mel-nattar, Nattatti Kodikkal* and *Kalla*. Even now, these five endogamous units are found among Nadar/Shanar, who are concentrated in different parts of the Southern districts. The Kalla sub-division is also known as *Pulukku shanan*. These divisions appear to be territorial in origin. Though they were
all considered to be toddy-tappers/Palmyrah climbers, there was significant occupational diversity within the community. There is no recognised rule of hierarchy among those five groups.

Dennis Templemen (1996) categorised Nadar into two territorial groups; Northern Nadars and Southern Nadars. The Nadras became a geographically mobile group, moving about in order to take better advantage of business opportunities in various localities which lead to the break down of old territorial or occupational divisions. Despite the in location of post divisions, however, the distinction between the Northern and Southern Nadar is far from absolute.

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**Occupational Division**

The traditional occupation of the community was toddy-tapping. Even today some of them continue to practice their traditional occupation. They began a campaign against toddy-tapping within the community and
they believed that their social backwardness is mainly due to their association with toddy-tapping and hence asked the people to abandon the occupation.

The Nadars are differentiated by occupation as well as by economic level opening the way for the intra-caste 'Class Solidarity' on the basis of shared interests. In terms of occupation, Nadras may be classified into (in addition to toddy-tapping/palmyrah climbing):

1) Merchants and Business people
2) Professionals and semi-professionals
3) Agriculturalists
4) Agricultural labourers and
5) Non-agricultural labourers.

The most commonly chosen professions among educated Nadars are medicine, engineering and teaching.

With such differentiation, the Nadar community reveals a marked degree of cooperation. A prosperous man may help a less successful member in the same community. Nadars live up to their reputation of helping members of their community who need help. They seek it first within their own Jati.

The Nadar have strong element of class or occupational solidarity among themselves as well as they maintain ties with people of other castes and communities, and this leads them to become a majority in the chambers of commence of similar organization.
To achieve the high social and economic status, the Nadar adopted a unique method. Among them, the creation of Uravinmurai and the collection of mahamai were the most important. The Uravinmurai has constituted an efficient and comprehensive means of local self-government. They make and enforced rules. Each uravinmurai had a number of committees to manage all the social and economic affairs, they formed a minority among the majority communities like the maravan. Reddiars and Naickers who had driven out the Nadars from those place during the Nayak rule. So the Nadars had to become a tightly knit community in order to be ready to fight for their status in society. In every locality, the head of the families of the Nadar Community joined and formed Uravinmurai and through the institution they worked for the upliftment of the Nadar of that place with the aid of the mahamai funds they collected. The uravinmurai took steps to solve the quarrels that used to arise among them or with the people outside their own community. For minor offences fines were imposed but sexual molestation and adultery were considered serious offence. They punished the offender publicly with sandal strokes (whipping). The customs continued to exist even in the 1950s. If any common problem occurred, all of them would sit together and find solution. If there was a dispute between two Uravinmurai or between Nadar of two villages, the elders of both Uravinmurai would meet and solve the problem or take it to the body of the six town Nadars at Sattan Kudi.
Almost all the married men are members of the local association (Uravinmurai) mainly because, they felt, the community/Nadars has undergone several attacks from other castes and they could prevent them by forming such support. The Nadars, therefore, needed an organisation for themselves for defence. Local association fulfilled these needs. Each member is called Murai karar (one who held the turn) and power lies with a committee.

Collection of Mahamai

Mahamai is a compulsory collection of grain from the Nadar cultivators and cash from the Nadar traders in specified proportion for utilisation in the development projects of the community. The funds allowed the Nadars to engage in charitable activities like construction of schools, mills, gardens, choultries Kalyanamandapams and conduct of festivals. In each town they built a Mariamman temple of their own. Even in those days they utilised Mahamai fund to prevent business failures. They help the poor Nadars with food and clothes, and also to get jobs. The fund is collected and managed by Uravinmurai.

Family among the Nadar

The joint family or extended family system is most common among the Nadars as a traditional pattern. "A prosperous joint family's income often comes from a business and/or lands which its members hold in common. If members of a joint family are employed separately, their income
is either put into the common fund or held separately, with a share usually
going towards household expenses. In a complete joint family the members share their income, then dwelling place and their kitchen" (Templeman, 1996: 48)

Even when there are hundred members in a household incomes are divided and the joint family continues to exist in practical sense if the father is still living for the entire arrangement exist on his authority, and he remains the head of the family.

Highly educated and urbanized Nadars view the joint family as an institution in decline and they prefer the nuclear family. Due to their mobility and in the case of professional man, the joint family is clearly impracticable, and he takes up residence where he finds employment and this usually means establishing a separate household for his own family. In short the joint family was often portrayed as "old-fashioned", a negative value among the middle class Nadars.

In the joint family decisions were mainly taken by he head of the family (oldest male member) for example authority of the father over the son was obvious and the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law was never cordial. Certain changes in family relations were apparent due to the changing family composition. The relationship between husband and wife also changed due to the increase in the education levels among them.
Kinship

The largest exogamous group to which a Nadar belongs is the Kuttam. Within a Kuttam is a Vagiyara or Veedu (lineage). Kuttam is a patrilineal descent group whose members trace descent from a common ancestor and also possess their own territorial region. Hence they believe that the proper name of any clan should refer only to its place of origin or to its deity. Many clans break down into Veedu groups and become the larger exogamous units within the social structure. A Veedu consists of a number of men who are related through patrilineal descent to a known ancestor. Unlike a Kuttam, a Veedu is not of unlimited generational depth, usually extending no further than the descendent of a common great or great-great grand father. The importance of Veedu mainly depends on their economic status. The lineage members call one another as Pangali (coparcenary heirs). Lineage members enjoy certain economic rights. By tradition, if a man has no sons or brother's to inherit his property, it goes to his lineage mates. Disputes among lineage mates are handled within the lineage itself. The important dimension of lineage activity involves the participation of lineage common ceremonies.

Marriage

Caste mobility and social evolution has influenced their pattern of marriage alliances. Marrying outside one's own village has not only become increasingly possible for Nadars but also increasing desirable. Occupation and class considerations are main determinants in selecting the mates.
Now-a-days, the prospective groom and, even on occasion the bride, is allowed a choice in the selection of a spouse. Educated youngmen look for educated and 'sophisticated' wives who will be assets to their careers by "moving well" with people. An element of compatibility has come to be regarded as important as young men and women look forward to a spouse who shares some of their interests and attitudes.

The Nadars never practised child marriage or widow remarriage. Polygamy and Polyandry are not usually practised by these people. The marriage takes place only after a betrothal ceremony called 'Nichayadhartham'. On a fixed day the maternal uncle of the bridegroom with the relatives would visit the house of the bride with the specified amount to be given to the bride. They also carry fruits, flowers, garlands, pansupari, sandal paste and a silk saree for the bride. In the presence of the lineage head, an agreement would be arrived at and both the maternal uncles would exchange garlands and apply sandal paste on each others forehead. Then the saree brought would be given to the bride who wears that saree and seated before the group. The women would place flowers in the plate of the bride and bless her with vermilion. The ceremony would come to an end with the distribution of sweets, beetle leaves and nuts.

The Nichayadhartam would be followed by another ceremony known as pown-urukkudal ie melting of gold sovereign for making the tali. This ceremony would take place either at the bridegroom's residence or at the place of goldsmith. Then the marriage takes place on the stipulated day.
A day prior to the marriage, the women of the bride groom family during the late hours of the evening would visit the bride’s residence and construct a small oven and platform with clay in the bride’s kitchen. This is called Aduppu Thinna Podudhal. This indicates that the bride was entrusted with the work of the kitchen of the new family. This would be followed by a ceremony known as bangle wearing by the bride.

The marriage alliances are usually fixed by the marriage brokers. A broker makes it his business to know the prospective brides and grooms available in the community. He keeps a record of Nadar births in his locality and other important details such as educational qualification, physical appearance, and the economic and general status of these families. If the broker succeeds in arranging a marriage alliance, the bride’s group and groom’s parents each pay him a fee usually equivalent to 2.5 percent of the dowry.

Dowry practise among the christian Nadars is different markedly from that of the Hindu Nadars. Christian Nadars emphasize on education as means of economic advancement. While a bride is expected to bring a dowry, this is paid directly to the father of the groom to reimburse him for his investment in his son’s education and to make it possible for him to educate his younger sons. The bride is supposed to benefit from the grooms educational level.
Sanskritization and self-respect movement had an impact on the religious beliefs and practices of the community. The Nadars were quite successful in Sanskritizing their ritual practices up to the 1920's, and were generally recognized by their neighbours and their claims to kshatriya status met with little general acceptance. The marriage ceremonies changed and they followed self-respect wedding ceremony which means no priest officiates, the groom wears a western style suit and shoes and the couple sits on a sofa placed on a platform or stage. In a strict self-respect ceremony, there would be no mention of any god, except perhaps the family deities. However the speakers at the wedding may refer to one deity or another in the course of their addresses.

The central part of the ritual is the tying of the thali and the exchange of garlands by the bride and groom. To this is often added an exchange of rings by the couple, an increasingly popular practice adopted from Christian Nadar wedding.

Life Cycle Ceremonies

Nadar/Shanar life cycle ceremonies include birth ceremony, puberty ceremony, marriage ceremony and death ceremony. The style and importance of life cycle ceremonies provides useful clues as to the respective weight of the sacred and the secular in the life of the Nadar Community.
Birth Ceremony

Several ceremonies before and after the birth of a child serve to bring the families of both parents together. During the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy, the parents invite the expectant mother on an auspicious day and meet all the expenses for the first delivery. On the seventh day after the delivery, they conduct a ceremony called Kayarukkattal i.e. tying a yellow thread with gold ornaments around the hip of the new born. The new born would be placed in a winnow made of palmyrah leaf. This denotes the initiation of the new born to the palmyrah tree.

Puberty Ceremony

The puberty ceremony for girls appears to be now less common than it once was, especially among urban, wealthy and educated families. It is still performed more in rural areas, although its importance is declining. The ceremony, which begins on the day of a girl's first menses, emphasizes the importance of the thayathikal or mother's lineage. On the sixteenth day after the girl's first menses, there used to be a procession whose purpose was to inform people that the girl was now ready to marry. But now they are not making a public display of a girl's attaining puberty and the procession is no longer held.
Disposal of the Dead

The Nadars/Shanars dispose off their dead by cremation. But it seems that the custom of burial had also existed among them. After burying the dead they constructed raised platforms called Pudam. On every death anniversary the family members would visit that place and pay homage to the dead. Celebration of death anniversary at home is a common custom among Nadars/Shanars. After the death of the husband, the wife is not allowed to wear the Tali. It would be removed on the third day after the husband's death. Usually the widows wear white sarees.

Of all the customs of the Nadars, an important one is the role played by a brother in all the ceremonies of his married sister's house. Even when she dies or her husband dies, the brother is expected to share a portion of the expenses.
CHAPTER IV

A GROSS-ROOTS LEVEL STUDY OF NADAR/SHANAR HOUSEHOLDS