Chapter - III

Marriage

The Vedic society with its complex socio-religious organization, customs, ideologies, rites and rituals would enunciate an elaborately detailed marriage ceremony. All the rituals begin from the selection of the bride and bridegroom. Once the preliminary details are attended the actual marriage ceremonies begin. The marriage takes place before the sacrificial fire with rituals. Holding hands or panigrahana is seen in most of the weddings. The bride groom takes the hands of the bride and makes a request for the meeting of the heart and the mind; after this couple circumambulate by holding hands, the sacrificial fire followed by the ritual of mantras. The bride mounts a millstone, to express her firmness through the rest of the life. In the ritual saptapadi the bridegroom leads the bride to pace seven steps in north-eastern direction chanting a verse mentioning the importance of each step. A very significant rite of kanyadhan indicates the bride leaving her parent home as her father gives her away as a gift of charity to her husband. When the ritual is over, the husband shows her the star Arundati, which is an emblem of steadfast and fidelity.

Marriage ceremony

According to Krishna Sharma the baudhayayana ritual of marriage begins after looking auspicious time. The baudhayayana ritual in the kriyaratnamala begins by saying “After checking auspicious time get a shave take bath, venerate the gods, put on the washed garment, have the ayani ritual after lighting the traditional lamp, be
blessed by greeting and honouring the respectable, wear a folded dhothi, take coconut, ada, carry an umbrella, have a graceful journey chanting the swasthi sooktham and reach virgins house, put down the belongings and do absolution and sit on a stool facing the east. Then the father should sit facing the west, light the lamp, offer water to the boy, then hold his hand and say, “take bath and marry” and the boy should say “yes” (Am or Ameen). Then he should rise, wear the folded dhothi, remove the washed garment, and take bath and return. The ritual continues after the bath; then wear the dhothi, smear the ash, sit in the courtyard facing the north, keep the folded cloth on shoulder, prepare the holy water, pray Ganapathi, do the penance do the ritual respectively then recite vivahadevatham priyatham (Let gods of marriage like or bless) (this may be a token pay for marriage). Then offer punyham. Then he himself with others pays reverence to God Ganapathi. Then sit facing the left, again offer to God Ganapathi, draw two female figures, spread karuka grass, and offer galagandha flowers. Chant manthras and when all the items are offered. Thrivritanam, the havissu, which include milk, curd, ghee all these should be split chanting mantras offer flowers with folded hands” (Sharma 1953).

According to Ernesty Crawley (1989) marriage ceremonies in all stages of culture may be called religious with propriety as any ceremony and the religious character in most cases, and almost except in the highest stages concerns the human relations of pair. Though so complicated the rituals are an intrinsic part of the marriage ceremonies in the several religious groups in India.

The mangalasutra or the tying of tali round the bride’s neck is a symbol of fertility rites. The very simple reason that created a man and a woman together is to raise family and a good society.
**Negotiation**


Only after attending the preliminary details the actual marriage ceremony takes place. Negotiation is the occasion in which the oral promise is given. The bride’s kinsmen and relatives go to groom’s house. Usually the family has some candidates in mind before formally takes up the search. The compatibility of horoscope is checked, and the discussions are made on the amount of dowry and other financial expenses. It is from the bride’s side negotiation process is initiated. The astrologer fixes the date of betrothal by checking the *panjangam* (Astrological Calendar). The father of the bride and the bridegroom takes the decision on the betrothal. The close relatives, both affinal and the consanguinous assist them. After deciding the date of betrothal, the relatives are invited to attend the ceremony and they make preparations for the betrothal ceremony. The dowry varies according to the family’s economic status. The dowry is in the form of money, household items, property, and rights over the *santhi*, dresses, ornaments etc. Cutting across different sections in the Hindu society, the horoscopes are read to determine the suitability of a marriage. If the horoscopes of the couple are incompatible, marriage is impossible, and the members of the *illam* in the Pitarar families must renew their efforts to secure
a spouse for their offspring. In fact, a favourable horoscope reading assures all the members of both *illam*, concerned that the marriage will be successful.

The customs of negotiating oral promise of girls are sometimes made in their early childhood or teenage. After they attain marriageable age the marriage is conducted.

**Betrothal**

Betrothal ceremony is termed as *nischayam*. The ceremony begins after the prayers offered to lord Ganapathi. The performance of Ganapathi puja is essential at the commencement of every important occasion. Ganapathi is also known as Vigneswara, the lord of obstacles. It is necessary to propitiate the lord of obstacles. Apart from *nilavilakku*, lightened lamp, puffed rice, *tulsi*, coconut halves and two bananas are offered in a plantain leaf. The Kaniyan after checking the horoscope and *panchangam* (astrological calendar) fixes the date of marriage. By selecting two auspicious days he announces the date. In case if in the first date the marriage wouldn’t take place they can select the second date. As a symbol of future life both the horoscope of bride and groom are tied together. The groom’s father receives the tied bundle of the horoscope in which the groom’s horoscope is placed on the top. After the rituals a feast is given to the people. Apart from the *muthapitarar, elaya pitarar, illakkar* and all the male and female kins folk of the nearby *illam* attend the function.
Marriage rituals

Marriage rituals are conducted in the bride’s *illam*, which lasts for five days. Five day long festivity begins with elaborate rites and rituals. If groom’s *illam*, is far away from the bride’s *illam*, then the party sets to the bride’s house on the previous day itself. Thus the ceremony starts a day earlier.

Marriage for a Pitarar man is one of the most important life cycle rituals, which endows him to do certain rights that also includes the right to do *uchapuja*. Thus it bestows a higher status in the society. Marriage for a Pitarar woman is the beginning of her life in a new house, her husband’s *illam*. The destiny of the Pitarar woman is motherhood, and wifehood is the only culturally approved means to it. She begins her adult and the socially significant phase of her life only with her marriage, which also marks her initiation into the full ritual status of a Brahman woman. Only thereafter she can participate along side her husband in domestic rituals.

As already mentioned, the marriage takes place in the bride’s *illam* and in the first day of marriage ceremony the groom along with his party joins the *muthapitarar, elayapitarar, illakkar* and the other male relatives and after an ablution they visit the *kavu* to show their reverence to Devi. The bride’s father who joins the party gifts the groom with a golden ring. This golden ring is handed over to him by the *muthapitarar* who in turn at the time of exchange enquires the willingness of the groom to accept the girl as his wife. When he reveals his willingness, he is allowed to wear it on the ring finger. All the male members then return to the groom’s *illam*. The groom wears
the double *kasavumundu* (dothi with golden lines) by changing *thattumundu* (a long cloth). Then the ritual *ayaloonu* follows.

**Ayaloonu**

*Ayaloonu* is a ritual which is performed in the groom’s *illam*. In the groom’s *illam* all the relatives including all those who attended the previous day’s function assemble for a feast. In case the bride’s *illam* is in a distant place the groom’s party sets off to another *illam* near the bride’s *illam* on the previous day itself. This *illam* is usually of the bride’s close relatives.

A feast is arranged in this *illam* for the attendees. Though the bride doesn’t attend the feast a symbolic seat adjacent to the groom’s seat is left vacant for her. All the items that are served to the groom are also served to this vacant seat. Her mother takes this share of the feast to the bride. This is one of the most important rites of the *ayaloonu*. The bride in her *illam* is seated in a wooden plank. Bride’s mother gives her daughter’s share of *ayaloonu* to the bride. The bride eats her share. The bride’s party provides for the items of *ayaloonu*.

After the feast in the groom’s *illam*, all the relatives proceed to bride’s house in procession. The F, B, FB or FBS of the bride comes to the groom’s *illam* and make enquires about the departure of the groom’s party for the function.

Afterwards, another ritual named *arinurikkal* goes on in the groom’s *illam* where bridegroom along with the *muthapitarar* sits cross-legged facing east on a
wooden piece of seat named *avanipalaka*. A *nazhi* (wooden measure) filled with raw rice and a lightened lamp (*nilavilakku*) is kept in front of them. The *elayapitarar* showers raw rice thrice on the head of *muthapitarar* and the groom. The male relatives of the groom like his father, the *illakkar*, his uncle and other male and female kinsmen and kinswomen, the affinal and consanguinal relatives do the blessing by showering raw rice. The gifts in cash, the golden ring etc. are given to the groom.

By wearing an upper garment, *veshti* (dothi) the groom along with the *muthapitarar, elayapitarar, illakkar*, kinsmen and kinswomen, relatives, the ladies with *vilakku* and *talika*, the member of all *illam* in the settlement, the members of Ambalavasis *veedu* proceed to the bride’s *illam* where the main functions are to be performed. The right is with the Ambalavasi to carry the box of the bride which contains her dress and the one who carries it receives an amount in return at the end of the marriage. Each *illam* has got separate Ambalavasi *veedu* to carry the box - the Kannanveedu for the Thazhathillam, the Pappiniveedu for Ettummal illam and Kannanveedu or Painganveedu for the Aryamvalli illam.

The bride’s relatives welcome the groom and his party whole-heartedly. While the M, MZ, MM, aunts of the bride receive them and welcome the party by holding *vilakku* and *talika* with the recitation of the sacred *mantras*. The bride’s father pours water in the palm of the groom. Afterwards, the bridegroom expresses his willingness to the bride’s father to have the wealth and the maiden. The father agrees to do so but before he gives his daughter to the groom, he should have a bath. So then the
bridegroom goes for a bath and he comes back with a wet clad. Then he changes his
dress supplied by the bride’s father, a *thattumundu*.

**Punyaham**

Now it’s the time to perform *punyaham*. The right to perform *punyaham* is for
the *elayapitarar*. The items for the preparation of the *punyaham* are paddy, banana,
and leaves of the medicinal plants like basil, flowers of ixora, hibiscus, and water.

*Punyaham* is a purificatory rite. The above-mentioned mixture is kept in a big plate
(*uruli*). This purificatory rite goes on under the guidance of the *elayapitarar*. Along
with him is seated the four *illakkar* and the bridegroom in a semi-circular manner.

By reciting the sacred spells *punyaham* is sprinkled on the bridegroom and the
*anapudavas* with the tip of *kusha* grass by all the four *illakkar* along with the
*elayapitarar*.

Meanwhile the bride, who is in a standing position, is sprinkled with
*punyaham*. The *tali* is kept in the *punyaham* in order to remove defilation. Ancestral
worship is done in order to propitate the ancestors for good results.

**Ancestral worship**

A *homakundam* is prepared in a special spot in the courtyard where rituals are
conducted by lighting the sacrificial fire. The courtyard (*nadumuttam*) is arranged for
the rituals. A *nilavilakku* (lightened lamp) is kept in front of the *homakundam* for
worshipping the ancestors. *Havissu* (sacrificial offering), basil, *kusha* grass, curd,
brutea fondesa, two bananas in a plantain leaf etc are supplied by the bride’s father. During the *homam*, the groom makes offerings to the ancestor. The *havissu* is received from the *uruli* on which the curd is poured thrice. This offering is then placed on the *kusha* grass.

Then the bridegroom goes for a bath. For this he is given two *anapudavas*, which were touched by the bride and supplied by her father. Bathing and changing of the dresses are done in order to purify him for the sacred rite *talikettal*. The bride’s father helps him in dressing the *anapudavas*, and he puts on the clothes as *thattumundu* and the *uthareeyam*. His eyelids are decorated and penciled. On his forehead sandal wood paste is applied. A sacred thread (black and white in colour) is tied on his upper arm. He wears wooden sandals and holds a cane in his armpit.

After *brahmacharya* (studenthood) a boy enters the *grihsthashrama* or the householder’s life through the marriage i.e. transition from boyhood to manhood. A symbolic return from the *kasi yathra* has been described in the Vedic texts in which a young man is given a wife only after he returns from Kasi. The *yogadhandu* is an implication that he has returned after his *Kasi yatra* completing the *brahmacharya*. The *vadhyar* (the spiritual teacher) gives the instruction for all the rituals. He recites the sacred spells loudly. The *poonool* (the sacred thread) worn by the bridegroom is twined with white and black woolen thread. This thread is tied with an iron ring. The Pitarar believes that the metal will protect him from the pollution and an iron ring with the woolen thread will indeed protect them from pollution. This ring is removed
at the time of couples visit to the kavu.

In the bride’s *illam*, the ceremony for the marriage begins in the previous day of the Wedding. Her body is cleaned with the help of Ambalavasi women by massaging the body with specially made coconut oil and naturally available shampoos. The mixture of water and hibiscus is used to clean the hair while taking bath.

On the day of wedding, the ceremony begins after the bride baths and changes her dress. She is dressed in *onnaramundu* (one and a half of dothi). She eats *ayaloonu* which is brought from the groom’s house by her mother. When the bridegroom’s party arrives, she is sprinkled with *punyaham*. After *punyaham*, she wears *onnaramundu*, which was touched by the groom by changing her *annapudava*. She wears one *annapudava* and covers her head with the other. Two ends of the cloth with which she covered her head are plaited neatly and taken into her hands. She also takes *valkanadi* (round mirror) on her hand.

**Tali - tying rite**

The Hindu cultural ethos attributes *tali* (wedlock) as an inseparable bond between a husband and a wife and gives much importance to it. They consider *tali* as sacred. The word *tali* literally mean an auspicious thread. Any harm to this is considered as an ill omen to the future. The woman always wear this wedlock until her husband’s death.
The groom enters the vadakkina (room in the northern side of the illam) where the bride is staying in on the auspicious time. The subsequent rituals take place here. As a symbol of the authority over her in the future life, the bridegroom touches the bride from head to toe with a kusha grass. Then the groom asks the bride to show her face and she does so. As per the instructions of the vadhyar all the rituals take place. The dowry giving ritual is done by keeping the groom’s hand under the bride’s hand. After pouring punyham into her hand, her father puts a kizhi (bundle) on it. Kizhi contains raw rice and coins. Then, she leaves this kizhi into the groom’s hand, and he leaves it into the brass plate kept beneath. After this the tali ritual begins. In order to avoid defilation the two talis, which are made of gold, are stringed together in a white cord and kept in punyham. The groom faces the eastern direction while the bride faces western direction, and he ties tali around the neck of the bride, which was handed over to him by the bride’s father. The rite saptapadi (seven steps) follows.

**Saptapadi**

The word saptapadi means seven steps. Mantras (spells) are chanted one by one as the bride steps from west to east. The bride makes seven steps on the northern side touches the ground in the seventh step and water is poured on that spot, and it is the same place were it is set ready for the sacred fire. These seven steps symbolise friendship, food, strength, wealth, joy, children and seasons.

The Brahmins who had undergone upanayana are respected by giving an amount as dakshina (gift) on this occasion. Each of them receives a coin, a betel leaf
and areca nut. The bridegroom receives blessings from all of them.

*Mantras* are chanted on each step of the bride in the *saptapadi* rite. The *mantra* for the first step is chanted for food, the second one for strength, the third for prosperity, the fourth for joy, the fifth for off springs, the sixth for seasons seventh one for being a good friend and wife to the groom during his youth and be mother of several sons who will line till ripe old age. *Saptapadi* is performed with the same wish. Sprinkling water puts out the sacred pyre of the wedding.

**Malaru homam**

A Pitarar marriage is incomplete without *homam*. Whole rituals are conducted beside the sacred pyre. There are almost eight varieties of *homam* for marriage. Eight *chamata homam*. *Chamata* (Brutea frondasa) is a medicinal plant used widely in Vedic rituals.

Partaking in all the *homams* for the couple is indispensable one. The rituals begin with the prostration before the *homakundam*. A very significant rite is that of chanting verses according to the instruction of their spiritual master – *Vadhyar*. For *Malaru Homam* in the sacred fire fried grain and ghee are offered. *Malaru Homam* is also called *lajahomam*. This *homam* is a symbol of prosperity. In *lajahomam* the father of the bride takes grooms hand and pours fried grain and ghee by chanting three verses.
The main mantra in the lajahoma is

“Agneya lajanam Va patni dirgayurasthume

Pathi jeevanta sarathashatatam

Myanarya prabhute sarata satagna Swaha”

This manthra is chanted in order to enable the wife to live with her husband a thousand years.

By holding the right palm of the bride the groom circles the sacrificial fire three times, without meeting her thumb. The mantras are recited. At the end of each round the bride mounts a millstone with the bridegroom expressing a wish that she would be as firm as a rock through their married life.

Karippottu thodeekkal

The ashes of the kusha grass are mixed with ghee after the homam. The groom applies this left - over of the homam, called sruvam, on his forehead and on the chest of the bride.

The entire male Pitarar, who had undergone the upanayanam, are revered on this occasion by gifting with an amount namely, dakshina (gift). After pouring water and washing the palms of muthapitarar, elayapitarar, illakkar and other elder male kinsmen the bridegroom supplies to them the ash paste. At the end of the homam, the bride and groom are seated near the sacred fire and the father of the bride sits in the
middle of them. Thereafter, he whispers in the ears of groom bride’s name and star and vice versa. He also tells them not to call each other by name. Then the ritual *kaipidi* goes on. The bride’s father gives his daughter’s palm to the groom. The groom holds her palm. Then onwards he prostrates before the *homakundam* or the sacred fire.

By holding the wife’s hand, the groom prepares to leave the house. With a symbolic act of disapproval, the bride’s father draws a line with water across their way. They stay in the Bride’s *illam* after a bath and a feast. After the first *chamatha homam*, the second *chamatha homam* begins in the *sandhya* (evening).

**Triratra vratha**

In *vadakkina*, the bride is sent in seclusion. The Ambalavasi woman from the Pappini veedu spreads *Padukka*. Up to the fourth day of seclusion the bride is not allowed to change her *manthrakodi* (wedding dress) or bath. The *pappiniamma* draws five thick lines of grains alternately with rice and paddy on the floor and upon the paddy and rice a black wooden blanket is kept. Afterwards, a white sheet is spread on the wooden blanket allowing the bride to sit on this *padukka*.

Rituals except *lajahomam* and mounting the millstone are repeated in the second and the fourth day. The above *homam* is conducted in the both *sandhya*. Both bride and groom wear *manrtakodi*.

On the third day evening, the *muthapitarar*, the *elayapitarar* the *illakkar*, the
members of all the *illam* of the settlement and the male and female kinsmen set to the bride’s *illam*. They are accompanied by the females who had the right to take the lighted lamp and bronze plate. As per the request of the bride’s mother, they assemble in the specially erected platform in the courtyard of bride’s *illam*. Paddy in a small wooden bowl, the lighted lamp with two wicks, dress, raw rice in a plate, *avanipalaka*, *nirapara* (paddy in a big wooden bowl) etc. are arranged in the *pandal*. The *mattumundu*, a cloth is kept in the *avanipalaka* and the *Vannathi*, a woman from the washer man caste, walks thrice around the *mattumundu*. She recites the sacred *manthras* while walking and she is paid an amount for her services. When these rites are over, a girl called *nagnika* arrives and the females holding the sacred lamp and plates accompany her in a sequence. The *nagnika* takes the *mattu* to the *vadakkina* and she keeps it in the *padukka* where the bride is seated. All the female folks bless her by showering rice. At the end of the ritual lord Ganapathi is worshipped to avoid all the interruptions by offering cooked green gram as *naivedyam*. This offering is distributed among the women folks are who assembled there.

On the fourth day, the ceremony starts when the Marar brings a jasmine twig. After the seventh *homam*, the twig is planted in the north eastern corner of the courtyard. In return he receives *dakshina*. The *chedikaran*, from the Thiyya caste brings tender coconut flowers, tender coconut, and tender coconut leaves. He is also paid for his services by giving *dakshina*. On the fourth day, the bride changes her dress-*manthrakodi*. She wears a neatly washed and dried cloth bedeck with all the ornaments made of gold and silver.
The golden and silver ornaments include palakkamala, pathakkakozha, manikkozha, nagapadam, kavantali, pavankozha etc. The bride also wears a belt named minnithodal. The finger ring made of panchaloha, silver bangles, golden earrings, golden bangles, golden ring, etc. Rich people wear more ornaments. Mass of the ornaments depends upon the financial capacity of the bride’s illam.

The Ambalavasi draws kalam in the vadakkina by using paddy and rice. After lighting the traditional lamp with three wicks he draws alternate lines of paddy and rice. The traditional lamp is placed in the center of the kalam. On each side of the traditional lamp three decorated avanipalakka are placed. Coconut halves are placed on the avanipalaka and wicks are lighted on it. Plate, rice in wooden bowl, paddy in big wooden bowl, coconut, areca nut, and betel leaves are placed next to the traditional lamp.

Rangalam

The bride sits cross-legged with the female Ambalavasi Pappinamma near the kalam. She sits in the opposite side of the bride and her task is to teach household duties of the future householder through certain games. After teaching the household duties and games, the bride is made to sleep in the avanipalaka. Symbolically, a millstone is kept beside her. It is considered as her child and with the help of a white blanket she covers herself and the child. The millstone symbolises the child. The Pappinamma awakes the future mother – the householder by calling her mother – mother by striking smoothly with tender coconut leaves. The white blanket is taken
away from the bride and she after awaking from the sleep receives the blessings from the Pappiniamma. The Pappiniamma showers some rice on her navel.

This ritual symbolically conveys the fertility concept of the bride and her readiness to have offsprings. The status of the bride is that of an *amma* (mother). This is an index that by adding *amma* the bride acquires the status of a mother in her husband’s *illam*. It is through her that the roots of her husband’s *illam* flourish and the future of the offsprings of the *illam* is in her hand and thus she is honoured. After this ritual, all the materials used in the ritual except the traditional oil lamp and measuring bowl are given to the Pappiniamma and the Ambalavasi females. The women are also given cash for the service rented by her.

As the period of seclusion is over, the bride sets for an elaborate bath. Pappiniamma and other Ambalavasi females accompany her. The females including those who carried traditional oil lamp and plates escort the bride for her bath in the nearby pond. The Ambalavasi females carry coconut oil to massage the head and body of the bride. Naturally available shampoo, dress, tender coconut flower, rice, etc are carried along. It is the duty of the bride’s aunt (Father’s younger brother’s wife) to massage her body with oil. While bathing, *malar* (puffed rice) and *ada* are offered to the fishes in the pond. When the bride bathes, the Pappini amma counts the bud inflorescence the bride has beaten during her bath. The Pappini amma after counting the buds throws it back. The count, if turned odd number, will be considered that the bride gets a male child and if the count is an even number, then she bears a female child as her first born.
Pantalilirangal

The elaborate bathing ends and the bride wear new clothes and adorns with ornaments. The ritual pantalilirangal means to enter into the panthal, the courtyard of the well decorated house. The Pappiniamma, with the female kinswomen of the bride and ten to twelve close female relatives of bride and groom, all of them holding the vilakku and talika, accompanies the bride inside the specially constructed courtyard of the illam. In the panthal a kalam is drawn. Four traditional oil lamps are kept in the four corners and a big oil lamp with twelve wicks is placed in the centre. The entrance of the panthal is decorated with sugar canes, plantain trees, banana fruits, tender coconut leaves etc. Inside the pandal coconut inflorescent is kept in a big bowl filled with rice. krishnapattu (a book containing hymns of lord Krishna), a valkannadi (mirror), nirapara (wooden bowl filled with rice), astamangalyam etc. are placed (astamangalyam consists of rice paddy, a blossom of coconut tree, a looking glass, a well- washed cloth, an arrow, a lighted lamp and a small wooden box). The party circumambulates thrice the pandal after paying reverence to all the materials placed there. The bride is then made to choose a page from the krishnapattu and that page is marked by using a palm leaf strip.

Murampidi and Murampuja

From the kottilakam (inner room) of their veedu, the Ambalavasi males pay their reverence to the muram (winnower). Then the muram is given to Ambalavasi females and it is brought to the pandal. Murampidi is done for the good fortune of the
couple. The bride holds the two ends of the *muram* in her hand while an Ambalavasi female holds its corner. The Pappiniamma recites *mantras*.

Her mother gives a handful of rice to the bride after putting some rice on her head. The remaining portion of the rice is put down to her right side. Some paddy grains are put on the naval part of the bride and the remaining is put down her left side. This is a kind of fertility rite. They believe that this rite will increase the fertility.

The entire females who accompanied the bride do the same ritual. After receiving the raw rice in the corner of her robe, the mother sits on the floor of the *vadakkina* (room facing the northern direction). Accompanied by the females the bride circumambulates the *pandal* by winnowing the rice in a plate. This act is done thrice. Afterwards the bride enters the *vadakkina* room and along with the female kinswoman she walks around her mother three times. Then the plate is handed over to a female member.

Two Ambalavasi males from the Pappini *veedu* bring traditional big oil lamp from the *pandal* to *vadakina*. In return the bride gives an amount as *dakshina*.

All the above-mentioned rituals are continued from the *pandal* in the evening. The next ritual starts when the bride accompanied with her mother and the *vilakku* and *talika* holders plucks the jasmine flowers. The Pappiniamma from the Ambalavasi *veedu* recites the sacred spells. The bride is made to walk around the jasmine twig by pouring water from the goglet by her mother and after watering the plant, the bride wears jasmine flowers on her head. The Pitarar considers jasmine as a symbol of
fertility. After entering the *pandal* the bride walks around it thrice. The same girl, *nagnika* who had taken her *mattu* on the third day of the ceremony, accompanies her. Raw rice and coconut are also kept in this plate. A canopy made of *thorthumundu* that is taken from the Ambalavasi male is also kept. One of the pages of *Krishnapattu* already selected and marked by the bride is read. It includes the hymns that describe Krishna’s stories in a poetical manner. Whatever the page read is a hint towards the future life of the bride. Again all the above-mentioned rituals are done in the morning. Thereafter, the mother gets into the *vadakkina* room and shuts the door. Bride knocks the door while mother tells her daughter that Sridevi and her children are inside, this is a symbolical denial of the mother that her daughter has no further right to sleep with her. Then the mother opens the door and the bride enters into the room. This ritual follows a grand feast.

Now it is the turn of the Eighth *homam* in which the bride and groom changes their dress and wear a new dress called *manthrakodi*. After looking the star named *arundathi* in the sky they get ready for the eighth *homam*, which is performed in the *padinhitta*. The materials like cot, lighted traditional oil lamp, *avanipalaka* etc are placed in the *padinhitta*.

The eighth *chamatha homam* starts on the fourth day. This ritual is also called *vivahasesham*. In the midst of the *homam* the groom is made to sit on the *avanipalaka* while the bride sits on the cot. Then the door is closed. The *vadhyar* recites sacred spells standing outside the closed door that reveal the procedure to be done in the first
night. During the ritual the groom is expected to touch the bride’s body parts. But no sexual contact takes place here. After half an hour ritual, the vadhyar opens the door and then the bride and groom have their bath. A common feast follows the ritual. The bride serves the groom in a plantain leaf and then the groom after having his meals serves the bride in the same leaf. This function symbolically conveys the integration of the bride and the groom - the future husband and wife. They are allowed to sleep together after the fourth day’s ceremony.

On the fifth day morning, by wearing the mantrakodi, the bride goes for a bath in the pond. The couple is accompanied by vilakku and talika procession. Pappinamma, the ambalavasis and male and female kinsmen escort her. They carry the chamatha twigs, thaly (Shampoo prepared from herbs), kusha grass, coconut oil and ash. They catch fish from the pond by using bride’s upper cloth. The fish they caught is then placed on the chamatha twigs and a puja is performed there. After this ritual bridegroom and bride are made to massage each other by using coconut oil, ath, natural shampoo etc. During the bath, the Ambalavasi women make loud sound with their mouth in a chorus - kurava. The females bless the bride by showering rice on her head. The water is taken from the pond with a measuring vessel and then it is discharged on her with the leaves of jack and peepal trees.

Thereafter, the bride and the groom change their clothes. A double dhothi – thattumundu, veshti and an upper cloth are worn by the groom and mundu and onnara are worn by the bride. The first homam after their veli is conducted when they get
back into their illam. The ash of first homam is put down in the hearth of her illam, which symbolizes that the bride’s relationship with her parental illam is cut down forever.

The fifth day of the ritual is called velikootal. All the above-described rituals are repeated and afterwards the bride is taken to the groom’s illam. After paying reverence to the goddess in the kavu, they enter groom’s illam. At the time of pantheeradi puja they go to the kavu and offer two tender coconuts to the mother goddess. The couple accompanied by muthapitarar, elayapitarar, illakkar and the other family members and relatives seek the blessings of the goddess in their kavu. The priest of the temple breaks tender coconut by hitting it in the altar. The altar is situated in front of the sanctum sanctorium of the sasthav.

Only after paying reverence to Devi the couple is allowed to enter inside the groom’s illam. The groom’s mother welcomes them by showering rice on their head. She is accompanied by the vilakku and talika holders. Then they are allowed to sit in the padinhitta, which follows the blessings of the relatives by showering rice on them. First the muthapitarar blesses the couple by showering rice on their head, then the groom shower rice on the head of the muthapitarar and the bride. The bride in turn showers rice on the muthapitarar and the groom. This ritual is followed by the distribution of appam (sweet dish made of rice flour) to all those who gathered there. Then the bride is shown the kitchen and she is made to draw water from the well adjacent to the kitchen. Then she is given sweet pudding. They arrange grand feast to
the gathering. The ceremony ends after the bride lights the sacred traditional lamp in the evening - *sandhya* (twilight).

Attending noon *puja* or the *pantheeradi puja* is important for the Pitarar in the marriage rituals. Visiting the mother goddess and receiving the blessings from her are something very much related to their very essence. In case if the groom’s *illam* is far from the bride’s *illam*, the party receives blessings from the goddess of *kavu* near the bride’s *illam* and then they join in the noon puja. Thereafter they stay in the bride’s relative’s *illam* and not in the bride’s *illam*. It is on the next day they join the noon puja in the *kavu* in the groom’s settlement. Only after attending the *pantheeradi puja* they are allowed to enter the groom’s *illam*.

**Changing Institution**

Pitarar marriage is not merely a union of a boy and a girl for procreation or carnal pleasure. It is a special kind of *samskaram* - the culture that generates attitudes and cordiality as well as internal and external strength to perform certain rites according to their sacred laws, for the prosperity of two families. The traditional five-day celebration of marriage has now transformed into mere one-day ceremony. Likewise, the eight-*chamatha homams*, which were done earlier in an elaborate manner, has been reduced to one *homam*. *Ayaloonu, punyham, varadakshina, kaipidi, homam*, touching the heart, *karipottuthodekkal, saptapadi*, hitting the grinding stone, *malaru homam*, respecting the Brahmins, circumambulating the *mandap* accompanied by the married females, tying *tali*, throwing rice on the naval,
reading *krishnapattu*, *velikootal* etc. are observed with certain modifications in order to fit into a day’s ceremony. Some rituals like catching fish from the pond, common bath, plucking jasmine flowers, *rangalam*, looking at the star *arundathi*, *mattuvekkal*, *vivahasesham*, *triratravrata*, etc which were observed with utter significance in the past are not observed now. Like other caste groups in Kerala, wearing silver bangles disappeared from the marriage ceremony. They use golden ornaments in a large scale instead. For the wedlock or *tali*, gold is used. All the rituals are reduced to one day ritual because of the inconvenience of doing it elaborately. Dowry plays an important role in the marriage ceremony. Like that of other caste groups in north Kerala, previous day receptions are arranged. People belonging to other community are also invited to attend the function.
Table 3.1

Marital Status of the Pitarar

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<tr>
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<th>Married Male</th>
<th>Widow</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Unmarried Female</th>
<th>Married Female</th>
<th>Widow</th>
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<td>45</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>46</td>
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</table>
Out of 109 males, 46 are married while 60 are unmarried. In the table all the male groups above the age of 35 are found married. The married males and females form 21 percent of the total population. Three widowers and 15 widows are seen among them. 12 of them are above the age group 65. Among the females 45 are unmarried and 46 are married. Three unmarried females are found between the age group 45 to 69.

**Ambalavasi marriage.**

Among the Ambalavasis, *pudava* and other items are gifted to the bride on the day of marriage. In the early morning the groom displays silk sari, the *pudava* to his sister, family members and other relatives. With this *pudava* which is kept in a box the groom’s sister and other relatives proceeds to the bride’s house. They adorn the bride with sari and ornaments. But today the beauticians do the beautification and the decoration of the bride. After the dressing function, the sister returns to the groom’s house. The groom is costumed by his male friends. Then he sits in the *padinhitta* (central room or the central hall) of the house. Here after all the relatives bless him by showering rice on his head. The first turn of the blessing is of the *vadhyar* (the religious teacher). He blesses the groom by showering rice on his head. Then his maternal uncle and all the elders including his brother, father, mother’s mother, mother and the whole family members bless the groom by showering rice on his head. After showering the rice the groom is presented with finger rings by each member of relatives. They put the rings on his finger. After the feast in groom’s *veedu*, the journey sets for the bride’s *veedu*. When they arrive at the *veedu*, they are welcomed to the *panthal*, an erected platform in the courtyard of the house. The *panthal* is decorated with coconut flowers, lighted traditional oil lamp, paddy
grains, *niranazhi* (rice measuring wooden bowl with full of rice) etc. The Brahmins who are present in the bride’s *veedu* are given *dakshina* in charity. Bride and groom circumambulate the erected platform or *panthal* seven times. After giving *dakshina* to the *muthapitarar* the bride and the groom receive garland from him. Both bride and groom exchange garlands. The groom ties *tali* around the neck of the bride. Then the rings are exchanged between them.

Unlike the Pitarar, the Ambalavasi did not practice dowry system.

*Ammayipudava* - The groom gifts a *pudava*, a white cloth to the bride and she in turn gives this *pudava* to her aunty - MBW- *ammayi*. After this ritual the bride and the groom circumambulate the *mandap*. A *sadya* (elaborate feast) follows the ritual.

After the feast bride goes to her husband’s house. There the mother welcomes them, by holding the traditional oil lamp along with her sister who carries a plate. The mother blesses the couple by showering rice on their head. Bride and groom are seated in the *padinhitta*. The uncle blesses them by showering rice on the couple which is followed by the groom’s father, mother and his family members. The mixture of *appam* (sweet snack) mixed with molasses and pieces of coconut are distributed to the couple by the mother. The couple exchanges a handful of this mixture among themselves. Then cow milk is given to them in a glass. At first the groom sips a little milk and the remaining milk is given to the bride and she drinks it. After eating the half of banana by the groom, the rest is given to the bride.
Table 3.2

Marital Status of the Ambalavasi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Unmarried Male</th>
<th>Married Male</th>
<th>Widower</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Unmarried Female</th>
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<th>Grand Total</th>
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</thead>
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<td>No.</td>
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<td>%</td>
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Of the 188 Ambalavasi in the Madayi, 88 are males and 100 are females. 0-4 age group has the minimum members (two members - one male and one female) and the maximum number of people fall in the age group 15-19 (25 members - 11 males, 14 females) followed by 35-39 age group (23 members - 9 males, 14 females). The females outnumber the males above the age group 15 to 19 and the trend continues till the age group 40 to 44. There are only three widowers above the age group 70+, while there are 10 widows starting from the age group 50 to 54, 60 to 64, 65 to 69, and 70+.
### Table 3.3

#### Educational Status of Ambalavasi

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<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
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223
25 males and 17 females have completed their primary education. 51 males and 65 females have completed their high school education. Two males and four females have completed professional course. Even though education was given less importance in the past youngsters are now seeking higher education. 61 percent of the total population has completed their high school education.
## Table 3.4

### Occupational Status of Ambalavasi

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Gulf &amp; Other foreign countries</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (100%)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four males and four females are engaged in the kazhakam and chuttadichutali in the temple. 10 members work in the government sector. 19 members are employed in private sector. 29 percent of the total population is included in non-productive work. The rate of the unemployed women is very high among them. Four members are working in foreign country. Of the ten government employees, three are women.

**Role of the lineage**

In every important rite of passage of the settlement, each illam has certain special right and obligation. Lineage is a significant entity in the matters of purity and pollution at birth, initiation, marriage, death and many other important occasions in the life. Members of a lineage are required to participate in all rites and ceremonies in the illam - the presence of at least a few male members among them is sometimes absolutely essential. Based on heredity, there are many myths, legends, proverbs and folklores. Besides, oral stories are woven around the fundamental idea of social relationship. It is the moral obligation of the parents to share the social and economic responsibilities of marriage of their offspring. A married son continues to live with his parents.

**Marriage transactions**

Marriage is a binding relationship between two families. Through the gift exchange, it explicits the implicit meaning of marriage and nature of social solidarity in the society considered. The dowry may also be considered as the type of compensation for accepting a non-productive family member even though the household labour that the wives do in the houses are very high yet unaccountable (Uberoi 2005). The transaction in some society is in
the form of bride price or bride wealth in which the gifts are transferred by the bridegroom or his kin to the bride’s kin on the occasion of marriage. Dowry is practiced in the Pitarar society in which the bride’s kin gives the gift to the bridegroom or his relatives on the occasion of marriage. Usually in marriage payment, the dowry consists of the golden jewelry, substantial sums of cash, clothes, and luxury items.

The term *varadakshina* is used for dowry among the Pitarar society. At the time of negotiation the amount is fixed. Both the financial and the social status play an important role in fixing the rate. Unlike the other communities in the north Kerala, the amount of dowry is high among the Pitarar.

As Sharma (1987, 341) observes, traditionally dowry in India was regarded as a burden for the bride’s parents but an honour for the bride “Dowry favours and is favoured by a cultural ethos in which brides can be viewed as objects to be passed from one social group to another, both as a means for the procreation of children and as vehicles for aspirations to social prestige”. In the economic spheres unlike men who are money-earner the daughter has no compatibility of earning money. Since among the Pitarar, daughters are given dowry, more money must be spent on their marriages than on their sons. Wealth must be spent on the celebrations for both marriages but the daughter’s dowry constitutes an additional and a huge amount, which is not required for a son’s marriage. It is in this respect, a daughter can be an economic burden and sons are regarded as an economic asset. The number of *santhi*, social status, prestige, status of the family and nowadays, financial status, and education are also considered in the matrimonial alliance to fix a nice amount as
dowry.

In olden days, only the eldest sons were permitted to have veli and beget children among the Pitarars. Younger sons of Pitarar households entered into sambandam - unions with Ambalavasi woman. This paved the way for a large number of young girls without getting married within the caste group. As the women were allowed to marry only within their caste group, the demand for the boys in the matrimonial alliance increased and this demand perhaps led to bargaining. Under such circumstances for a father the critical period in his daughter’s life is to get her married off so as to avoid social ostracism. This might have led to the greater demand for the boys within the community and this demand has continued up to the present day. The bride’s father spends all expenses for the marriage like the wedlock, the feast and arrangement for marriage in the bride’s illam, the dress worn by the bride, the dakshina that was given to the Pitarar males etc. The bride is also given clothes and the articles, which she uses in her daily life for a year. She is provided with the clothes for all the members in her husband’s illam.

Marriage rituals among the Nambuthiris

The marriage ritual of the Nambuthiri Brahmins in Aduthila near Madayi differ from that of the Pitarar eventhough both these communities follow the Baudhyayana rituals. These Nambuthiris form the group Krishna yajurvedis. In the past, their marriage rituals continued for ten days. The main rituals include 1. Veli 2. Vivahadiksha (setting the sacred fire) 3. Nishekam - (observed in fourth day) also called sekam. 4. Panchamehini - observed the next day of the sekam 5. Malachoodal - Observed on the day of panchamehini after the
6. *Dasha Mehini* - It is observed after the Panchamehini and within ten days.

Apart from these, the main rituals comprise the *Vaisyadevam*, *Baudhyayaniya snanam* and elaborate *Dashamehini*, with lots of *kriyas*. The different *kriyas* (which are always a combination of both the *mantric* and *tantric* rites) namely *Krishnayajurvediya Baudhyayana Kriyas* of the Nambuthiris include

1. *Pumsavana* - It is observed by the pregnant woman in her 3rd month of pregnancy. This is observed on Sunday/Tuesday or Thursday and the Zodiac sign of that day should be *Pooyam*.

2. *Nayyjapam* - The pregnant woman is given ghee in the third month and this continues till the fifth month of Pregnancy.

3. *Seemantham* - Carries out after the third month of *Pumsavana*.

4. *Vishnu Bali* - observes on the 8th month of pregnancy in a new moon day.

5. *Jathakarmam* - observes soon after the birth of the child.

6. *Prasavalparam* - If *Pumsavana* or *Seemantham* is not observed during pregnancy then this rite can be carried out on the day of *Jathakarmam* or after the *Jathakarmam*.

7. *Namakaranam* - It is performed after 11 or 12 days after the birth of the child.

8. *Vathilpurappdu* - *(Nishkramsanan)* – It is performed in the 4th month after delivery or can be done at the time of rice - giving ceremony.
9. **Annaprasanam** - (First rice giving ceremony) - done after sixth month of the childbirth.

10. **Chaulam** - (First hair cutting ceremony) – Done at the age of \(3\frac{1}{2}\) years.

11. **Rethusudhi** - Celebrated at the time of first menstruation of the females.

12. **Upanayana** - (Initiation) – It is considered fine if it is performed when the male child is 8 years old.

13. **Samavarthanam** - The most important one is *vedadyana* or the study of Veda in it. Many ceremonies are associated with this.

14. **Vivaham** or **Veli** - Marriage.

15. **Pindam** – Observes on the 11th day of demise.

16. **Shodasham** - Observes on the 41st day of demise.

17. **Sapindi** – Observes by the persons of the same lineage

18. **Sradham** - **Andubali**, observes on the day of demise every year.

**Nayar**

The website www.Nayars.in. cites on the origin of Nayars that;

“It may not be easy to trace out the exact date of the origin of Nayars. It is certain that they belonged to the Dravidian group, not the Aryan. It is believed that in the Aryan society the rulers were Kshatriyas. Chera rulers who ruled over Kerala from AD 130 to AD 1100
were not Kshatriyas. But they belonged to this place. So it can reasonably be presumed that they were Nayars. Greek Ambassador in the court of Chandra Gupta, Megasthenes refers in around 300 BC about the Nayars and the kingdom of Cheras, where there were female sovereigns, in his account of ancient India.

It can be assumed that as a result of the Aryan insurgency to the south the Non-Kshatriyas of Kerala were converted as Kshatriyas. Though the rulers of Venad, Onat (Kayamkulam), Deshinganad, Ilayidathu Swaroopam, Thekkumkur, Vadakkumkur, Kochi, Kozhikode and Kolathumadu were known as Kshatriyas, they were actually Nayars. The profession of the Ksyathriyas was warfare. According to this interpretation, Nayars would seem to be more like Kshatriyas since they were a martial class as well. The rulers of Thekkumkur and Vadakkumkur were saluted as “Naeri”.

The word ‘Nayar’ was authoritatively recorded in the 9th century Thirukodithana (Trikodisthanam) command of Vijayaragadeven. Mention to Nayar was also seen in the Thirunelli Pattayam of Bhaskararavi Varma. There are inferences about ‘PadaNayars’ (warriors) in two stone carvings of Nedumpuram Thali. In the stone wall of Suchindram Dwaraka Temple which belongs to AD 400, it was recorded that ‘Pallikkkan Nayar’ was the temple uralan. During the beginning of the 19th century Nayar became a caste name in Venad. Before that, the word was used to mean “warrior”.

One finds mention of the Nayars during the reign of the King Rama Varma Kulashekhara (1020-1102) of second Chera dynasty, when the Cholas attacked the Chera Kingdom. The Nayars fought by forming suicide squads (Chavers) against the invading
force.

Whatever may be the arguments on the origin of Nayar community, it is an undisputable fact that Nayars were strong group of people having deep-rooted influence over Kerala. No other society had possessed their status or standard. They were deeply immersed with the history and culture of Kerala. Truly speaking, the history of Nayars is indeed the history of Kerala” (ibid).

Kiriyattil Nayars, Illatu Nayars, Swarupattil Nayars, Agattu and Purattu Charna Nayars, Menokki and Pattola Menon, Marar, Padamangalam Nayars, Pallichan Nayars, Vettakad Nayars, Chempukotti Nayars, Otattu Nayars, Edacheri Nayars, Anduran Nayars, Attikurusi Nayars, etc are fourteen subdivisions of Nayars. Otattu Nayars, Chempukotti, Anduran, Pallichan and Vettakad Nayars are non-military classes and intermediate class. They don’t inter dine or intermarriage among these subdivisions, but they are classed among the high caste Sudras on account of their services in temples, which indeed provide them privilege to bathe in the public tanks. Under the head of the low caste sudras are included in the four sub-castes namely Tarakans, Velakkathalavans, Veluthedans, and Chaliyans who pollute the Nayars by touch and as such on this account are classified as low caste sudras. The Velakkathalavans are Professional village barbers and shave Nayars and all castes above them. The Veluthedans are the village washer man and they follow customs precisely similar to those of Nayars. The Chaliyans are the caste of Weavers and they appear to be immigrants from Tamil districts and they keep the original habit in living streets. The Tarakans were originally housekeepers. The primary occupation of the Kadupattans is
teaching. They are also astrologers, physicians, magicians etc. The titles the Nayars affix to their names are Kartha, Kaimel, Kurup, Panikkar, Nayar, Menon, Asan, Mannatiyar etc. The marriage is endogamous and they cannot intermarry between the descendants of any female ancestress. Strict prohibitions are observed in the case of intermarriage between the two persons of the same tarawad or tavazhis (Iyer 1981).

The most desirable bride for a Nayar is his maternal uncle’s daughter. In olden days they practiced two kinds of marriages namely, thalikketukalyanam and sambandham, i.e Tali - tying ceremony and the customary nuptial union of man and woman respectively. The talikketukalyanam is observed for every girl before she attains puberty. Tali - tying is considered as compulsory before she attains maturity. While the sambandham is performed after she come of age and it is considered as real or adult marriage. The Nayars in the northern parts of Kerala checks the compatibility of the horoscope of the girls and boys of their enangans and thus the taliketukkalyanam is performed. In the well - to - do families there is a tali tier for each girl. If the Tirumulpad is the tali tier, he goes through the ceremony for a number of girls and after conducting the ceremony he departs. If the tali tier is a Kshethriya or a young man of the enangu and if he wishes to take her as his wife, he is at liberty to do so with the consent of her parents. He commemorates the sambandham by gifting her with cloth. In the south Malabar and the Cochin state it is generally seen that if the bridegroom wishes he has the right to marry the girl. The tearing off the cloth shows the dissolution of marriage tie. This ritual gives her the liberty to choose any body as her husband. With the tying of tali, the virginity of the girl ceases, and he who brings or takes her to that stage has a right to cohabit with her. The woman observes a sort of pollution for
fifteen days for the death of the man who tied the *tali*, which proves that he is her husband. The *tali* tying ceremony refers to betrothal, and *sambandham* to the real marriage (Iyer 1981).

Even though local variations were seen in the *sambandham* relationship, the general features of the *sambandham* are, to an extent, the same. The checking of the horoscopes, the selection of the auspicious day and hour, the presentation of gifts to the Brahmans are the same ceremonies which were invariably found in the *sambandham* conducted in almost all parts of Kerala. The *sambandham* or *Pudamuri* is not a marriage in the legal or sacramental term. The same ceremony is conducted for the Nambuthiri and Nayar. But the Nambuthiris do not look up to this as marriage. If a Brahmin is a bridegroom he cannot join his sudra wife in the wedding feast. The horoscopes are also not checked. The aristocratic class of Malabar - The Rajas and the Nambuthiris were after the view that the chastity is not one of the duties prescribed for the Nayar community and in order to support these views *slokas* are quoted. *Sambandham* may be terminated at any time from wantonness, caprice or any other reason. In *Pudamuri* the separation occurred without any legal formality on the next day. In the Malabar marriage commission Ninety - one witnesses alleged for the formality of the relationship that parties should not separate without the approval of their Karanavans. Some argued that the woman should not allow the right to divorce as such that the Hindu law does not say that no woman can be independent. The commission which was appointed by Madras government in Malabar enacted a permissive law, Act of IV 1896. The bill put forward that when a *sambandham* has been registered, “it shall have the incidence of legal marriage. The wife and children shall be entitled to maintenance by the husband or father.
respectively and to succeed to half his self-acquired property if he dies intestate, while the parties to such a sambandham cannot register a second one during its continuance. The law does not extend to this state. The fewness of the number of marriage registration points out how little the Nayar community, have availed themselves of it. The principal objections urged against it are 1. that it ignores caste and customary restrictions on marriage and thereby interferes with caste 2. that it sanctions what according to social usage is deemed to be incestuous marriage. 3. that marriage before register is obnoxious to the people, and that no one has any scruples about going through the customary form. 4. that the provisions relating to divorce are ill-adapted to the present state of society in Malabar, and that revelations of conjugal infidelity in public courts are the most repulsive to the people 5. that the provisions relating to the giving of the whole of the self-acquired property to wives and children amount to violent interference with the customary law” (1981, 37).

Life - cycle rituals of Nayars in Kannur

In the third month of pregnancy the husband’s mother/sister if not, sisters in law inform the girl’s parents about her pregnancy. A ritual named pulikudy is conducted in the third month by giving the essence of medicinal plants to drink. Neyseva is done in the 5th month. Ghee is served from the temple. For this ritual, she is brought to her home by her relatives, and she visits the temple accompanied by her in laws. This is sometimes celebrated in a grand manner. In the 7th month of pregnancy the girl who is adorned with ornaments, is taken to her house by her aunts (MBW).

When the child is born, the valayma ends after 14 days. In olden days the house is
cleaned by washing clothes and by smearing cow dung on the floor. After taking bath on the 28th day a thread is tied along the waist of the child and this is done either by the baby’s paternal aunt (FZ) or by grandfather (FF). In the past this ritual is done by babe’s father’s maternal uncle. On the same day, the name giving ceremony is conducted. Grandfather whispers his name in baby’s ears. If the name giving ceremony is not conducted on the 28th day, then it is conducted on the 40th day. Baby’s mother rests in her house for three months.

**Thirandukalyanam** (Puberty Ceremony) - In olden days the puberty ceremony was conducted in a grand manner. The girl is bathed in the pond and she is accompanied by her aunts (MBW) and other relatives. After bathing, the bud inflorescences are beaten in the steps of the pond. A traditional oil lamp and a *niranazhi* are carried. When she returns home, she is adorned with ornaments like a bride and grains are showered on her. Those who visit her give her sweets.

**Kettukalyanam** (Marriage) - Girls who are seven to nine years old undergo this ceremony. It is conducted in the temple in the presence of the Goddess. In this ceremonial marriage, girls are married to their cross cousins.

**Sambandam** is conducted in the night. The Nayar woman who lives in the *veedu* undergoes sexual relationship at her will with the Nambuthiris. But the Nambuthiris do not take any food from the *veedu*. The Nayar women are not allowed to enter inside the *veedu* and they do household task outside the *illam*. In *Pudamurikalyanam*, the boy’s father and the girl’s uncle (MB) tear off the cloth. The marriage function is over after this ceremony.
Marriage - The proposal is initiated from the groom’s side. They come and see the girl. If the horoscope matches, the boy’s party asks the bride’s parents whether they are willing for marriage. After that an informal enquiry is made about the boy’s background and job. They convey their willingness.

On the day of marriage the groom and his relatives go to brides’ house. There the priest does puja to tali. The bride first garlands the groom. Then groom garlands the bride and puts kumkum on the crown of the bride. Tali is tied around the neck of the bride. After the tali rite, the girl is given pudava by the groom and she hands it over to her aunts. Then the bride and the groom circle the pandal. A grand feast is served to the guests. The girl wears the pudava. She takes with her necessary items required for six months like the costumes, hair oils, soaps etc to her husband’s house.


Of the Nambuthiris in Kerala, the Thirumumpus or the Payannur Nambutiris follow *marumakathayam* or matriliny. In quarrel between the Kolathiri and the Perumchellur Brahmins the payyannur *gramam* sided with the former and suffered excommunication at the hands of the latter. Consequently, if the Nambuthirs who did not belong to Payannur married Payannur Women, they have lost caste and also their rights in their family. The Payannur women were, therefore not in a position to go and live with their husbands and had to stay in their own homes with their husbands and children under the care of their brothers (Krishna Iyyer 1938).

The term Ambalavasi is a generic caste name with various divisions or sub-castes whose occupation is temple service in some form or other. They rank below the Brahmins and Kshethriyas, but are above the sudras. They are mainly divided in to two communitites - Those who wear the sacred thread and those who do not wear the sacred thread. The Muttatu, Adikal Chakkiyar, Pushpaka Nambiyar and Thiayi Nambiar wear the sacred
thread. Chakkiyar Nambiar, Variyar, Pisharoti, Puthuval and Marar do not wear the sacred thread. The Adikals officiate as the priests in Bhadrakali temples with the offerings of flesh and liquor. Pitranmar and Pattola Musath also perform priestly service in the same temples. But these three caste groups never inter dine or intermarr. The Illayatus, the Chakkiyars, the Nambiar, the Variyars, the Pisharotis, the Pothuvals, the Marars etc. are considered as sub-caste of Ambalavasis. The Samanthan is a generic name for a group of castes which form the Aristocracy of Malabar. There are several minor divisions among Samanthan i.e Nambiyar, Unithiri, Adiyodi. These three belong to north Malabar. Nedungadi, Vellodi, Eradi, Thirumulpad etc. belongs to south Malabar (Iyer 1981).

**Wifehood, motherhood and widowhood**

Wifehood is considered as a sacrament. It’s a life-long relationship with husband for several births. Wifehood gains more status and respect at the stage of the motherhood. After her puberty the girl has to wait until her marriage to attend sacred rituals, religious functions, to enter the kavu, to use turmeric paste for bathing etc. As a mark of wifehood, the women wear two talis; she also wears kumkum, on her forehead. She is expected to jeweled her with ornaments, usually golden or silver ornaments. A wife is strictly expected to wear two of her - tali (wed locks), when she attends rituals and other programmes, which should not be removed until she became a widow. Tali is never remade or melted away. Since residence is virilocal among the Pitarar, it is generally agnates and their wives who constitute the core of local settlement.
The Pitarar prefer a male child to a female one. It is argued by informants that although a daughter is immensely helpful in domestic tasks, her services are available to the family of procreation only until her marriage, where a son is a life long associate in *puja* and is capable of looking after parents when they grow old and become disable. Efforts are made in getting a daughter married soon after she crosses her eighteen. She is considered an asset to the family in view of her services at home.

According to Rao “It is almost impossible to derive final conclusions and give a uniform picture about a woman’s role and status in Hindu family except theoretically. It needs to be acknowledged at the outset that the literature on Indian history abounds with contradictory and conflicting views on this subject. The term woman is used in a generic sense regardless of the internal differentiation present throughout India based on socio-cultural, demographic and ecological factors. Thus an attempt is made to delineate a general picture of the status and role of woman in broad sense. Any discussion on the status and role of an Indian woman cannot be properly understood except within the socio-cultural context of the joint family, as the true import of role relationships within a family is embedded within a wider context of the kinship system” (Prakasa Roa and Nandini Roa 1985, 173). The wife in a virilocal Pitarar family is expected to be obedient to the husband and other elders. She is not supposed to command her husband and utter his name. Domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and utensils are done by women. Men do not deem all these as derogatory.
A woman is considered unclean during her menstruation period. In olden days she refrained from cooking and serving food for three to seven days after the menstruation, and resumes normal household duties following a bath on the seventh day. She takes food only after the men in the family. Female members usually avoid taking food in the presence of senior male members of the family. Movements of women are restricted.

Widowhood is considered as a curse while the marriage a sacrament a union of two souls and a binding relationship that is life-long. A widow is not allowed to wear *tali*, golden ornaments or any other kind of ornaments. Both the *talis* are removed from the wife at the time of death of her husband; the piece of *tali* is ritually broken and then kept in the mouth of the deceased. Another piece of *tali* is kept in the pit. A widow is not allowed to remarry. Usually she receives a secondary status in the society which limits from several ritual statuses once she enjoyed as a wife.

The widowhood in India, the mental impression of the widowhood is a socially constructed one, which paves the way for social death without having social or sexual identity (Uma Chakravarthi 1995). The cruel treatment of Widows among the Hindus is the result of ancient superstition. The horrible practice of burning alive was banned in 1830. Logic behind the remaining of widow by celibate and chaste to follow an ascetic life-style is that the young widow was seen by the society as sexually dangerous to the dead husband’s lineage where there may be several other male members. That is why a widow is expected by the society to follow such rules (ibid).
In the past the widowhood was treated as a curse, a widow was not allowed inside the temple. Her presences at the auspicious occasions like life-cycle rituals, funeral function and observance of fasting, etc., were considered as a taboo. Even young widow in her teens were forced to observe such evil practices and confine herself to the inner recess of the house.

A widow could not wear saffron on the her forehead, no longer permitted to wear ornaments, to use the cosmetic items, dress herself in silks or brocades, not allowed to wear colour dress and she is forbidden to take part in any amusement or family festivities. According to Dubois (1992, 395) “The happiest death for a woman is that which overtakes her while she is still in a wedded state. Such a death is looked upon as the reward of goodness extending back for many generations. On the other hand, the greatest misfortune that can befall a wife is to survive her husband.” A widow in the Pitarar society is expected to confine herself to the *illam* for a year.

A widow is not permitted to remarry, the fear of turning to an evil spirit after her death refrains her from remarriage. A widow’s appearance at auspicious events was considered an ill omen.

The only silver line among the Pitarar is that they have a claim of maintenance from the property of her late husband. Due to the efforts of social reformers, many evil practices have undergone considerable changes.
Unlike widows, the widowers are not denied the ritual rights nor are they forced to make any strict observance. After the death of the wife, the widower observes *puja*, by abstaining from all celebrations and ritualistic functions for eleven days. After the *puja* his daily routine in the *kavu* continues the same. He enjoys the same ritual status of a married man.

**Talikkettukalyanam or Pre-puberty marriage rite**

For the Pitarar and Ambalavasi, *sambandham* was a contract, a life-long union of two concerned individuals. Divorce was non-permissible for the *sambandham* union. The Pitaran male before entering into *sambandam* had to receive formal permission of the Chirakkal Raja. The Raja was presented with betel leaves, banana etc. The ceremony is celebrated after the Raja solicits his permission.

The Ambalavasi females who had not attained puberty, about the age of seven to twelve years were ritually married from the respective *veedu*. On the day of the *talikkettu*, the girl along with the members of the *veedu* goes to the temple at the time of *abhishekam* to offer her prayers, and it is a must that nobody should see the girl while offering the prayer. At 11 in the morning a *nilavilakku* is lightened. By standing in the front courtyard, wearing *annapudava* and holding *sarathkol* in the hand she stands. A *tali* is tied around the neck of the girl by the *karnavan* (MB). After tying the *tali* she should get inside the *padinhitta*, central room without touching the earth. For this purpose an *avanipalakka* is placed interchangeably five times on her path. By walking on this, she enters into the
padinhitta. On the third day the ritual pantalilirangal begins. The Ambalavasi girl had to observe ceremonies which the Pitarar woman observes at the time of her veli. The ceremonies begin after ending the three days of ritual seclusion, in which the Ambalavasi girl is isolated as if she had menstruated. The pollution lasts for three days. The rituals start after receiving blessings of the elders. The Ambalavasi girl is seated in a wooden plank; she performs the same rangalam ritual which the Pitarar bride observes on her veli. Thereafter she goes through the ritual of designation of amma. Murampidi, pantalilirangal, mullappooparikal, visiting the kavu, receiving the blessing from the elders etc., are the rites associated with the talikettukalyanam of the Ambalavasis.

The tying of the tali among the Ambalavasi was a mere ritual which involves no marital relationship on the participants. Even though tali is a symbol of marriage, she seldom wears it, and the retention of the tali is not at all obligatory. After the ceremony she can handover the tali to her sisters at the time of their talikettukalyanam. The talikettukalyanam initiated for each Ambalavasi girl is a state of marriage. Followed by talikettukalyanam, a menstrual seclusion for three days is made to solemnize the ritual.

Before talikettu ceremony, the permission of the Raja is taken, and he is presented with gifts. If the talikettu is performed after menstruation, then the whole kin group may be excommunicated, punished or paid penalty to Raja. The tali are rarely worn by the girl after the mock marriage ritual. This clearly exhibits the true ceremonial role of this type of ritual. This in fact is a public announcement that the girl is now ready for sambandham. The prepubertal talikettu rite asserts the status of womanhood for the girl. She had to follow the
womanly manners by keeping a distance between the males in her surroundings.

**Sambandham**

*Sambandham* is the word generally used by followers of matriliny in Kerala to refer to marriage. *Sambandham* is a Sanskrit word meaning connection or joining together. Among the Nambuthiri in Kerala only the eldest of the males married within the caste, while the rest looked for partners among the Nayar women. Under the Nayar social custom, obligation including the monetary obligation for the Nayar wives and the children was not on the hands of the husband. Instead the sole responsibility of the family members and the ancestral property was administered by the *karanavan* (MB) of the Nayar woman. The family property of the Nambuthiri was preserved undivided in the hands of the eldest Nambuthiri male. The children of the Nambuthiri-Nayar alliances became part of Nayar families true to matrilineal traditions. The younger Nambuthiri brothers should take their partners from among the lower caste groups like Nayars, the Kshethriyas and the Samantas. Not only is the younger son, the elder son also allowed to have *sambandham* relationship with the women of the other caste groups. It is from 1955 the situation began to change, the Nayar girls were allowed to have their marriage partners within their caste group (Unny 1994). The Kshethriya males too have to go through these ceremonies namely the *tali* tying ceremony and *sambandham*. He is chosen as a bridegroom and invited for the ceremony. He ties the *tali* or the marriage badge around the neck of many girls. Later on, he enjoys the real marriage or *sambandham* with their caste women and other caste groups who are not below the Nayars, like Nambidis, Samanthans, Ambalavasis or Nayars. It should be noted
that this is performed independently and secretly without the Knowledge of his *tarawad* members.

In his book ‘Marriage and Family in Kerala’ Puthenkalam has elaborately described the Marriage among the matrilineals (*sambandham*). He describes *sambandham* as the ‘socially recognized alliance constituting matriliny among matrilineals’. He has described four different forms of *sambandham*—*pudamuri* (tearing of the cloth), *veedaram kayuruka* (entering the house), *Kidakkara Kalyanam* (Bed room ceremony) and *uzhiyam porukkal* (taking his turn) (Puthenkalam 1977). He opines that now the term *vivaham* and *kalyanam* are used instead of the word *sambandham* because of its old association with loose marriage morals. According to him, *Sambandham* is a civil contract, by which a man and a woman surrender their sexual rights to each other. *Sambandham* was not, nor is it; a sacrament like other Hindu marriages. It was not attended by any religious ceremony previously, nor is the present rite essentially different. Not even the growing practice of conducting the marriage in the temple makes it a sacrament. It wasn’t a valid marriage, and neither the polyandrous or polygynous practice prevalent long ago nor the facility of free divorce destroy its true nature as a marriage. The mores of society had tolerated these as accidental contingencies of any marriage. Gough’s definition of marriage “Marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more other person, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of relationship is accorded full birth status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum” (Gough 1959, 32) has been criticized by Puthenkalam (1977, 78) in view of the clause in chapter IX section
(3) of the Nayar Regulation, 1925, where it is said: nothing in this Regulation shall affect the status and rights of children born to parents where the female enters into marriage with the male without notice of and in ignorance of any prior subsisting marriage of the male owing to mistake, misrepresentation or fraud practices on the said female or her guardians as the case may be”. Even though the custom sanctions the relationship the law does not support “Therefore children born to the female who knowingly marries a male who has a wife, becomes illegitimate children and they do not inherit the property of the male. Hence “full birth status common to the members of his society, or social stratum is no more provided to a child born to a woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship” (1977, 78). He also opines on the view of the English lawyers who could not recognize marriage as legal institution because that a sexual union, on which no rights of property or inheritance are founded, terminable at the will of either party and which has subjected at the best to certain conventional restraints among the respectable classes, such as money payment, and the control of the relations could constitute a valid legal marriage. Judgments in the Travancore and Madras High Courts described *sambandham* as no better than recognized concubinages” (ibid, 74). On the *sambandham* Dubois (1906) opines on Nayars whose women has the privilege of possessing several husbands, was found anywhere but in Travancore. Amongst them the *Nambuthiri*, observes one abominable and revolting custom. The girls of this caste are usually married before the age of puberty; but if a girl who has arrived at an age when the signs of the puberty are apparent happens to die before having had intercourse with a man, caste custom rigorously demands that the inanimate corpse of the deceased shall be subjected to a monstrous connexion. For this
purpose the girl’s parents are obliged to procure by a present of money some wretched fellow willing to consummate the family would consider itself dishonoured.

In the Pitarar society only the eldest male member of the family is allowed to marry within the caste while the rest looked for partners among the Ambalavasi woman. A lady who had entered sambandham in the year 1951 was interviewed and an aged Pitaran, who underwent sambandham. Now he is staying with his son who was born from his Ambalavasi wife. The sambandham in both the cases were monogamous, both the Pitaran male and Ambalavasi female had gone through the marriage only once.

Unlike the Nambuthiri-Nayar mode of sambandham, the Pitarar-Ambalavasi sambandham was strictly monogamous. The marital bondage between the Pitarar and the Ambalavasi was stronger than that of Nambuthiri and Nayar.

**Sambandham and related ceremonies**

The younger sons of the Pitarar had to enter into the connubial relationship with the Ambalavasi females. The rituals included in the sambandham are very simple. Betrothal is first done after negotiation. The sole responsibility of matrilineal Ambalavasi veedu was on the shoulders of the karanavan, the MB. He is to administer the property and supervise the religious duties including the marriage of his sisters. The senior male member, by right of birth, becomes the karanavan of the veedu.

The primary stage of proposal starts from the Pitaran side. They enter into a formal
talk with the *karanavar* of the respective *veedu*. The children of both sides do not have any role in the Betrothal. As the *sambandham* is monogamous, legitimate and customary relationship, the Pitarar check the compatibility of the horoscope. If it is compatible, they enter into a mutual understanding and the procedure for the betrothal function is performed after receiving the formal decision of the *karanavan*. The Ambalavasi considered the relationship of the *karanavan* with his nephews and nieces as crucial, and for them his decision was final in the matter related with *sambandham*. An auspicious day and time is fixed by the astrologers on the day of betrothal ceremony for *sambandham*. The discussion marks an end after the feast. Usually the women are not allowed to take part in the discussion.

As per the decision made on the betrothal ceremony, the next part of the ceremony is *dakshina kotukkal* (offering of gift). On the auspicious day and time fixed by the astrologer, the ceremony is arranged in the *padinhitta* (the central room) of the Ambalavasi *veedu*. On the right *muhurtham* (auspicious time) prescribed, the bride is given an amount (3¼ rupees) as *dakshina*, three betel leaves, and three areca nuts by the Pitarar husband. She is adorned with the fine traditional *onnaramundu*, which is not new, but the best one she had. The ceremony marks an end after an elaborate feast in honour of the occasion. The villagers are given beaten paddy. The Pitarar do not take food from the Ambalavasi *veedu*, so the feast is arranged in another nearest *illam* of the Pitarar. The rituals are performed in front of the lightened traditional oil lamp with five wicks.

*Sambandham* ritual is usually performed after sunset. After the ritual, the husband
stays in the wife’s *veedu*. Now he has the right to visit his wife at night. The intake of food from the Ambalavasi *veedu* is strictly prohibited for the Pitaran husband. The husband stays in the wife’s *veedu*, after the dinner at night from his *illam*. In the early morning he returns to his *illam*. The husband presents the wife with regular gifts at the time of festivals. She receives clothes or money as presents. These ritualistic obligations also include the delivery expenses for his wife at the time of delivery. The biological fatherhood of a child was certain.

The wife’s obligation towards her husband and husband’s *illam* included her service relationship in the respective *illam*. After *sambandham*, she is invited to her husband’s *illam* for a few days, where the notion of purity and pollution is in high esteem. She is not allowed to enter the pujaroom or kitchen and to touch the well. Entering these rooms and touching the well by an Ambalavasi is considered as pollution. In this hypergamous union, the Ambalavasi wife had no exclusive rights in her husband’s property. The maintenance for her and her children is on the shoulders of her matrilineal kinsmen. It is the *karanavan* who looks after them. After her service in the respective *illam* she returns to her *veedu* at dusk. The visiting husband comes to the *veedu* after the dusk.

**Sambandham and certain observations**

**Pitarar and Ambalavasi**

*Sambandham* relationship between the Pitarar and Ambalavasi was monogamous, customary and legitimate unions. The *sambandham* relationship between the Nambuthiri
and Nayar is considered unstable and easily dissoluble as the couple enters into a loose relationship that can be dissolved on each other’s will. But here the *sambandham* relationship between Pitarar male and Ambalavasi female was a harmonious, stable and monogamous alliance. The association between the Pitaran and Ambalavasi is limited in and around the *illam* and the sacred grove.

The service relationship of the Ambalavasi with Pitarar extended within the *illam*, the *kavu* and its premises. This includes the collecting of the necessary items related to *puja* like flowers and materials for the daily *puja*. The *puja* articles, plates, vessels, the temple premises are cleaned and washed by them. The Ambalavasis do all these in ritualistic manner which are known as *adichutali*. The *chuttadichutali* is done by using broom. Thus, the Ambalavasi males keep the temple and its premises neat and tidy. Vessels, plates and the other articles of the temple are washed and cleaned by the Ambalavasi females. The main role of the females is to render the necessary physical labour to their respective husband’s *illam*. The duty of the males of the Ambalavasi community also includes preparation of goats during *valiyaratti puja* (sacrifice of goats) and their active participation during the life-cycle rituals in the *illam*.

Thus, the Pitarar and Ambalavasi are interrelated and interdependent in many ways. They are entwined in such a manner that their in depth relationship has paved the way for monogamous life - long unions. Unlike the Nambuthiri-Nayar mode of *sambandham*, the Pitarar husbands gave much importance to their Ambalavasi wives by keeping allegiance only to them. The Ambalavasi wife in turn was also loyal with her Pitarar husband. So here,
we can use the term *sambandham* to indicate the union of one husband and one wife where as in the case of the Nambuthiris and the Nayars the same term *sambandham* was used to denote a multiple liaisons.

*Sambandham* is a hypergamous relationship between the Pitaran male and Ambalavasi female. The relationship between the Ambalavasi male and Pitarar female is not at all permitted. The hypergamous marriage is considered as *anuloma*\(^2\) while the reverse as *pratiloma*. The *anuloma* is accepted while the *pratiloma* is not favoured and prohibited through issuing punishment to the whole kin group, or by eliminating them from the caste group or by cutting off the privilege to daily *puja* and service in the *kavu*.

**Hypergamy and sambandham**

“Polyandry may be a product of a peculiar ecological condition, or peculiar ecological condition may have helped in the development and nourishment of polyandry. But it is at the same time true that a particular type of ecology cannot compel all communities living within it, to adopt identical social trait or institution. It is thus interesting to note that all societies living in the same socio-economic and socio-ecological environment are not polyandrous. Some may be polyandrous but others practice monogamy, of course, polygyny may exist in both with a weak strength.”(Raha 1987, 11). As Raha observed on the Polyandrous marriage, the relationship between the Nambuthiri and Nayar may be due to the particular ecological condition in which only the eldest son was allowed
to enter in the marital relationship and the other younger sons had to seek their partners from the lower caste Nayar group. In the case of the Pitarar also the ‘peculiar ecological condition’ had sometimes led to the development of such kind of *sambandham* relationship which forced the *appans* or younger brothers to enter into the conjugal relationship with the lower caste Ambalavasi woman. The peculiar ecological condition may be (1) the scarcity of suitable grooms for the Ambalavasis within their community (2) the acquired status of the Ambalavasis through the affinal relationship with the Pitarar males (3) The sub-ordinate status of the Ambalavasis in the caste hierarchy, at the same time they were dependent fully on the Pitarar in social, religious and economic aspects.

Kathleen Gough observes “The temple - servant castes - in addition to the Nayars, other aristocratic castes often lived in a village. These were the temple servants nowadays collectively called Ambalavasi” (Gough 1961, 309). The Ambalavasi referred to above by Gough means the temple service caste comprising Varrier, Marar, Pisharodi, etc. Here it should be noted that Ambalavasi pointed out by Gough is not the group of Ambalavasi mentioned in this study. The Ambalavasis in these villages exist as a separate caste group.

Now the *sambandham* or the hypergamy is not at all observed among the Pitarar and Ambalavasi. The system of *sambandham* has changed a lot. The Pitarar males, both the younger and elder brothers, seek their bride within the caste group. Likewise, the Ambalavasi females are married by the Ambalavasis within their caste group. The older generation remembers the old customs and rituals.
Divorce

Divorce is a rare thing among the Pitarar. The conservative approach for the Indians towards the marriage and parenthood in different classes of the society rather limits experimentation through the arranged marriages (Beteille 2005). The holy matrimonial everlasting binding relationship with several religious sacraments accompanied by vows and promises to each other is the peculiar feature of Pitarar marriage. This union, they believe, continues even after several births.

The causes of divorce in non-western societies run the gamut from infertility and adultery to quarrelling and failure to live up to expected roles (a lazy wife, an improvident husband). Divorce may be highly formalized, or it may be just a matter of one partner ordering the other out or giving public notice that the union is over (Singh 1986). For the Pitarar veli was a life long contract which was unbreakable, the Pitarar society considered breaking it as sinful, but today there are a few cases of divorce due to extreme torture of the husband and his kin. Usually the dowry accepted as cash and ornaments are returned in the case of divorce.

In olden days, the divorce didn’t exist for veli as well as sambandham. However, these indissoluble unions were allowed to break for males with the prior permission of the Chirakkal Raja, if the wife was found to be having illicit relationship with other men, and if she is found infertile etc. Hence, after dissolving the existing relationship, he was allowed to marry another woman. The divorced woman was taken back to her illam and she was not allowed for a second marriage.
The social and economic process of the society is mainly reflected in the process of divorce (Howard 1983). The women often complain about alcoholism, lack of economic support, problems with in-laws, etc. The main reason for the divorce is domestic violence. The Pitarar women are allowed to divorce. Due to the implementation of laws, a lot of changes emerged in the divorce rules.

Certain conditions were put forward for the judicial separation like suffering of another party from leprosy or any other infectious disease, mental imbalance of either party, extra marital relationship of the spouse etc. The wedding procession marks the end of the marriage in many communities. The reason behind the large number of invitees is that it makes impossible to dissolve the marriage even if the groom tempted to do so. The wedding procession in the last day of the marriage let know every one that they are married couple (Ayyer 1992, 46).
Interpretation of sambandham

The conventional marriage sometimes generally referred to as *sambandham* is very much written about by the earlier travelers, historians and anthropologists. Interpretation of this is mainly found in the works of Kathleen Gough. She has discussed much on matriliny and *sambandham*. She drew a different definition after studying Nayar marriage. She found that the definition on marriage in Notes and Quarries in Anthropology would not fit in to the definition on Nayar marriage. Her definition on marriage is as follows:

“Marriage is a relationship between a woman and one or more other persons which provides that a child born to the woman, under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, shall be accorded full birth status, rights in his society or social stratum” (Gough 1959, 32).

Gough views Nayar marriages as the slenderest ties. She calls the institution of *sambandham* of Nayar as the institution of marriage by pointing out that *sambandham* served to legitimize the children (both *tali* rite and *sambandham*), (1) conferred several and procreative powers upon the girl, (2) took the sexual rights in a girl away from her matrilineal kinsmen and (3) transferred the sexual except the procreative rights in the girl to a representative of her caste.

Gough mentions that the *tali* tying ceremony in which the girls who had not attained puberty and belonged to one generation within a common lineage were married to the men from their *enanger* lineages. On the fourth day of the ceremony, the bridegroom tore the
lower cloth of the girl into two and thus ending the ceremony.

The *tali* tying rite is known as *talikettukalyanam* or *kettukalyanam*. According to Menon “the term *talikettukalyanam* is a compound of the three words, viz, *tali* (a badge), *kettu* (tying), and *kalyanam* (marriage). *Tali* tying was performed on a girl or a batch of girls between the ages 11 and 13. The *tali* tier belonged to either to the same caste or to a superior caste. The celebration of the ritual was accompanied by much pomp and display. There were processions of caprisoned elephants; *chenda melam* etc., in connection with the celebrations which lasted for four days and much well earned money was wasted. The assumption was that with *tali* tying the girl becomes an eligible bride. The *tali* tier had no special claim to matrimony with the girl. He left at the end of the ceremony almost unhonoured. In fact the *talikettu kalyanam*, was a mock or sham marriage, though several foreign and even some native writers have mistaken it for marriage. The essential item in real marriage was not *tali* tying but the presentation of cloth (*pudavakoda*) by the husband and this latter event took place in due course. With the spread of liberal education, public opinion crystallized itself against the continuance of *talikettukalyanam* which involved many a family in debt and therefore in course of time it became defunct. With the disappearance of *talikketukalyanam* the tying of the *tali* has of late become as much an integral part of the marriage ceremony among the Nayars and as such other castes as presentation of *pudava* or cloth” (Sreedhara Menon 1979, 97).

He further observes on the prescribed and prohibited degree of marriage that “all the caste and communities’ marriage between near blood relations is taboo. The Brahmin
marriages are endogamous, no inter-marriage being permitted between the different gotrams. The Nambuthiris have strictly avoided matrimonial relationship between those related to each other through father and mother. Among Tamil Brahmins marriage with the daughter of a maternal uncle or paternal aunt is not only permitted but even claimed as a matter of right. Marriage with sister’s daughter is not uncommon among them. The Nayars do not permit this kind of marriage. The children of brothers and sisters enter in to matrimonial relations among Nayars. The paternal aunt’s or Maternal uncle’s daughter is murapennu for the boy. Children of sisters do not inter marry among the Nayars. Nor do the children of brothers. The hill tribes also observe certain restrictions based on prohibited degrees of consanguinity. The marriage of cross-cousins is common among them as it helps to keep families intact. Among several tribes it is customary to marry the murapennu” (ibid 98).

The Nayar women welcomed Brahman or Nayar visitors of appropriate rank. Again Gough clearly defines “The relationship with the visiting husband was called sambandham (Sanskrit, “joining together”). At the start of a girls’ first sambandham her husband came to her house privately at night, sometimes with a few friends of his own lineage. In the presence of the girl’s kin he presented her with a white cloth of the kind worn as a skirt. The occasion was not marked by feasting. Later husbands might or might not present the cloth. A transient visitor is said to have left a gold coin beneath the woman’s pillow, and a regular husband might do the same on the first night of his union (Gough 1960). The secrecy of this relationship is well indicated in the above statement.
Here the Pitarar mode of *sambandham* differs from the above mentioned Nayar mode of *sambandham* relationship. For the Pitarar the *sambandham* with matrilineal Ambalavasi female is monogamous, legitimate customary relation that is life long and arranged after negotiation. The younger sons of the Pitarar were not allowed to enter into a marital bonding named *veli*, which was enjoyed only by the eldest son of the family. In the *veli* system of marriage, the elder son married the woman within his caste group, while the younger brothers married the women of the Ambalavasi caste group. This relationship between the Pitarar male and Ambalavasi female is called *sambandham*. It will be noted that divorce was not allowed in the Pitarar Ambalavasi relationship.

Regarding the *tali* rite, Gough points out that “After *tali* rite and shortly before or after puberty, a woman might enter into a number of sexual relationships with men of her local caste group or of an appropriate higher caste. Similarly, a Nayar might visit a number of wives of his own or an appropriate lower Nayar caste” (Gough 1959). She justifies by calling Nayar “marriage” as an institution because (1) this system limited and regulated sexual relationships and (2) legitimized the children born out of the union. The necessity of both the *tali* and the *sambandham* were directed toward these ends (Gough 1959). The *anuloma* form was encouraged by both the Ambalavasi and Nayar case. As mentioned earlier, the Nayar women entered into relationship with the Nambuthiri, Nayar, or by men standing on the “appropriate rank” and the Nayar men with his wives of his own or “appropriate” lower Nayar caste women. The *pratiloma* marriage was absent.

Puthenkalam has gathered summary from the opinions of sociologists on the
meaning of *tali* rite. 1. It is a real marriage - M.D. Raghavan and Achuyutha Menon, 2. It is analogous to the consecration of *devadasis* (temple prostitutes) in the east coast - Thurston. 3. It was a relic of pre-nuptial defloration - Westermarck. 4. It was a ceremony signifying group marriage - Kathleen Gough. 5. It was an institution rite – Aiyappan (Puthenkalam 1977, 48).

**Sambandham** (Pitarar-Ambalavasi)

In the Matrilineal Ambalavasi family, the power was vested on the uncle’s hand (i.e. Mother’s brother, most importantly the elder brother) known as *karanavan*. His word is final in the matters regarding the *veedu*. He is the ultimate decision maker (This situation can be clearly seen in the above mentioned Nayar studies).

The residence of the Matrilineal Ambalavasi joint family is known as *veedu*. Before marriage *talikettukalyanam* is conducted by the *karanavan*. The *talikettukalyanam* is a kind of initiation for girl to womanhood. A *tali* is a symbol of marriage which even today the South Indian women ties around their neck. Every girl in a *veedu* before attaining their puberty is tied a *tali* around their neck. This ritual marriage was done by making them to observe the taboos as if they were menstruated and they were secluded for three days. The *talikettukalyanam* is a formal announcement that the girl is now ready for marriage. The Ambalavasi considered it as an honor to have *sambandham* with the higher caste Pitarar. The Pitarar take the initiation and the *karanavan* discusses this with the other members of the family and his lineage. But the girl had no role in the decision making. After checking the Horoscope and if it matches well, the date and time of the *sambandham* is fixed. Only
males participate in the betrothal ceremony. Here, one thing to be noted is that betrothal is
done only after checking the compatibility of the Horoscope. Negotiation is done for a life
long monogamous marital liaison. The Ambalavasis are the caste group around the Pitaran
settlement who had hypergamous unions with the patrilineal Pitaran. In the Pitaran
patrilineal extended family, only the eldest son was permitted to marry as per the rites with
the member of his caste group and to beget children for his family. The younger sons in the
Pitaran family had recognized liaisons with women of the matrilineal Ambalavasi caste
group, whose offspring belonged to their mother’s caste and obtain the lineage by
matrilineal descent. These hypergamous unions were of course recognized by the Pitarar
society. The Pitaran accepted this relationship as socially connubial unions but as these ties
followed no vedic rituals. The offspring born out of this connubial relationship were not
considered as the legitimate offspring of the Pitaran, but children were regarded as the
offspring of the woman’s matrilineal Ambalavasi group. They were also not accorded the
rights and status of the Pitarars kin group.

At the time of field work, I came across only one Ambalavasi female engaged in
sambandham, who is now a widow. She told that her sambandham took place at night. The
four sthanikar or the illakkar Pitarar attended the sambandham. Her Pitaran husband gave
her dakshina. He worked in a hotel at Selam. Later on he came back and continued his
tradition as santhi. After her delivery, she was paid her expenses by him. He also met the
expenses of his children’s education. Apart from the female Ambalavasi woman, a Pitaran
widower who had engaged in sambandham (He crossed 85 years) was also interviewed. He
is now staying with his children born out of his Ambalavasi wife.
Gough’s notion of Nayar hypergamy fits well in the notion of the Pitarar hypergamy i.e., the Ambalavasi Pitarar unions in many ways. Gough describes that “If a Nambuthiri’s eldest son remained childless; the second son might marry a Nambuthiri woman and beget children for his family. Unmarried Nambuthiri woman, of whom there were many, remained in their natal homes and were maintained by their fathers and brothers. The eldest son of Nambuthiri house might however have several Brahman wives (who lived patrilocally with him) and also several Nayar partners whom he visited in their homes. Nambuthiri younger sons lived and ate in their natal households, headship of which passed from the eldest son down the line of brothers and then dropped to the next generation. In this way the Nambuthiri family was prevented from splitting in to segments and was enabled to maintain its ancestral estate intact over many generations. If in any generation a family had no son, succession was ensured by the adoption of a daughters husband or of a man related through some cognatic tie” (Gough 1961, 320).

In the case of the Pitaran, if the eldest son has no male issues, then he is allowed to undergo veli with another Pitaran woman with the consent of his first wife. In case, if in any generation in the Pitaran family had no son, the younger sons who under went sambandham with the Ambalavasi woman is forced to have veli so as to perpetuate the lineage through the male issues. If the first wife is an Ambalavasi, then she does not acquire the same status like that of the second wife, while if the first and second wives are from Pitaran community then both of them acquire equal status and then veli took place after the consent of the first wife.
According to Gough Marriages were hypergamous in royal lineages of Cochin. The Royal women married only Nambuthiris of the highest wealthiest sub-castes. In Calicut women married either Nambuthiris or the feudatory princes of higher rank while the Royal men married women of the same or lower matrilineal groups. Same case was among the Cochin and Walluvanad Kingdoms. For Nayar chiefly lineage like the royalty married only hypergamously. Pishoradi, Variyar, Poduval and Nambiar caste group married Nambuthiris while Nayar retainers and Nayar temple menials were usually married between persons of the same caste. Gough remarks that “the hypergamy of the Nayar office-bearing lineages fitted their gradual social mobility and lack of rank parity with each other” (ibid, 322).

The hypergamous marriages carried few obligations as in the case of all the Nayar marriages. Gough asserts that they (the Nambuthiris) gave him (the king) the right to protect their temples and to use their temples and to use the Nayar retainers in war, on receipt of a fine for any personal inconvenience they had suffered. They (Nambuthiri) obviously needed the ruler’s military protection of their religious and landed rights. The rulers in turn needed the Brahmins, for the whole social system was sanctioned by religious beliefs of which they were the chief exponents. Marriages at all levels between the religious and secular hierarchies pointed up this interdependence. The interdependence of the different communities also leads to the hypergamous unions (Gough 1961, 309). What Gough had called some caste groups collectively ‘Ambalavasis’ is different in the case of the Ambalavasis in the Madayi as they come under the single caste group called ‘Ambalavasis’. Ambalavasis in the Madayi, as a separate caste group are not at all related with the Ambalavasi which Gough had mentioned here. With Ambalavasis the Pitarar were
religiously and customarily inter-related. In olden days the Pitarar lived in the *nalukketu* and *ettukkettu*. Apart from the Pitarar, the Ambalavasis also lived in the *nalukketu* and *ettukkettu*. Remains of a large Ambalavasi *ettukkettu* was found in the settlement. In the past more than 85 members stayed there.

As the website [www.Nayar.in](http://www.Nayar.in) cites

“Though Brahmmins considered *Sambandham* as one of the 64 *Anacharams* (social do-nots), this type of alliance existed for centuries. Gradually *Sambandham* became common within Nayar community also”. It continues “*Sambandham* relates to Nayar marriage. It is known so in South Malabar, Kozhikode, Ponnani, Kochi and in some parts of Travancore. The Sanskit words like *Sambandham* and *Bandhavam* came to common use after the Aryan domination. In earlier days marriage denoted the grand function organised on the eve of *Thalikettu*. The marriage among Nayars was usually called as *Pudavakoda, Pudakamuri, Uzham Porukkal* etc. Sambandham was known as *Pudamuri, Uzhamporukkuka and Vidaram Kayaruka* in North Malabar; *Gunadhosham* in South Malabar and *Kidakka Kalyanam* in certain areas of Palakkad. The functions related to this were very simple. The bridegroom arrives in the bride’s residence on the appointed day along with his near relatives. The bride’s brother will wash the feet of the bridegroom and then he enters the *padinjatta* (main room of the house) and gave four or eight cloths, betel wine and areca nut to the bride. After food, the bride’s aunt leads the groom and bride to the *Maniyara* (room for the married couple). The groom will leave to his residence the next day or after one or two days. When he comes with his friends for the second time, the bride
also will be taken to the groom’s residence either by himself or by the women of his family.

It is interesting to note that the functions like *Thalikettu* (tying thali-gold ornament around bride’s neck) *Mothiram aniyal* (exchange of rings) and garlanding were not there in *Pudavakoda*. Those attending the functions will be less than twenty. The person who gave the *pudava* was known as *Gunadoshakkaran*.

Gough remarks visiting husband came to the house of his wife after eating supper from his *illam*, and left the house early in the morning. He placed his weapons outside his wife’s door as a sign to other men that he was within (Gough 1961). Gough asserts “The relationship with the visiting husband was called *Sambadham* (Sanskrit “joining together”). At the start of a girl’s first *sambandham* her husband came to her house privately at night, sometimes with a few friends of his own age. In the presence of the girls kin he presented her with a white cloth of the kind worn as a skirt” (Gough 1961, 359). A woman had no obligations to her husbands other than the granting of sexual privileges. Nayar husbands of the woman’s own caste occasionally dined in her household. But the Brahmin husbands did not dine in the Nayar woman’s household. In an autobiographical fragment published by Devaki Nilayangod (2003) has given an account of the Polyandrous *sambandham* of the Nambuthiris. The *aphans* who had undergone *sambandham* brought their wives to the *Mathams* in the *illam*. As the presence of these wives was considered to cause pollution in *illam* they stayed and dined in this separate *Matham*. They were also arranged separate cooks. But the *thamburattis* of the royal lineages of the *kovilakam* were not interested in visiting their husband’s *illam*. 
Thurston (1909) says that if the existing relationship breaks out of incompatibility of anger, aversion, caprice, or any of the thousand vexations by which from the frailty of the domestic happiness is likely to be disturbed, both the woman and the man seeks another mate. The attachment of paternity remains the same as else where, too strong to be shaken off and that the uninfluenced and uninterested union of love. The love that formed in youth lasts even in the old age.

To denote sambandham different terms are used in different parts of Kerala namely gunadosham in South and North Malabar, pudamuri or vastradanam in South Malabar, uzhamporukkuka and vidaram kairuga in North Malabar and the kidakkora kalyanam in Palghat and some parts of Nedunganad. The Kshethriyas are married off before or after puberty. The tali - tying ceremony and the sambandham has been practiced among them. Tali tying ceremony is known as talikettukalyanam or thrithalicharthal. The Brahman ties tali and he acts as pseudo bridegroom for other girls in the same family, but he should tie tali for only one girl at a time. It is conducted without taking in to consideration of the gotra of the bridegroom. The compatibility of the horoscopes is not checked either. The tali - tying is not the real marriage. It is a kind of licensing ceremony. This ceremony brings a title to the girl or certificate of fitness to contract conjugal relationship. It is a ceremony performed prior to sambandham. Only the four classes of Brahmins namely Nambuthiri, Arya Patters, Patters or east coast Brahmins, or the Brahmins of Canara or from the girls of own caste people who are not related by pulla or pollution are allowed to do so. In the noble Kshethriya houses only the Nambuthiri males are allowed to enter in to the sambandham with their ladies. The sambandham is performed secretly in the calm silence of the night in
the maiden’s bed chamber. Sanction is obtained from the elder members like the Karanavan and others. The sambandham affairs are considered as open family secrets. But the husbands of the women and the wives and children of the male members are accorded preferential treatment in the house. At times the tali - tier and the person who is performed sambandham may be the same. The Kshethriya males too have to go through these ceremonies namely the tali tying ceremony and sambandham. He is chosen as a bridegroom and invited for the ceremony. He ties the tali or the marriage badge around the neck of many girls. Later on, he enjoys the real marriage or sambandham with their caste women and other caste groups who are not below the Nayars, like Nambidis, Samanthans, Ambalavasis or Nayars. It should be noted that this is performed independently and secretly without the Knowledge of his tarawad members (Iyer 1981). The Nayars have practiced both fraternal and non-fraternal polyandry. The fraternal polyandry was practiced in South Kerala, while the non-fraternal polyandry was practiced in north – Kerala. Apart from the Nayars the Thiyyas of Malabar and the Kammalas also followed this system. The main explanation given for the practice of fraternal polyandry was that it prevented the partition of the family property. The matrimonial relationship benefited with the minimum investment.

It has become very clear that the meaning of the word sambandham in respect of Pitarar-Ambalavasi is different from the meaning given to it by Gough for the Nambuthiri-Nayar relationship (sambandham). The word sambandham has thus become a common word or usage in Malayalam language for many castes in Kerala irrespective of their caste hierarchy. Thus, the word sambandham has acquired a hidden or inner meaning particularly
with respect to the secret sexual relationship of the Nambuthiri men with Nayar women and this often leads to multiple sexual unions connecting many Nambuthiris with Nayar woman through *sambandham*. Of course, Nambuthiri - Nayar *sambandham* is nothing but the result of the hypergamous unions. People of Kerala have accepted it as an institution and though it is not equivalent to marriage, it is an important aspect of marriage among Nayar and as such defined by Gough as an institution.

Among the Pitarar-Ambalavasis *sambandham* is an institution equivalent to marriage since it is permanent and monogamous, recognized by both castes (Pitarar-Ambalavasis) and accepted with customary rights and obligations including standardized code of conduct among the *veedus* involved. *Sambandham* among the Pitarar-Ambalavasis is solemnized through a ritual ceremony involving families of both castes unlike the Nambuthiri-Nayar *sambadham* where the relationship (sexual union) lasted only for the night and continued in the nights secretly.

The Travancore Nayar Act of 1912 granted half the self acquired property of the male to his sons, while the other half to his nephews. The Nayar Act of 1925 provided for the partition of Nayar *Tarawads*. Share was calculated per capita and it deprived the nephews of all claims to the properties of their uncles. Similiar legislation was made in the case of Nanjanad Vellalas and the Ezhavas. The Nayar Act of 1925 prohibited polygamy. In Cochin the Nayar regulation Act of 1919-1920 imposed restriction of the powers of the *karanavan*. This act prohibited polygamy and legalized customary marriages and made all husbands including non-Nayars legally responsible for the maintenance of their Nayar
wives and children. The Cochin Nayar act (1937-1938) made the wives and children of a husband or father the legal heirs to his property\(^3\). In Malabar the acts which brought about the transition of the patriliney i.e. Patrilineal law of inheritance are the Madras Marumakkathayam Act (1933), Moplah Marumakkathayam Act and the Madras Nambuthiri Act (1933) etc. The Madras Nambuthiri act conferred on all the Nambuthiris the right to marry from within their own caste and children of all such marriages became legal heirs of property. In 1956 the Hindu succession Act was passed which provided the Hindu men and women equal right to inherit property and monogamy became compulsory for them. The Malabar Marriage Commission of 1894 stated that polyandry existed till the third quarter of the 19th century. In south Kerala fraternal polyandry persisted till recent times. The spread of English education made this uncivilized customs slowly given up (Sreedhara Menon 1979).

**Foot Notes**

1. One of the informants told that it was a matter of prestige in having so many *sambandakaran*. While quarrelling with each other they used to boast that they had so many *sambandakaran* and challenged one another.

2. *Anuloma* (with the hair) this is considered as best, *Pratiloma* (against the hair). This is considered as worst, but the texts give recognition for this hypergamous union.

3. Basham states “In the early days of the Chera kingdom of Kerala inheritance was through the male line but about the twelfth century a matrilineal system became regular, according
to which the heir to the throne was the son not of the king, but of his eldest sister. This
system, called Marumakkathayam, continued in Cochin and Travancore until very recent
times, both for royal succession and the inheritance of estates. Perhaps it existed in Kerala at
an early period, but was dropped by the upper classes for a while under Brahmanical
influence, to be revived in the course of centuries” (Bhasham, A.L. 1967. The Wonder that
was India. Calcutta).