

THE NANCHINAD VELALAS.*

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THE Taluqs of Thovala and Agasteeswaram in the Southern Division of Travancore form the tract of country known as Nanchinâd. A mystery hangs over the origin of this name and no definite conclusion has yet been arrived at as to its real meaning by scholars, who have incidentally taken up the subject for discussion in their writings. Some believing the tradition of the Kurava chieftains think that the land is so called after Nanchikurava, the greatest of the Kurava line of kings who ruled over that country in former days. This view is challenged by others who hold that Nanchikurava owed his name to the country and not the country to him. According to these critics *Nānchinâd* (நன்செய்+நாடு or நாஞ்சில்+நாடு) means the land of paddy-fields or the country of the ploughshare where paddy cultivation is largely carried on. A third class of writers refute all the etymologies given above and try to connect the name Nanchinad with Nānchil meaning bastions or forts. They in support of this view point to the natural barriers fortifying the land on all sides. The details of the genesis of this word need not detain us any longer. We are more anxious to trace the ancestry of the Nanchinad Vêlâlâs and no amount of time and labour spent in that attempt would be considered too much at the present moment. The history of the Nanchinadians is yet to be written and even the materials for the same remain to be gathered. The accounts given in the *Travancore State Manual* and the *Travancore Census Report* for 1901 are meagre; and most of the facts therein mentioned are based on the slender, if not totally unreliable, evidence of persons who have had no historical spirit in them. Tradition, grand-mother's story, street-talk, hearsay, guess and conjecture are given undue importance in the works mentioned above and no endeavour seems to have been ever made to filter and boil them down before distributing their essence for general consumption.

Who are the Nanchinadians? In answer to this query two conflicting theories have been advanced. They may be styled the Nair-origin theory and the Pandy-origin or immigration theory. The supporters of the former are led to their conclusion by the apparent

* In the preparation of this paper I have received much help from Mr. M. Soobramonia Pillai of Therur, South Travancore.

similitudes found between these people and the Nairs in respect of the custom of wearing the front-tuft, of giving widows in remarriage, and of following the Marumakkathayam law of inheritance. It may be shewn that this view is entirely wrong and is based on very insufficient data. The mode of wearing the tuft is an unstable one and cannot be looked upon as a sure index of the community to which a person belongs. To a very great extent one is guided in this matter by the custom or fashion obtaining among his neighbours. There are a good number of Makkathayam Vêlâls in North Travancore who wear the front-tuft as their Nair friends amidst whom they live. Shall they on this account be called Nairs? These arguments apart the Nanchinadian does not as a class wear the front-tuft. The statues and busts found of the ancient Nanchinadians in the temples and mutts all over Nanchinad tell a different tale in regard to this point. In them we see men with long hair done into a knot just at the crown of their head. The manner, too, in which the Nanchinadian women dress their hair closely resembles that of their sisters in the East Coast. They wear their hair parted in the middle and gather it up in a chignon behind and not in front as is the fashion with the Nair ladies. The widowed among them have a quite different mode of tying up the hair. Thus we see that one of the arguments on which the Nair-origin theory rests has fallen to the ground. Now as to widow-remarriage and the Marumakkathayam law of succession of the Nanchinadians, I have to add that these are only later adoptions made after their entry into Nanchinad. The question will be discussed fully in connection with the examination of the rival theory referred to above.

The upholders of this latter theory establish close affinity between the Nanchinadians and the Pandi Vêlâls on the following grounds.

1. *Tradition of immigration*—A tradition is current among the people of Nanchinad that several families of the Vêlâls were invited from Madura, Tinnevely and other Tamil districts of the East coast to settle down in Nanchinad in order that their services might be utilised for account-keeping in the Civil and Military departments of the ancient Chera kingdom.

2. *Existence of distant relatives and of tutelary deities in the Tamil districts even to this day*—The majority of the Nanchinadians have their ancestral family temples in the districts of Madura and

Tinnevely. There are also many an old family both in Nanchinad and the above districts, claiming mutual relationship.

3. *Language.* The home language of the Nanchinadians like that of the other Vêlalas is Tamil.

4. *Village System.* The Nanchinadians have a village organisation of their own. Each village has a common temple and a common fund. The chieftains of the villages were once all powerful. These circumstances remind us of the Village constitutions of the Pandi Vêlalas of the East Coast.

5. *Religious System.* The Nanchinadians are all Saivites. Their high priest is called the Gurukkal. Ammankodai is their most important religious festival. Devil-dancing is even now very common among them. Ancestral worship is kept up every year in almost all the house-holds. To whom can we trace these customs except to the Tamil Vêlalas?

6. *Personal names.* All the names of the Nanchinadians are those current among the Tamilians while many of them are quite unknown among the Nayars, e. g., Kuttalalingam, Subramanian, Muthuswamy, Ponnampalam etc., among males, and Sivakami, Kanti-mathi, Valli, Thaivana etc., among females.

7. *Dress and personal Decoration.* The dress and ornaments of the Nanchinadians especially of the female members bear the closest resemblance to those of the Vêlala community living beyond the Ghats.

8. *Marriage and funeral rites.* The Nanchinadian weddings agree in all respects with those of the Makkathayam Velalas and the right of performing the funeral ceremonies is vested in the son as among the latter.

9. *Ukanthudamai, and Nankulamai.* These are proprietary rights peculiar to the Nanchinadians alone, being enjoyed by no other Marunakkathayam community and point to their once following the Makkathayam law of inheritance.

10. *Intermarriage and interdining with the Pandi Vêlalas.* Marriage alliance between the Nanchinadians and the Pandi Velalas are not quite unknown. Members of the two communities freely interdine with one another without any fear of their being ostracised by their caste men.

These are some of the important arguments urged in support of the Pandi-origin of the Nanchinadians. Let us now weigh them one by one and find out their value in the settlement of this racial question.

1. *Tradition of Immigration*:—A close examination of the institutions, customs, manners, dress, ornaments, architecture, language etc., of the Nanchinadians will not fail to convince even a very superficial observer that the original home of the people of Nanchinad should be sought for in the neighbouring kingdoms of Pandia or Chola. Ancient inscriptions on the walls of temples and on rocks throughout the country strongly bear out the above fact. The tradition of the Nanchikuravas, too, can not but throw some light on it. Scholars have not failed to take note of this particular and press the same into service in their literary works. In *Manōnmantya* the late Professor P. Sundaram Pillai makes Nanchinad the subject of a war between Manōnman's father (a Pandia King) and the hero Purushothama of the Chera house—the former claiming the land solely on the grounds we have cited a little before. Mr. E. Thurston in his valuable work '*The Castes and Tribes of Southern India*' says that 'the Nanchinad Velalas were not originally different from their Pandian analogues, but settled in the taluqs above mentioned (Thovala and Agasteeswarain), over which the Pandians held sway during several periods in mediæval times.' He gives 824 A. D. as the probable date of this important event in the history of the Nanchinad Velalas.

The Nanchinadians are well known for their skill in ciphering and for a long time the accountant branch of the Travancore State service was recruited from this community alone. As symbolic of their mathematical training the Nanchinadian bridegroom is to this day presented with, among other things, an iron-writing style and knife by the bride's party. The Tamil notation or system of signs for representing fractional parts and the peculiar table of square measure by means of which the areas of rice-fields are indicated in the old Ayacut records of Nanchinad immensely warrant our inference that the Nanchinadians had their ancestral homes somewhere in the Pandia or Chola country. The words *Kāni*, *Aramā*, *Orumā* etc., have no existence at all in the early accounts of the Nairs of the West Coast and were introduced into Nanchinad and other parts of the West Coast only after the advent of the Nanchinadians. Again the author of the *Kunnimakumari Schalapuram* in his description of the country in the first chapter includes Nanchinad in the Pandian Kingdom. The Travancore history also bears ample testimony to this fact.

2. *Existence of relatives and of family deities in the Tamil districts even at the present day*. Apart from what we have stated above we have other evidences which command acceptance at once.

Many a Nanchinadian of the present day has his ancestral *Sastha* temples located in the villages of Tinnevely, Madura and other Tamil districts and annual pilgrimages to them are even now kept up by the respective families. This pious tour gives the present day Nanchinadian an opportunity of meeting his distant relatives in the land of his fore-fathers.

All these facts are no doubt traceable to the Pandi-origin of the Nanchinadians and to their early immigration into Nanchinad.

Now come the difficult questions:—When did the Nanchinadians change their law of inheritance? What were the circumstances that led to it? How did remarriage find a place among their institutions?

In the absence of a regular history of this interesting people we cannot but try to get some grains of truth by a rigorous sifting of traditional accounts current among them. A tradition exists that during the reign of the Kurava chieftains the people ashamed to have Kuravas as their lords went over in a body to the Travancore camp, sought protection under the present ruling dynasty of Travancore and also adopted the Marumakkathayam law of their new Royal master as a token of loyalty and submission. There is also another version of the story to the effect that a certain prince of the Chera house persuaded, if not compelled, the new Velala immigrants of Nanchinad to accept the Marumakkathayam law of Malabar lest they might return to their native homes. Probably this tradition has been fashioned on the model of Parasurama's as regards the early colonisation of Malabar. The inference to be drawn from the above is that the Nanchinadians changed their law of inheritance either by force or of their own accord under the rule of a particular sovereign of the Chera line. Perhaps, this may appear strange and unnatural to many who think that in the progress of evolution the Matriarchal system should precede and not follow, as it does in the present case, the Patriarchal. But one should hesitate to subscribe to this view as the Nanchinadians have evidently not been left to themselves to work out their social evolution but subjected to external compulsion. We quote below what the author of the *Travancore State Manual* says on this point:—"Evidences as to whether the Nanchinadians were Makkathayees:—The purohits of Pandi Velalas and Nanjinadu Velalas are Makkathayees. The language, ornaments, marriage and funeral obsequies of the Nanjinadu Velalas are those of the Makkathayees. Though many

of the Nanjinadu Velalas became Marumakkathayees, several of them and all the people of the other castes are Makkathayees. This establishes the fact that the Nanjinadians were originally Makkathayees". The circumstances which led the Nanchinadians to change their law of inheritance are given as follows:— "There was once a dispute as to the sovereignty of Nanjinad between the Pandyan and the Travancore kings. It was contended by the Pandian kings that the whole of Nanjinad was under his sway that a dam that had been constructed across the Paraliar with feeding channels for irrigating the paddy fields, went by the name of Pandian Anai in memory of the king who constructed it, that the king of Travancore and his subjects were Marumakkathayees, that the inhabitants of Nanjinad were Makkathayees like the Pandyan people and for these reasons, the sovereign right vested in him. This contention was opposed by the Travancore king who argued that the inhabitants were Marumakkathayees, that the Pandyan dam was constructed by the Travancore Government, that with a view to perpetuate the memory of the Pandian king who was in sincere intimacy with his contemporary king of Travancore the dam was called by that name and that as the land where the dam stands is indisputably included in the Travancore territory permission could not have been granted to construct it for the benefit of an alien sovereign. The dam was soon after destroyed and made unserviceable. The Nanjinadians deposed to their having become Travancore subjects and their ancestors having adopted the Travancore law of succession viz., the Marumakkathayam law. They did not desire to be the subjects of the Pandyan king or follow the Makkathayam law of inheritance. To this effect they made a solemn statement in the Madura temple.

In the manuscript records in Padmanabhaswamy temple at Trivandrum, it is stated that this happened in 282 M. E. (1106 A. D.)"

From what has been already stated we may well conclude that a modern Nanchinadian belongs to the stock of Velalas and is on a par with his brother Velalas of the East Coast except as regards the law of inheritance.

Now a word about the re-marriage of the Nanchinad women. The adoption of the Marumakkathayam Law greatly facilitated the introduction of re-marriage among them. As soon as they returned from Madura after taking the solemn oath in the temple there, a general conference was held of the Nattars and in it widow-marriage was

declared permissible from that time forward. It is on account of such medley nature of their social constitution that the Nanchinadians were compared to a kind of "ethno-chemical compound." Whatever may be their defects in other respects the ancient Nanchinadians deserve to be congratulated on their having achieved peacefully years ago what all India over the social reformers are fighting for in these days of advanced education. The rigour of the marriage bond must have been felt too much by the Nanchinadians at that time as do the Brahmins and other Makkathayees of the present day and consequently they were quite prepared to welcome the introduction of re-marriage customs into their community. So they relaxed the marriage-bond a little and did not want the *tali* to be tied so tight as to strangle the wearer to 'social death.' By this privilege no marriage union has ever been wantonly broken nor an unwilling couple allowed to remain yoked together for ever. Remarriage among Nanchinadians is still looked upon only as a refuge to be resorted to in cases of extreme necessity. The Nanchinadians, who badly felt the want of re-marriage custom and ushered in the same, nevertheless stigmatised such unions as irreligious and informal and styled them "cloth-giving"—a very poor but significant substitute for the sacred name of marriage. Contracting alliance by cloth-giving is considered second rate and it is the form of wedding that is very largely in vogue in Malabar. The orthodox Nanchinadians look upon the issue of such unions as ineligible for performing the funeral rites or the death anniversaries of the father. These notions largely serve as an effective check on the abuse of this privilege. The present condition of the Nanchinadians, as regards remarriage, is safe and sound and does not stand in need of any reform at all. Nanchinad in this respect occupies a half-way station, a golden mean, between the ideal land of a modern social reformer and the priest-ridden, caste-bound Puranic India of our remote fore-fathers.

3. *Language.* Tamil is the home-language of the Nanchinadians and it is not as largely mixed up with Malayalam words and phrases as certain writers have stated it to be. The cadjan books preserved in some of the old families of Nanchinad are a clear proof of the veneration they attached to the Tamil works. The *Thevaram* and *Thiruvachakam* hymns are even now regarded by them as the Tamil Vedas. It is only after the opening of the Primary schools in their midst that they were able to pick up a little Malayalam. In the whole of Nanchinad, very few people can be found even to this day who could speak

Malayalam with the natural accent and freedom of a Malayali. Thus the language also bears evidence of their Paudi origin.

4. *Village System.* The Nanchinadians are mainly agriculturists and possess all the characteristics of a typical rural people. They live grouped together in villages situate in the midst of their paddy fields. The houses are built in streets unlike those of the Nairs, who live in isolated homesteads. Their hamlet is an epitome of a town. They have a village organisation of their own with office-bearers such as the Dharma Kartha or trustee, the Muthalpidi or treasurer and the Kanakkan or accountant and the management of the village common fund is vested in them. Every village has generally one or more common temples with rich endowments. Each profession is represented in the village. It has its own carpenters to build houses, its own blacksmiths to forge ploughshares, its own cobblers to mend the shoes, its own shepherds to tend the cattle, its own watchmen to guard the houses, and its own schoolmasters to teach their children, its own barbers and dhobies, its own masons and potters, its own physicians and poets.

In ancient days the law-suits among the village folk were all settled by the Village Court of Arbitration. The Moothapillays and Karayalans known as Ambalakars were the leaders of the society. Occasionally the whole Nanchinad used to meet at different centres by representatives and discuss political questions of great importance at the time. These meetings were known as *Nattukootams* and were announced by the parish tom-toms and bugles throughout the whole country. Till 985 M. E. (A. D. 1810) it was the Ambalakars who collected the revenue and paid the same to Government, and then the practice was put a stop to by a royal proclamation. The ancient Nanchinadians were a very independent class and once they even attempted to establish a commonwealth in Nanchinad, defying the authority of the then ruler. From the above accounts we can very easily infer that the village system too of the Nanchinadians has been modelled after the East Coast type.

5. *Religion.* The Nanchinadians are one and all Saivites. Their high priest is the Umayorubhagom Gurukal of Srivaikuntam and not of Kumbhakonam as stated in the Travancore Census Report for 1901. Mr. E. Thurston in his work *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India* writes on the authority of Mr. N. Subramonia Iyer, M. A., of Travancore that "like the Tamil Vellalas the Nanchinad Vellalas are divided into two classes, Saiva and Asaiva, of which the former abs-

tain from flesh and fish while the latter have no such scruple. Asaivas will take food in the houses of Saivas but the Saivas cook their own food when they go to an Asaiva house. Again though the Saivas marry girls from Asaiva families, they are taught the Saiva hymn by the Gurukkal immediately afterwards, and prohibited from dining with their former relatives. This custom is, however, only known to prevail in the south. I am sorry I have to demur to these statements entirely. There is not a particle of evidence to support them. I myself am a Nanchinad Vêlâlâ of the south and a strict vegetarian. The matter of abstinence from flesh or fish does not create any division in the community. The division, referred to, has never existed. True a vegetarian may have a sentimental objection to dine with a flesh-eater, but the members of the community, as a whole, do not evince any such repugnance. Nanchinadians whether Saiva or Asaiva freely interdine with one another without any scruple whatever. The girls from Asaiva families are never prohibited from dining with their former relatives by their husbands if they happen to be vegetarians. Returning from this digression, I may state that the Nanchinadians as disciples of the Saiva Gurukkals wear holy ashes. They generally have three horizontal lines on the forehead and on certain other specified parts of the body, the different Guroos introducing slight differences in the above so as to constitute a sort of a trade-mark for the easy identification of their followers.

The Nanchinadians, at the time of their Deeksha or initiation into the religious truths, form a brotherhood known as *Santhana Piravi*. A few friends conjointly undergo certain religious rites and make certain solemn promises in the presence of their religious instructor by which they all bind themselves to look upon one another as brothers during the whole of their life-time. Mutual help is its main purpose. It is, in fact, a brother-hood as obtains among the free-masons. The relation thus created is considered to be more than friendship—it is almost kinship. They even observe pollution for three days on the death of any one of these brothers. This institution is peculiar to Nanchinad and is not without its evils. It is, however, fast dying out.

The Nanchinadians are also devil-worshippers. Madan, Esakki, and Inan are some of their recognised tutelary deities. Paykodai and Ammankodai form their most important religious festivals. Like the Pandi Velulas they also observe Thyponkal, Theepâvali and such other festive occasions. The worship of ancestors is very common among

them. Ceremonies are performed every year in propitiation of the departed forefathers of every house-hold. Under these circumstances we cannot but be convinced that the Nanchinadians belong to the Dravidian or the Tamilian group of Southern India.

6. *Personal Names.* In Southern India the inhabitants of a place take their individual names after those of the deities of some neighbouring shrines. Most of the names common among the Nanchinadians, male and female, are those of Gods of the important temples scattered over the various parts of the Tamil districts of Madura, Tinnevely, Tanjore and Trichinopoly. We have already pointed out that many of these names are unknown among the Nairs.

The Nanchinadian in writing his full name tags on his own to that of his father from a time as far back as tradition and records reach. This of course cannot but be a remnant of the old practice still continued. The other Marumakkathayees act differently in this particular. The reference in Mr. E. Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of S. India* to several Nanchinad families in Travancore having dropped the designation of Vellala and adopted Nanchinad Nair as their caste name is unwarranted. The Nanchinadians are always referred to in documents as Vellalas or Pillamars and not even as Sudras like the Nairs.*

7. *Dress and Personal Decorations.* The dress of the Nanchinadian is extremely simple, a *Mundoo* and a *Thuvarthu* forming his usual suit of clothes. In this respect he may be said to resemble the Nair more than his brother Vellala on the East Coast. But the female costumes in the two communities—the Nanchinadians and the Nairs—bear little or no resemblance whatever. The Nanchinadian woman is indistinguishable from her sister in the Tinnevely and Madura Districts by the dress. The ordinary Nair woman wears a short white cloth round her loins and an insufficient covering over her breast. The male and female dresses of the Nairs are not quite distinguishable from one another. The Nanchinadian lady usually wears coloured cloths seven or eight yards long all in one piece like the East Coast Vellala woman. She gathers up a few folds of this cloth into a bunch on her right side unlike the Nair women. White colour is with the Nanchinadian women a sign of widowhood and none but widows wear a pure white cloth.

* Whatever may be the differences between the Pandi Vellalas, Nanchinad Vellalas and the Nairs there is little doubt that they all belong to one stock—the Dravidian,—Ed., *M. Q. R.*

The ornaments used by the male members of the community are not many and even the few they wear have no special features about them. The ornaments of women with a few exception are similar to those worn by their Pandi Vêlala sisters. The following is a list of the typical ornaments of a Nanchinadian lady.

- (i) Pampadam, (பாம்படம்) Koppu (கொப்பு) and other ear-ornaments,
- (ii) Sûripirai, (சூரியப்பிறை) Chandrapirai (சந்திரப்பிறை) and other head-ornaments,
- (iii) Thali (தாலி), Sutturu (சுத்துரு), Savadi (சவடி), Villaimalai (வில்லமலை) and other neck-ornaments.
- (iv) Kadayam (கடையம்), Chandukarai (சந்துகாரை), Muduku (முடுகு) and other wrist-ornaments.
- (v) Padakam (பாடகம்), Thandai (தண்டை), Konathandai (கோணத் தண்டை) and other ankle-ornaments.

Many of these have gone out of use in these days and have been replaced by the more fashionable jewels of the East Coast. The Thali or the wedding-jewel is the best index of the community to which a woman belongs. It is the most sacred of ornaments and its shape differs with different people all the world over. The Thali worn by a Nanchinadian woman is similar to that of a Pandi Vêlala woman both in size and shape. The Minou (Thali) of the Nair lady is of a peculiar form. She is very indifferent about its wearing and is often found without it. But it is not so with the Nanchinadian woman. If her husband is alive she could never be seen without her Thali round the neck. None but the death of her partner deprives her of this ornament. Thali and Peeli, according to the Tamil proverb, belong to husband. (தாலியும் பீலியும் தலைவனுக்குடையவை). They are the symbols of married life and they remain on the person of a woman only so long as her husband lives. Turmeric paste, the most indispensable of bathroom articles, is another symbol of wifelyhood. The Nanchinadian lady uses it profusely as a cosmetic wash during the life-time of her husband. After his demise she eschews this also as she does flowers and other luxuries of a like sort. This kind of turmeric wash does not obtain among the Nair ladies probably because of their fair complexion not standing in need of any improvement by such artificial means. Tattooing is not very common among the Nanchinadians and the use of collyrium for the eyes finds favour with girls in their younger days.

8. *Marriage, Sambandam and Divorce.* Marriage among the Nanchinadians bears a close resemblance to that of the Pandi Vêlalas.

It is attended by all the religious rites prescribed in the Sastras and its legal binding is beyond all question. The comparison of horoscopes, the exchange of turmeric or betel between the parties as a token of confirmation, the appointment of an auspicious day for the celebration of the marriage itself, form the usual preliminaries to be gone through. A Saiva Gurukkal or a Brahmin officiates as priest during the whole ceremony. The sacred fire is ignited and kept alive as a witness to the marriage and the blessings of the Gods are invoked. Then the father makes a free gift of the bride to the bridegroom and ratifies the same by the pouring of water in the hands of the bridegroom repeating after the priest certain mantras—formulas conveying solemn promises. This over, the most important and the most sacred item—the tying of the Tali comes in. 'The bridegroom ties the tali slightly round the bride's neck; amidst loud hurrahs, tomtoming and conch-blowing the bridegroom's sister, however ties it tightly, and takes off one of the garlands worn by the bridegroom and puts it on the bride's neck. The bridegroom also takes one from his neck himself, and puts it on the bride's. The bride then takes one of hers and puts it on the bridegroom's neck. This is the end of the ceremony of tying the tali.' The hands of the couple are then united; and they are in this posture made to undergo certain rites and repeat certain mantras conveying promises of conjugal fidelity for all time to come. Then they retire from the marriage pandal, walking round the *manavarai* or marriage dais, once or thrice according to the custom obtaining in the village. The marriage ceremony is supposed to spread over seven days but ordinarily economic considerations have cut short the period to one, two or three days; and very poor people conclude the affair in as many hours too. In one of these days a very significant ceremonial is performed by the couple so as to ensure the bride's love and constancy to her life-partner. It is called "*அம்மிமிதித்து அருந்திகாணல்*" which consists in the newly married couple treading on a block of stone, usually the kitchen grinding stone, and looking up in the sky at *Arunthathi* (*அருந்ததி*) the paragon of chastity and the ideal wife of Vasishta. The piece of granite is taken to represent *Ahalya* (*அகலிஷா*) in allusion to her illegitimate connection with Indra and the curse pronounced on both of them by her husband Gautama Rishi. Consequently *Ahalya* (*அகலிஷா*) is despised and trampled under foot and *Arunthathi* (*அருந்ததி*) revered and worshipped by every newly married couple. The ways of the one are to be shunned and those of the other followed.

The sprinkling of turmeric water and the performance of some more minor rites close the marriage ceremony. The above is only a brief conspectus of the customs and rites attached to a Nanchinadian marriage, setting forth only such parts as would enable one to form at least a rough estimate of its binding force on the parties concerned and also to institute a comparison and contrast between the Nanchinadians and other people in this particular. From the account it is clear that the marriage is celebrated among the Nanchinadians with all the ceremonies and with all the solemnities observed by the Hindus who follow the Makkathayam Law of inheritance. "Amongst Nanchinad Vêlalas following the Marumakkathayam Law there is, unlike the custom of the Nairs up West and North who follow the same law of inheritance, binding legal marriage as distinct from the latitudinarian co-habitation of the latter." (O. S. 42 of 1049 Nagercoil Zillah Court). The Kettukalianam of the Malayali girls is only a mock-marriage and a four days' wonder. On the 5th morning the cloth is torn and the union dissolved between the husband and wife. In a Malabar marriage the legal and religious elements are conspicuous by their absence. The Nanchinadian and the Pandi Vêlala marriages are the same and the one is as good as the other.

Sambandam. The Nanchinadians have relaxed their marriage bond a little in cases of dire necessity. Widow marriage is allowed among them and it is performed in the simplest form known. The children born of such a Sambandam alliance are equally entitled to *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை) after their father's death as those of parents united in regular wedlock in the manner described above. In this respect also a Nanchinadian Sambandam differs from a Nair Sambandam in as much as the latter entails no responsibility or legal obligation on the husband towards his wife and children. In his article on the matrimonial customs of the Nairs Mr. K. Kannan Nair says that "marriage among the Nairs, is indeed pure and simple, unmixed with considerations of civil rights of property—a marriage for the sake of marriage alone. It is not an institution intended, as in more advanced societies, for the perpetuation of family, but a social arrangement intended for the peaceful satisfaction of that 'blindest appetite' of man. In the case of the Nanchinadians, Sambandam is only a later introduction in their midst and the full dignity of a regular wedding is never attached to it. With them the Sambandam ceremony is far simpler than in any other community. It begins and ends with the presentation of

a cloth to the lady-elect by the husband or his sister or other female relations acting as his proxy. Occasionally an *Yeduppu* deed is also executed in favour of the wife by the husband in accordance with the terms of an arrangement they have come to, before *Sambandam* takes place. The *Yeduppu* deed is drawn more in the form of a contract than anything else. By this the husband binds himself to pay the wife a certain sum of money as remuneration on his death provided the latter continued to live with him till he died or resorted to a divorce of his own accord. However she is more than a concubine taken on contract since her children also could claim *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை) right. Further the Nanchinadians never marry outside their caste and children born of a Nanchinadian and a Nair woman are not considered as legitimate ones and consequently they can not legally lay any claim to *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை). But intermarriages between the Nanchinadians and Makkathaya Velalars are common to some extent. This marriage has also been recognised by courts of law and the children resulting from the same declared to be the offspring of legitimately wedded husband and wife. I need not add here that such things have become possible only as both of them belong to the same caste and observe the same customs as regards marriage etc. Thus we see that a Nanchinadian woman may be the lawful wife of a Makkathaya Velala and a Makkathaya woman, of a Nanchinadian Velala. What then is the law of succession, applicable to these cases? In the former i. e., a Makkathaya man marrying a Nanchinadian woman, it is a settled point that the children of such a union inherit, under the ordinary Hindu Law, the property of their father. (T. L. R. Vol. IX pp. 21. S. A. No. 336 of 1063) These children do not on this account lose their right to the properties on their mother's side. They in fact inherit the properties of both the parents. As the sons of a Makkathaya father they inherit the father's assets and liabilities and as those of a Mammakkathaya mother they inherit their mother's property. Thus we see that by the above union the sons have the advantage of a double inheritance while daughters should be satisfied with what they get from their mothers being themselves ineligible for inheriting their father's property according to Hindu Law. Considering the legal recognition and validity of the above marriage it is a pity that the custom has been allowed to die out in these days when racial feelings are on the wane. When other people are trying to remove the barriers existing between their various

sub-sects the Nanchinadians bring into existence many where they had not a single one before.

Now as to the marriage between a Marumakkathaya husband and a Makkathaya wife I have to add the following. In theory there is no objection to such an alliance but it works badly to the issue of such unions in practice. The children have nothing to inherit on the mother's side nor can they expect a full share of their father's property. The father being a member of a Marumakkathayam Tarawad, his children will be given only the Ukanthudama portions after his death and nothing more. Here we see the opposite systems of inheritance followed by the parents working together for the ruin of the offspring. Consequently a Nanchinadian husband is seldom counted by a Makkathaya woman and the door for inter-marriage practically stands blocked on this side.

Widowhood is not compulsory among Nanchinadian women. The community holds the view that the marriage contract ceases with the death of either of the parties; but opinion is not unanimous in this respect and there have been many instances of women remaining widows till their death.

Separation by mutual consent under a registered deed executed in settlement of all marital claims is also prevalent. It is also effected at the instance of either of the parties on reasonable grounds e. g., incompatibility of temper, change of religion, adultery, cruelty, permanent and infectious disease, impotence, sexual incapacity, unsoundness of mind or any other cause which renders the mutual discharge of marital duties impracticable with due regard to personal safety. The Nanchinadians have a settled course of procedure for dissolving the marriage bond. When the husband or wife applies alone or jointly for the dissolution of the union, an informal Panchayat consisting of their relations or friends and leading men of the village is called in the presence of which the claims of the parties against each other are settled, their marital relation severed, and a *Vidumuri* or release-deed executed to that effect and duly attested by the presiding Moothapillai and others sitting on the village tribunal. The custom is slowly disappearing in these days. The principle is observed but the formalities are not strictly adhered to. In the case of a husband desiring to repudiate the wife and the wife not willing to break off her connection the former is legally bound to maintain her till her death and if she survived him, his property becomes liable for her maintenance. If

the wife takes the initiative in the separation for no just cause on her part she cannot lay any claim for her support. She is not free to enter into a new alliance before the customary release-deed is taken or the Panchayat decision got. Any man accepting a woman similarly circumstanced, for wife before the said deed or decision is obtained, is liable to be criminally prosecuted for the offence. There are also cases in which the wife was made to compensate her husband to the extent of his marriage expenses when her separation could not be reasonably justified. The existence of the divorce system among the Nanchinadians can not be argued as militating against the validity of the marriage and its legal binding on the parties. It is only a special device for dissolving the bond when circumstances imperatively demand such a step; it is a safety valve provided for the sound working of the machinery of the marriage institution.

The funeral rites of a Nanchinadian are all performed by his son. Although the Nanchinadians adopted Marumakkathayam Law they could not entirely give up the customs which they had brought with them from the land of their birth. They are those of marriages and funeral rites. According to the Sastras it is the duty of the son to perform the obsequies of his father. The Nanchinadians are Saivites and their religious heads are the Saiva Gurukkals of the various *mutts* situate both in and out of Nanchinad. Their ceremonies are all presided over and guided by these priests either in person or by proxies. Under those circumstances a change in the mode and practice of religious rites can not be effected as easily as in the law of inheritance. The faith in the efficacy of performing the religious rites in a particular manner enjoined by the Sastras and its results in the future life with all the hoary traditions of the past is not likely to be shaken very easily. So the Nanchinadians have been keeping up the two essential customs of marriage and funeral rites intact as in ancient days. It is the sacred duty of the son to perform the obsequies of his father and it is not one for which he goes unrewarded. The immediate reward is found in the gift made of the ear-rings and other ornaments worn on the person of the deceased to his son. The more substantial portion, Ukanthudamai, comes later on and it is the compensation to the son for his performing his father's obsequies and giving up the right as his son to a share in the family property.

The *Sanchayanam*, (collecting of bones) as is common among the Makkathayam Vélalars is done on the second day. The wife and

children observe pollution for 16 days. The *Kartha** wears the holy thread while he performs the funeral rites or the death anniversaries of the parent. All the expenses of the first day of the funeral should be met by the children of the deceased man and they have every right to remain in the house where their father died till the last day of the ceremony (i. e., for 16 days.) All these customs are no doubt followed by the Makkathayam Velalars even to this day and they totally differ from those of the Nairs. Among the latter the nephew performs the funeral rites and the Sanchayanam ceremony is performed on the 5th or 6th day. The wife and children are free from pollution. The *Kartha* never wears the holy thread.

9. The *Ukanthudamai* and *Nankudamai* rights:

Ukanthudamai means inheritance or right by love. This is a relic of the ancient custom of co-heirs partitioning ancestral property. It is a true tell-tale of the past history of the Nanchinadians. The late Justice Chellappa Pillai of the Travancore High Court in his judgment on a suit for *Ukanthudamai*, incidentally has the following in respect of the history of this ancient people:—"They are a peculiar class of people. They originally followed the Makkathayom Law and with it the manners and customs of those people who followed that Law. But emigrating into a country where the Marumakkathayom prevailed they gradually imbibed the manners and the customs of the people of their land of adoption till they became to all intents and purposes followers of Marumakkathayom Law". The Nanchinadians are not complete Marumakkathayees. They in this adoption of the Marumakkathayam Law did not relinquish their claim to the father's property altogether. The son of a Nanchinadian begotten as he is of his wedded wife and bound to perform his funeral rites stands in a very different position from that of an ordinary follower of Marumakkathayam Law. He is legally entitled to a share of his father's possessions (family or self-acquired) after the death of the latter and not before that event. The statement made in the Census Report of Travancore for 1901 that it is a further rule that in the case of a divorce, the wife and children should be given this *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை) at the time of her (wife's) separation is wrong and cannot be supported by a single instance, the death day of the father being the birthday of the son's right of *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை). This right will not be taken away by the absence of male issue. It is claimable both by male and female children of the deceased and the assets

* A person who is entitled to perform the ceremonies is known as the *Kartha*.

available for *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை) are to be divided among them equally. If a Nanchinadian has more than one wife and also children by all of them his family property does not stand liable to be charged with as many *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை) as there are wives. Only one *Ukanthudamai* (உகந்துடமை) can be claimed on account of one member out of his Tarawad property and that is subject to division according to the number of wives a particular man has'.

The father is incompetent to disinherit his children by any alienation to take effect after his death nor the Seshakars defeat the same by any collusion. The sons and daughters have a first claim on their father's property left at the time of his death and every alienation made thereafter will take effect necessarily subject to the charge of *Ukanthudamai* right. The method adopted for calculating the *Ukanthudamai* due to the children of a Nanchinadian is one ordinarily followed in the partition of a Makkathaya family. All the estate and effect of the father at the time of his death are thrown together in one lump and the full saleable or market value on them settled and divided equally among the equal claimants, every female being left out of account. For this purpose the family is treated as one following the Makkathayam Law. *Ukanthudamai* is really that portion of the ancestral property which would have descended to the son of a Nanchinadian had his family followed the Makkathayam Law of inheritance. Further it is also held "by parity of reasoning any gift made by the father during his life-time ought not among people of this description to be permitted to affect a claim which as regards the children is as much the incident of legitimacy as among any other class of legitimate offspring. *Ukanthudamai* is an indefeasible filial inheritance of legitimate offspringship among these people as is the inheritance of legitimate children among people who follow the direct line and indeed of the Seshakars who follow the indirect course." (O. S. No. 42 of 1049 N. Z. Court). Before now it has been said that the right of *Ukanthudamai* could not be exercised by the children during the life-time of their father. But by mutual consent an arrangement is generally come to by which the father becomes an adopted member of his childrens' family and dies as it were a civil death so far as his own family is concerned. He will be given property for his maintenance to be afterwards inherited by his sons and daughters in satisfaction of their *Ukanthudamai* claims. This is known as *Yappia Ukanthudamai* (யாப்பிய உகந்துடமை). *Nangu-damai* (நங்குடமை) is the property inherited by Nankai or woman.

This is an alimony or maintenance allowance granted to a childless widow. If the deceased has more than one wife—say two—and if one of these has children and the other not, the Nangudamai for the latter will be given out of the Ukanthudamai portion due to the children.

All these are peculiar institutions prevalent among the Nanchinadians and are the results of following the Makkathayam and Marumakkathayam Laws at the same time. In operation of this mixed system of inheritance it is also clearly seen that the Makkathayam element predominates over that of the Marumakkathayam and that the Nanchinadians have greater affinity to the Pandi Velalars than to the Malayali Sudras.

10. *Intermarriage and interdining with Pandi Velalars*—The question of intermarriage between the Nanchinadians and the Pandi Velalars has already been treated of in connection with the topics of Ukanthudamai and Nankudamai. The matter of interdining between these people does not require any elaborate discussion. It is one of daily occurrence and a marriage feast affords ample proof of the same.

Now as a result of the above enquiry we find that the Nanchinadians belong to the Tamil Velala community; that their ancestors colonised Nanchinad from the adjacent Tamil districts of Madura and Tinnevely and that they afterwards adopted the Marumakkathayam Law and the custom of widow-marriage prevalent in Malabar.

The total population of Nanchinadians in Travancore is 18,000. Their chief centre is Nanchinad although they are scattered all over the country especially the Taluks of Trivandrum, Mavelikara and Vayalunkom. There are also a few families in the neighbouring State of Cochin. It is a melancholy fact that the Nanchinadians of the present day have considerably fallen from the high estate of their forefathers who were well known throughout Travancore for their thrift, industry and mathematical acumen. The community as a whole has sunk in the estimation of the public.† It is growing poorer and poorer day by day.

† In an Anthropological study as the present paper purports to be it will surely be out of place to embody reflections on the characteristics of the present-day Nanchinadians, which are likely to be mis-interpreted. These strictures, if they may be given so strong a name, come from a writer who is himself a Nanchinadian and a staunch lover of his class and as such will not carry with them that sting which they would otherwise have carried. As for the extremely backward condition of the modern Nanchinadians, we think a variety of causes have contributed to bring the community to the state so pathetically deplored by the writer. The stay-at-home tendency of the Nanchinadian, his ignorance of English education, his apathy to his own mother-tongue Tamil, his following a profession which does not call forth into exercise the best

All the lands have either been hypothecated or mortgaged to the money lenders. The modern Nanchinadian is a spendthrift, a drone and a dullard. There is no household in Nanchinad without a family dispute nor a village without a faction. He makes the lawyers rich and becomes himself bankrupt and wrecks his whole family—wife, children, sister, nephew, niece and all. His unnatural law of inheritance also proves a very prolific source of litigation. Educationally the Nanchinadian occupies a very backward place in the state. The community cannot boast of many graduates in their midst. The number of Nanchinadian students attending the colleges or High Schools all over Travancore can be counted on one's fingers. He is conservative to a degree and is consequently far behind the time. He knows no trade but agriculture and that only in the methods and with the implements worthy of an ante-diluvian age. His devil-dancing propensities show the low standard of his civilisation. To him the world does not extend beyond the bounds of his own village. He has grown intensely clannish and his ambitions are pitched at so low a key that one would take him for a man of fourth century B. C. His educational ideal is that his boy should learn to that extent as would enable him to read a *Kacharth** and his highest aim in public service is to fill the place of a *Proverticar* or a *Taluq Samprathy*. On the whole the present-day Nanchinadian has lost ground in the inter-racial struggle and if he does not wake up betimes and work for the social uplift of his community he is sure to go to the wall at no distant date.

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of his intellectual powers, his peculiar almost unnatural law of property-devolution, his social isolation from the two great communities the Pandi Vellalas and the Nairs have each had no small amount of influence in keeping him immobile in this age of progress. It is also not an encouraging circumstance that even the few educated members this community possesses do not seem to have the public spirit to come forward and work for the social amelioration of their class. We hope the present writer will try to stir them up in another contribution of his, dealing with this aspect of the subject.--Ed., M. Q. R.

* A tax receipt in *Olai* given by the *Proverticar* which has now been replaced by a paper-receipt.