

Nayar of india

Sociology



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Nayar is the of many upper caste Hindus hailing from the South Indian state of Kerala. Traditionally speaking, Nayars are considered to be a martial race, which later splinted into many sub castes affiliated to varied professions involving one form or other of supervisory responsibilities like soldiers, landlords, bookkeepers, revenue collectors, community leaders, etc (Fawcett, 1990). Though, many sociologists believe that Nayars are not indigenous to the state of Kerala, it is quiet difficult to trace the period when Nayars actually migrated to Kerala (Fawcett, 1990). Before the advent of the British, the Nayar caste enjoyed a prominent place in the state of Kerala. The word Nayar is believed to have originated from the Sanskrit word ' Nayak', meaning a powerful and esteemed leader (Fawcett, 1990). Historians hold that Nayars were initially tribal in their social organization. However, after converting to Hinduism, they adopted the Hindu caste based system of social organization. Social Organization In a traditional context, one prominent feature of the social organization of Nayars was the practice of Marumakkathayam, which meant a matrilineal system (Renjini, 2002). As per this system, the fundamental tracing of descent, inheritance and succession was dependant on the female line (Renjini, 2002). According to the Marumakkathayam laws and norms, a Taravad or a matrilineal kin group was considered to be the primary unit of social organization in the Nayar society (Renjini, 2002). This cooperative group comprised of all the matrilineal descendants of a common matriarch. The family property was held jointly by the entire group and was administered and managed by the senior most male member in the group. In case a Taravad got large and too unwieldy, it was split into easy to manage smaller units called Tavazhis. This resulted in

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an equal division of the group property, while keeping the group relationships intact. The other salient aspects of the Nayar social organization was the prevalence of the social institutions of Talikettuallyanam and Sambandam, the two traditional forms of marital relationships recognized by the Nayar society (Renjini, 2002). Talikettuallyanam was a ceremonial marital rite that was to be performed for every Nayar girl before attaining the age of puberty (Renjini, 2002). This marital rite was considered sacrosanct and not performing it amounted to inviting religious impurity, which could socially translate into ostracism of the involved girl and of the Taravad to which she belonged. The marital rite called Sambandam was celebrated by every Nayar woman after she reached the age of puberty (Renjini, 2002). Sambandam ritual allowed a Nayar woman to have multiple marital partners. Same way the Nayar men were also allowed to have multiple female marital partners. Such relationships were not held rigid and could easily be dissolved. Children born of such wedlock were taken care of by the mother and her Taravad. Social Change The traditional Nayar social organization revolving around the recognized and validated practices of collective ownership of property, polyandry and matrilineal descent have undergone noticeable changes in the recent times (Kathleen, 1990). This social change could mainly be attributed to the disbanding of the Nayar martial groups around the British times and the shifting of the Nayar men to other professions like farming, bookkeeping and administration. The Nayar men who were earlier constantly on the move because of being soldiers, when employed in relatively sedentary professions felt the need for getting into more permanent, dependable and lasting relationship with women (Kathleen, 1990). Hence Polyandry soon gave way to monogamy in the

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contemporary Nayar society and the institutions of Talikettuallyanam and Sambandam lost their relevance. Besides the Nayar men were influenced by the practices of other affluent communities in Kerala, whose capitalist success they attributed to the contrary practices of monogamy, nuclear family, individual ownership and patriarchy (Kathleen, 1990). Beliefs and Values Nayars are mostly devout Hindus and do believe in the religious values and sacred rites and ceremonies enshrined in the Hindu religion (Fawcett, 1990). They also hold sacred the Hindu pantheon signified by many gods and goddesses. It was the religious zeal and faith of the Nayars that Kerala was one of the few Indian states that were never ruled by a Muslim king. One could also trace aspects of Dravidian beliefs and rituals amongst the Nayars (Fawcett, 1990). That involves a firm belief in the evil spirits, which could do harm and negatively impact the human health.

Conclusion Nayars as a community had a significant impact on the culture of India in general and that of the state of Kerala in particular. The modern day Nayars are more in tandem with the mainstream social and religious practices and beliefs, which have greatly altered the traditional Nayar societies. References Fawcett, F. (1990). *Nayars of Malabar*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services. Kathleen, Gough. (1959). The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 89(1): 23-34. Renjini, P. (2002). *Nayar Women Today*. New Delhi: India Classical Publishing Company.