

Concept of fatherhood in polyandry among the Thiyyas of Malabar, South India

Dr Sunil John and Dr K Rajan

Introduction

A system of polyandry, almost similar in features to that prevalent in Tibet, had existed among some social groups in some parts of Kerala, one of the southern states of south India. At the turn of the last century, there were some areas in Kerala, where polyandry had remained as a dominant marriage system. K P Padmanabha Menon mentions the Ilavars of Talappilli taluk of the Cochin state and Valluvanad taluk of south Malabar as regions noted for the custom.¹ L K Ananthakrishna Iyer describes the custom of polyandry in these areas as follows:

In a family in which there are four or five brothers living together, the eldest of them marries an adult woman, who, by a simple ceremony, becomes the wife of all.²

Such a system was banned when the government of India enacted 'The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955' which 'made monogamy both general and compulsory among all classes of Hindus.'³ It completely lost its legal sanction in 1976 when joint family was abolished.⁴ Polyandry was a custom that had existed among the Nairs as well. This is indicated by the accounts of the 16th century Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa and others. Fraternal polyandry, however, had existed among the Thiyyas, Thandans,⁵ Kammalas⁶ and Mannans⁷ of the Hindu society of Kerala. The exact period of origin of polyandry among the Thiyyas is not known.

Review of Literature

Social science research has taken note of the existence of polyandry in Kerala. In most cases, it has relied on the European testimonies on the custom with the result that the prevalence of the custom among the Thiyyas has largely been ignored. The only exception to this is the work titled *The Tribes and Castes of Cochin* by L K Ananthakrishna Iyer. The 19th century ethnography could not take notice of the custom among the Thiyyas. Edgar B Thurston and K Rangachari, for instance, devotes nearly 80 pages for discussing them in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Volume VII (1909). There is no reference to polyandry prevailing among the Thiyyas.

Polyandry in India: Historic origins

Polyandrous marriages do not come under the narrow definitions of marriage stressing the presence of 'the marital couple and their children.'⁸ At a time when the Indian society is passing through a phase in which so much concern is expressed about the existence of traditional families, enquiries into the polyandrous marriage system of the pre-1960s era have great relevance.⁹ This is especially so because of the fact that the legacies of polyandry have not died down in many parts of India, especially Kerala. Monogamy, which was well established in the western societies, had not taken deeper roots in the non-European world. As Charugupta noted, it was in the backdrop of social reforms process that the Indian society began to glorify 'the ideal of monogamous and companionable marriage.'¹⁰

Polyandry seems to be similar in most parts of the world. The system prevalent among the Thiyyas of Kerala, one of the southern states of India, closely resembles with features found in the other polyandrous societies, especially the Tibetan. It has been rightly pointed out that marriage systems such as polygyny, polyandry and monogamy are 'culturally approved' relationships of man and woman. There were also marriages of endogamous and exogamous nature. However, Indian historians, inspired by Hindu nationalism, had stated that polyandry was 'practically unknown to Hindu society.'¹¹ Dharma Sutras, Mahabharata etc contain references to polyandry though it was not a favoured system of marriage.¹² Polyandry is mentioned more as a system that had long died out and existing in areas outside the north.¹³ However, polyandry was not confined to the non-Aryans only.

South India was understood as a land where polyandry had existed from ancient times onwards. Historians, tracing the origins of polyandry in India, have considered it a practice akin to *Asura* marriage which involved the bridegroom receiving wife after making presents to the father-in-law. Some of them use the term patriarchal polyandry while referring to instances including the one associated with the Mahabharata character Draupadi with the five Pandava brothers as her husbands.

The Indian society has been transformed on account of factors such as colonial policies, social and religious reforms, spread of western education, etc. Family had been at the centre of debates among the reformers in India right from the mid-19th century onwards. Even today, the process of changes in the structure and nature of marriage systems is continuing. Although the paper is focused on fatherhood in polyandry, it also attempts to delineate how woman's sex role and other responsibilities were distributed among her husbands. It may be pointed out that Thiyya

men, whether they were polyandrous, polygamous or monogamous, had occupied a central role in the family.

Polyandrous groups and Thiyyas of Malabar

Fraternal polyandry had existed among several Indian castes and tribes. They include the Todas, Kotas, Paharis etc.¹⁴ The most noted examples of polyandry outside India are those of the Simhalese, Nepalese, Bhutanese, and the Tibetans.¹⁵ Except in the work *Castes and Tribes of Cochin* by L K Ananthakrishna Iyer, the existence of polyandry among the Thiyyas has generally been ignored.¹⁶ Oral testimonies, archival records, medieval and modern travel accounts, and the extant literature on social change in Kerala point towards the fact that polyandry had a deeper impact on the households of the region until the 1960s. This is despite the fact that historians and sociologists have largely ignored a marriage system that continues to strain relations among the progeny from polyandrous relationships. Scholarly attention has mostly been on the matrilineal marriages and customs which favoured child marriage and polygamy among the prominent castes, including the Ezhavas. cursory references apart, the system of polyandry that had prevailed among the upper sections of the Avarna castes – Thiyyas, Thandans, Asari, Karuvan, Thattan, Moosari, Mannan etc—in some parts of Kerala has not received serious attention in social science research. Social scientists were more focused on *Sambandham* system of the Nairs, though a form of polyandry in many instances. The Malabar Marriage Commission Report of 1896 gives us ample evidence that polyandry was a powerful tradition in Kerala until the end of the 19th century. Although it had hinted that polyandry had died out in south Malabar, there are evidences to show that even in the 1940s, this region had polyandry as an accepted system of marriage. Even before that, Kerala's social reformers such as Narayana Guru had urged the people not to practice polyandry.¹⁷ Novels in Malayalam such as *Manninte Maril* clearly indicate that the emergence of social and political movements had its impact on the joint marriage system. Such a change began to appear in the study region at least by the 1930s. The Thiyyas who practised polyandry were by profession toddy tappers and cultivators. In the 1940s, the Thiyya households were known for the making of a toddy-product called *chakkara or jaggery*. Toddy was brewed for the purpose. Children had to gather dry leaves and wood for processing toddy.

Features

There are several dimensions to relations among the members of polyandrous families. Though the features are similar to the other polyandrous societies elsewhere in the world, cultural

differences make each of them distinct. This is true even among the various castes and tribes of south India. Even among particular polyandrous castes, monogamy had acceptance. Many of the Ezhava leaders of social reform in Kerala had their parents from monogamous relations. This is evident from the lives of Sree Narayana Guru, Sahodaran Ayyappan, C Kesavan and so on.¹⁸ Interviews with the representatives of the polyandrous families could not establish whether shortage of women was the reason for the origin of polyandry among the Thiyyas. None of those interviewed has cited the existence of a custom of infanticide or shortage of women as the reason for polyandry among the Thiyyas. Infanticide had existed among the Simhalese and the Todas.

The single most factor cited by them all is protection of family property, whether considerable or not. Thus, the system had existed among the Thiyyas as a solution to the limited resources available to them. The Tibetan example had similarities with the Thiyyas of the south. All the polyandrous castes being discussed were patriarchal and, therefore, the position of their women folk had not been enviable. These castes, though below the Varna hierarchy, had been following Smriti norms regarding the early marriage of girls, menstrual impurity, obedience to husbands etc. Even polyandry had its mention in ancient writings including the Dharmasutras and Mahabharata. At quite a young age, not exceeding 12 years,¹⁹ they were prepared for marriage with a bridegroom or bridegrooms. It took several decades of campaigning and legislations to make the practice of men entering into sexual relations with child wives aged below 10 years illegal. Among the Thiyyas, tali-tying before the age of 12 was done in a festive manner and the ceremony indicated the ceasing of virginity. The ceremony, according to scholars, signified 'a girl's transition to womanhood.' As in the case of the matriarchal Nairs, this ritual was to take place before the first sign of menstruation.²⁰

However, actual marriage did not involve tali-tying in many cases. Only a yellow-coloured thread was tied round the neck of the bride. A garland was also put round the necks of both the bride and bridegroom. The age of men for actual marriage, often far exceeded that of the girls. The average age of men at the time of marriage ranged from 19 to 22.²¹ No dowry was paid to the bridegroom in cash. Articles of use in the bridegrooms were gifted at the time of the departure of marriage party and every item given was accounted. The articles, all of them in metal, were known as *Ezhoorippathram* and *Anchoorippathram* which included spittoon, plate, drink pot, lamp, etc. These were to be returned in the event of divorce. The Thiyyas had the practice of giving bride price called *Acharam*. The bride and bridegroom would sit on a mat covered with a white cloth placed in front of the bride's house. Giving *Acharam* was a major

part of the marriage ceremony. Ramankutty, one of the surviving polyandrous husbands, said the elder members who mediated the ceremony of giving *Acharam* chanted *Sreemal panthalkku madhye---enpathiyoracharammavan iruvareyum cherthittu acharam*. The exact meaning of it is not clear, though it suggests marriage uniting the bride and bridegroom. It also conveys the idea that marriage in a stricter sense was an affair between two persons. With the available evidence, it is not possible for us to speculate that polyandry was a later accretion.

Oral testimonies indicate that there were instances when the girl was unaware that she had to be wife to the younger ones of her husband as well. In some cases, her parents were also not aware of it. Majority of the cases, however, seem to indicate that the girl had prior knowledge that she was being married to a family. Marriage used to be a simple affair. Generally, the eldest brother used to go to the bride's house for marrying him. In some cases, his younger brothers also accompany him. Polyandrous marriages (in legal terms joint marriages) take place at either the bride's house or in that of the bridegroom. Judicial records pertaining to a caste involving descendants of joint marriage hint that girls who had attained puberty were married. A 1984 Pattambi munsiff court document reveals that the woman married in 1938 was 16 years old. Her husband was 34 years old.

In her statement before the court, she had recorded that milk was given to her at the bridegroom's house as part of establishing *bandham* or relation with the younger brother of her husband.²² This ritual was performed under the leadership of *Enangan*, a senior person in the community. The brothers were made to sit on both sides of the bride before milk was given. It was 'customary' in the society that the eldest would go to the house of the bride. At the time of marriage at the bride's house, the sisters of the bridegroom would give the bride milk, calling her name.²³ After that garlands were exchanged.²⁴ The garlands were elaborate. Even if the custom of polyandry was followed as a traditionally handed over caste practice, there were younger brothers who were not ready to join the marital ties with the elder brother's wife. At Amettinkara, the youngest brother in a family ran away when invited for the ceremony of *bandhamkodukkal* (establishing marital ties). Similar incidents had happened in other areas as well. The age of younger husbands sometimes was far below that of girls. Even the Cochin Makkattayam Thiyya Act (Act XVII of 1115) of 1940 had prescribed the ages of 18 and 14 respectively for male and female.

In one of the partition suits, one woman who had given birth to seven children deposed that 'both of the husbands are fathers to these children.' However, the same statement reveals that

she shifted her residence to the house of the younger husband and that her first husband was in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. She also states that the elder brother lived with her and the younger brother in the new house as her husband. Though the elder brother lived with them for some time, he soon built a new house and shifted his residence. The elder brother had married another woman while in Madura. The actual reason for the separation of the elder brother and the first husband is revealed in the deposition of another person. There emerged differences of opinion between the brothers and the elder had to change residence from the house of the younger brother. He then built a new house and married another woman.

Polyandry had existed in Kerala as a system which served the familial interests of the husbands. In most cases, the women had to be a victim of frequent pregnancies. They had often to face persistent demands from her multiple husbands for sexual intercourse. In many households, there were fixed days on which one of the husbands could be with her. Such a system seems to have worked well in families composed of a wife and two husbands. In this case also, the younger ones generally came to have a commanding role in the years following marriage. As in Tibet, the common rule that had prevailed among the Thiyyas was that the elder brother would have preference in access to wife.²⁵ It was the elder brother who visited the bride's house after marriage. The younger ones were to accompany the wife on their next visit. It was strictly followed that only one husband would accompany the wife for attending functions or visiting the wife's house. In some cases, the younger husbands called their wife *Edathiyamma*, *Edathi* etc (both meaning elder brother's wife).

The Brahmanical insistence on menstrual impurity and ban on sexual union for four days in a month seem to have given the polyandrous women great relief. In families, which were very poor, the pressure of sexual union with more than one man in a day had compounded the travails of women. Their living space was limited. Some of the descendants and kinsmen of the polyandrous parents have informed that women had enjoyed the right to choose her partner at night. Also, it is pointed out that women had her own room in the Thiyya house. The decision to allow entry into it was her choice. In cases where there were only two brothers as husbands, there were alternate days for them to be with the woman. One of the informants told us that the elder brother used to have more importance in sexual union with the wife. He also said that there was an arrangement by which the days Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were fixed for one brother and the remaining for the other. In some households, the rule of *onnaradam* (alternate days) was followed.²⁶ It was the wife who had a more say in deciding with whom she would sleep.²⁷

Such a system had not worked among more than two husbands. Even among two husbands, separation from the union had happened. In a polyandrous family among the members of washermen caste called Mannan in Ottapalam, one of the brothers shifted to a separate life with another woman sometime after marriage.

It was informed that the person who would enter the wife's room used to keep his clothes after washing in front of the room. In fact, there were so many variations in the matter of conjugal life between the wife and her husbands. One version, narrated by those close to the polyandrous families, tells us that the wife's room would be kept open if no man was inside. It is also said that the wife receiving more than one husband on a single day was also usual.

However, there were issues among her husbands regarding their right to be with her at night. These often led to break-up of polyandrous families and the younger or elder ones chose to choose another woman. Unlike in monogamous marriages, polyandry in Kerala had not given a monopoly in the wife's sexuality to a husband. As in other societies elsewhere in the world, polyandry in the region had allowed sharing of rights among more than one husband. It was customary in the region that the elder brother who actually marries had superior rights on the wife. The polyandrous wife had not enjoyed a monopoly in the husbands' sexuality, however. Marriage in teens or even in the early twenties is considered as a factor which reduces high marital adjustment. However, polyandrous marriages between girls in teen age and men in the early twenties had continued to prolong perhaps because of the fact that polyandry was an accepted custom.

Also important was the flexibility allowed in the system. In many cases, one or more brothers would opt for separate marriages. This was also a practice found among the Tibetans.²⁸ The girls or husbands could decide not to continue the relationship and opt for another marriage. At the time of marriage itself, the senior members of the caste would inform the bridegroom that he could leave the relations even if she had 10 children if there were issues. The marriage thread would be cut at the time of divorce.²⁹ The bridegroom was even given permission to thrash her for 'bad conduct.' The only condition was that she should not be thrashed with a stick. The bridegroom was also warned against harming her.³⁰ Legal documents accessed by the authors show that the younger of those who were part of joint marriage could marry another woman in the event of the death of their wife. There was no compulsion on them to again marry in the polyandrous manner. Such a system indicates that both the man and woman had enjoyed the option to be in marital ties with several women or men. At Amettinkara in Kumaranallur in

Pattambi taluk, there were five brothers in a family. The eldest died of snake bite. The second and third sons lived with a wife. The youngest of the five married separately. It could not be established whether the eldest had brought the woman after formally marrying. When the second also left for Bombay, the polyandrous family became monogamous.

The size of the family was bigger in polyandrous households. The number of children ranged from four to 10 or 12. In one of the instances, the authors could notice 23 children born to six brothers from three wives.³¹ Two brothers each married a girl. One of the groups had 11 children, the second group had four children, and the third had eight. It was informed that they had not faced any issue till the end. If all the sons had married, there would not have been sufficient number of rooms for the couples to sleep. When two brothers take in a girl as common wife, they would sometimes shift to a new house and the remaining brothers would continue to live in their parental house. Polyandry was a convenient system for the Thiyyas engaged in cultivation and toddy tapping. The pressure of rent and other customary dues to be paid to the landlord was heavy. As per one estimate, a Thiyya cultivator had to remit 100 paras of paddy to the land lord for the right to cultivate a 10 *vadippan*³² land.

However, it could not be established whether the Thiyyas had faced the issue of girls remaining unmarried as in the Tibetan society. It is important that though the Thiyyas had been generally polyandrous, there were families which had remained monogamous. One of the issues the polyandrous husbands had faced in the later years of their marriage was sexual weakness, including early orgasm.³³ At the same time, the women who had married multiple husbands, informed the authors that they had not faced any lack of marital happiness. An 83 years old woman from Ponnani hinted that there was no pressure from her husbands for sexual union at night as one of her husbands, working in a little faraway place, used to come to house at certain intervals only. The social stigma that the present society attaches to polyandry may perhaps be the reason why women are unable to disclose much about their sexual life with polyandrous husbands. Women and girls had to bear the burden of polyandrous marriages. In the event of frequent pregnancies, spaced between one and a half years on an average, the elder girl children, aged 6 or 7, had to take care of child-rearing.³⁴ In most polyandrous marriages, the women were not able to reach schools. The girls were also not sent to school.

Similarly, children growing up in a traditional extended family system had not faced the issue of legitimate parenthood. They had to confront this issue since the 1950s as monogamy had been declared a legally valid system of marriage in the state. Like in the Tibetan society, the

children of the polyandrous Thiyyas were considered children of all the fathers. The Thiyyas of Kerala do not seem to have observed any ceremony to mark the fatherhood of the child when the woman was pregnant as had been the custom among the Todas. There were some identifiable markers –colour, similar features, etc--for recognizing the children as of particular fathers. Biological paternity was never a botheration to them. This was asserted by most of the surviving members of polyandrous families. A witness in a court stated in 1984 thus: I do not know who my father is. My fathers were Kannappan and Chami. This is because they married as part of Koottuvivaham (joint marriage). I used to write the name of my father as Chami, the elder brother of Kannappan. Kannappan had died in 1927-8. The right to property of Kannappan also passed into the hands of Chami and the sons born from joint marriage. In most of the records, the elder brother's name was added as father. In school registers, the name of the father who took the child to school was registered. In cases where only two fathers were there, both their names were recorded in the property documents. One of the sons from a joint marriage informed us that he could inherit a landed property amounting to 2.5 acres of land because he had three fathers. The name given in his school register was that of the eldest father. Achan or father was the term used by the children to address the eldest brother. *Achanmar* or fathers was also used. In most households, the younger fathers were designated as *Cheriyachan* (little father) and *Kuttichan* (youngest father). The fathers were also designated on the basis of the profession in which they were occupied –*Padathe Achan* (father working in the field), *Peedikayile Achan* (father running shop), etc. In some cases, the younger fathers were called *Achan* with their names (*Ramanachan*, *Raman Kuttichan* etc). *Kuttichan* was the term used for addressing fathers starting from the third. At the time of marriage, polyandrous children used to touch the feet of not only the eldest husband but also those younger to him. The fathers treated all children as their own.

While children born of polyandrous marriage had inheritance rights to their fathers' property, the women had been denied the right to inherit the property of their husbands. The women of the Thiyyas, like the others in various castes, high and low, had not enjoyed right to inheritance until the 1940s. There were property disputes between the descendants of polyandrous families which show that law recognized the Thiyyas as Hindus observing Mitakshara law. Suits in the courts often raised the issue of proof for joint marriage. Social reforms and legislations introduced under the leadership of Thiyya/Ezhava reformers such as Narayana Guru and Sahodaran Ayyappan, gradually abolished customs which had imposed a heavy burden on women. The customs which stressed early marriage—such as *Thirandu kalyanam*, *Koottu*

vivaham etc-were increasingly discouraged by reformers like Narayanaguru. It was the Kerala Joint Hindu Family System (Abolition) Act 1976, which abolished joint family system in Kerala. The extinction of polyandrous and polygamous families in Kerala implies a shift to nuclear family, decline of extended families and a trend towards loss of male dominance.

As polyandry rested on the sanction of customary usages, marital disputes were rare. The authors could hear women in their 80s saying that husbands numbering more than two had lived peacefully and happily. If there were any disputes, the community itself had found a solution to them. The flexibility allowed in the system had also ensured that marital disputes never reached the court. Disputes arose among the descendants of polyandrous parents from the 1980s. They related to partition of property of parents and there were disputations of claims on the part of children to property for being born to polyandrous parents. When monogamy began to get social and legal recognition, those in polyandrous marriage chose to start a new family. The children of such fathers often put claims to their property citing that they had been their fathers. There were several partition suits which cropped up in the 1980s. Most of them were settled amicably. Some of them prolonged.

CONCLUSION

The above details underline the fact that the polyandry, as it existed among the Thiyyas in Kerala, was similar to that of the Tibetans while it varied considerably from the systems prevailing among the Todas and the Sinhalese. If this is taken into account, the existing notion among linguists, anthropologists and historians that the Thiyyas had migrated from Sri Lanka has no basis.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ K P Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala, Written in the form of Notes on Visscher's Letters from Malabar, Vol. 3, ed. Sahityakusalan T K Krishnemenon, Asian Educational Services, Delhi, 1984, p. 437.

² L K Ananthakrishna Iyer, The Tribes and Castes of Cochin, Vol.1, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1981 (1909), p. 294.

³ A Sreedhara Menon, Kerala District Gazetteers, Thiruvananthapuram, 1962, p. 285.

⁴ Krishnadas, a leading advocate in Pattambi, hints that as long as polyandry remained a customary usage, the court had recognized it as legal and therefore approved the rights of parties associated with it. He and some others call the Thiyyas 'Kettumargakkar.'

⁵ Thiyyas, Thandans and Ezhavas refer to the same social segment of the Hindus.

⁶ Kammalas include five castes – Asari, Moosari, Kollan, Thattan, Tholkollan etc.

⁷ Washermen caste of Kerala

⁸ The term polyandry derived from two Greek words, polys (many) and andros (men). See The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol 9, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc, Chicago, 1995, p. 575. Polyandry is defined as a system of marriage which allows the 'sharing of a single wife by two or more husbands at the same time.' See Encyclopedia Americana International Edition, Grolier Incorporated, Danbury, 1993, p. 365. It is also considered as 'the rarer form of polygamy.' Polyandry, along with matriarchy, and other practices, is supposed to be part of the human society at the starting point of evolution. See Julius Jolly, Hindu Law and Custom, Trans. Bata Krishnaghosh, Bharatiya Publishing House, Delhi, 1975, p. 102.

⁹ By the 1960s, polyandry had almost died out in the study region.

¹⁰ Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community, Women Muslim and Hindu Public Opinion in Colonial India*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2012 (2001), p. 128

¹¹ A S Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Pvt Ltd, Delhi, 1995 (1959), p. 112.

¹² S N Sinha and N K Basu, *History of Prostitution in India*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 82.

¹³ See Julius Jolly, op.cit., p. 102. Apastamba's Dharmasutra had mentioned that 'marrying a girl to a whole family' was an obsolete custom. Brihaspati, another authority on law in ancient times, also states that Kule Kanyapradhanam (group marriage) had existed only 'in other lands.'

¹⁴ Carol R Ember, Melvin Ember, Anthropology, Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi, 1995, p. 324; Gerald D Berreman, Hindus of the Himalayas Ethnography and Change, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993.

¹⁵ Serena Nanda, Richard L Warms, Wordsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, 2007, p. 214.

¹⁶ L K Ananthakrishna Iyer, The Tribes and Castes of Cochin, Vol.1, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1981 (1909). Iyer states that the ceremony was conducted 'before they are nine or ten years of age.)

¹⁷ M K Sanu, Sreenarayanaguruswami, National Bookstall, Kottayam, p. 182.

¹⁸ M K Sanu, Sahodaran K Ayyappan, DC Books, Kottayam, 2011 (1980), p. 146.

¹⁹ By the year 1909, the Social Conferences of the Indian National Congress had started demanding the raising of marriageable age of girls to 16 and that of boys to 25. However, such changed perspectives had not made much impact on the Thiyyas of the erstwhile Ponnani and Ottapalam taluks.

²⁰ According to Ottupara Raman at Kaippuram near Thiruvegappura, Kettukalyanam often occurred at night. It was cousins (sons of uncle or aunt) who were selected for the ritual. Kettukalyanam had been held from the age of 6-7 to 14. If no *kettukalyanam* was conducted,

the family of the girl would be boycotted with the result that their relatives would not invite them for occasions such as marriage. Raman was witness to *kettukalyanam*. However, he doesn't recollect any incident of boycott. His marriage occurred when he was 22 and his wife 20.

²¹ Raman says that the age of marriage in his childhood ranged from 18 to 20 and the age of girls for marriage was much lower and was in the range of 12-13. At Kumbidi in Anakkara region, an informant told the authors that her mother was married to brothers ranging from 5-8. She was just 10. She had to return to her parental house and remarry after attaining maturity as she could not bear the pressure from these many husbands.

²² This ceremony was known variously. *Bandham varuthuka*, *palbandham varuthuka*, *Palum pazhavum kodukkuka* etc were the terms widely prevalent. Most of the informants told the authors that sweetened milk was served to the bride and the brothers when they reach the house of the bridegroom and that only the elder brother formally marries the girl at her house. Ottupara Raman, who had attended several such marriages in his childhood, informed us that all the brothers were present at the house of the bride and that they all had tied the thread.

²³ It was the bride's mother who in most areas was reported to have performed this ceremony.

²⁴ In the 1940s, a thread, coloured yellow by mixing it with turmeric powder, was tied around the neck of the bride. During the time of Ottupara Raman, no garland was exchanged other than tali-tying.

²⁵ This was also a generally observed practice among the polyandrous societies in the world. See Encyclopedia America, International Education Grolier Incorporated, Danbury, 1993, p. 365.

²⁶ Ramankutty, who was one of the two husbands to a girl, then aged 14-15 years.

²⁷ This was a version received from an informant at Paruthoor in Pattambi taluk.

²⁸ Jonathan Stoltz, Journal of Buddhist Ethics, Vol. 21, 2014, p. 613.

²⁹ Ottupara Raman says divorce was an easy affair. The tali should not be cut when the woman was asleep. The decision to divorce often came from the husband, even of the woman did not agree to it.

³⁰ L K Ananthakrishna Iyer, op.cit., p. 295.

³¹ There is also a version that originally, all the six brothers were wedded to the first wife.

³² *Vadippan* is a term which implies a measure of paddy. Here, the term refers to the total quantity of seed sown in a land.

³³ Dr K P Mohammedkutty, an ayurvedic practitioner in Pattambi, hinted that there were many cases of polyandrous husbands consulting him for issues such as early orgasm. According to him, a woman in her prime can receive three or four men as sexual partners as she takes time to attain orgasm. 'When you marry a 16 year old when 40, there would be issues,' he said.

³⁴ Personal interview with Ottupara Raman.