

KNANAYA TERMS, CUSTOMS & TRADITIONS

Aasaan: A teacher who provides basic education. This title is a sign of respect for the teacher of folk dances such as Margamkali.

Ancharapallikkar: "Owners of five and a half churches" - Before the crucial Synod of Diamper in 1599, the Knanaites owned churches in Udayamperoor, Kaduthuruthy, Kottayam, Chunkom (Thodupuzha), and Kallissery. They also shared church ownership with the Northists in various locations, which earned them the designation of "Anchara pallikkaar."

Bar Mariam Song: This is a hymn of blessing in the Syriac language. Bar Mariam means "the Son of Mary." At the end of the wedding, the priests and choir sing this song and give a blessing to the couple at its conclusion. The Chaldeans sing this song on special occasions. The song mentions the wedding of Cana and the crucifixion of Jesus who is betrothed to the church.

Betrothal: It is a Jewish and Eastern Christian tradition. The Knanaya tradition requires the bride and groom, their families and friends to arrive at the church before the priest to pledge solemnly for an upcoming marriage. Besides the expression of verbal consent of the couple, the paternal uncles will clasp hands and receive a blessing from the priest. The church begins the required processes for the marriage from that point onward.

Chantham Charthal: Groom's beautification - It is a traditional ritual to enhance the groom's appearance on the eve of the wedding. Historically, the event took place on Saturday night when the wedding was on Sunday. This comprised a solemn shave, hair trim, and an application of oil to the body by the local barber, followed by an austere bath. This action has a spiritual component, similar to the confession one makes before taking the Holy Eucharist.

Charamkett: "Ashes Knot" - Supposedly, the bride would make a knot with a pinch of ash from her home to the end of her new garment. This practice is based on a historical event from the past. To honor their ancestral church and burial places, the Knanaites took a handful of burned remains from Kodungalloor when they were forced to leave because of the Samoothiri of Calicut's attack on the King of Cochin in 1524 which caused the devastation of their churches and homes. This is like the modern practice of family members preserving the cremated remains of a deceased relative.

Chatham (Sratham): Sratham, a word derived from the Tamil language, is synonymous with journey or path. This is a prayer service in remembrance of a family member's passing away, accompanied by a meal on the day of their memorial or death anniversary.

Chatta: This is a white, full-sleeved blouse of Christian women, designed to cover the entire upper body. Cotton and silk are the primary materials used and often adorned with embroidery or lace. It is a representation of modesty and holiness for Christian women.

Cord for thali: This cord is composed of seven strands taken from the manthrakodi and entwined together. That is folded three times to form twenty-one strands and then interwoven to create a single thread. The product of three and seven is twenty-one. The number three symbolizes the loving unity of the Holy Trinity and seven represents the sacraments.

Cumin: It is the dried seed of a plant, *Cuminum cyminum*. This spice is used for cooking and is said to have health benefits, according to Ayurveda. Knanaites share cumin for manthra (a memorial prayer service) from one plate as a symbol of family unity.

Deathbed blessing: At the end of life, individuals may place their hands upon their children, grandchildren, or other close family members while at the sickbed and give them the traditional blessing of their ancestors.

Diaspora: This term in Greek signifies the act of dispersing. Individuals living in diaspora have been moved from their original homeland but still keep cultural connections. The Knanaites from the Archeparchy of Kottayam, who have moved past its legal limits, are still preserving their communal identity, much like the Jews in dispersion.

Endogamy: The term endogamy is composed of two Greek words: endo (internal) and gamos (marriage). Therefore, endogamy is the practice of marrying someone from the same ethnic community or caste. The practice of endogamy is used to protect the social, cultural, and spiritual unity of a group, while also maintaining its traditions and strengthening the bonds of the community. Endogamy has been a feature of different societies around the world since antiquity and persists in certain societies presently. The Knanaya Community is one among such groups that practice endogamy.

Ettu Nombu (Eight Day Fast): The Catholic and Orthodox Eastern Churches have a custom of fasting for eight days, beginning on September first and ending on September eighth, to prepare for the feast day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Knanaya ladies who married after the prior eight-day fast will go back to their home and attend regular Mass and special prayers in their original parish with other women. Practice of fasting, abstinence, and interceding to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and her mother Anna, is for a child in good health to arrive soon.

Ichappad: This is a traditional white rice porridge cooked in coconut milk, popularly known as “Venpalchor” and is served with jaggery. Knanaites have adapted the food they had in their original home to fit the ingredients found in Kerala. The tradition of offering Ichappad during the Chantham Charthal and Mailanchi Ideel conveys the wish that the lives of the couple will be as pleasant as the delectable taste of the dish.

Illappanam (Clan money): As recorded in Gen 34:12, Illappanam was a payment that the groom’s father gave to the bride’s family in return for allowing her to transfer from her clan to the groom’s clan. This took place at the end of the marriage celebrations, which lasted from Saturday to Thursday. The Knanaya community was originally composed of seventy-two families from seven clans. The customary practice in the community was to marry between different clans in order to prevent marriage between close relatives (*P.U. Lukas, 1910, p. 20*).

Indary Appam (INRI Bread): On the Holy Thursday, a customary rice bread, referred to as “Pesaha Appam,” is prepared with two Palm Sunday leaves placed on top in a cross pattern. On the night of Holy Thursday, after a brief prayer, the head of the household slices the cake and divides it among the family members. A sweet milk dish made of coconut juice and jaggery is served along with this. The bread and milk symbolize the Holy Eucharist, and the participants consume them with reverence.

Kacha Thazhukal (Cloth Caressing): This is a ritual at the wedding reception after the “Vazhoo Pidutham.” The bride’s maternal uncle will fasten his shoulder cloth around his head with the ends facing upward. He will seek permission from the assembly three times prior to performing the ritual. Then he will touch the groom’s waist three times with both hands and then will touch the bottom of the groom’s hands and the saree. He will then pass the saree to the hands of the bride and do the same again. Afterwards, he will take the cloth and will withdraw. The bride’s mother and grandmother will repeat the thazhukal without asking permission.

Kacha: It is a lengthy white cloth worn by women known also as “Koodi” that was at least six yards long. During Kacha Thazhukal, kacha was given to the bride’s family by the groom’s family as a gift for bringing up the bride. The sari is now a substitute for the koodi.

Kaipiduatham (Clasping of hands): “Kaipiduatham,” the engagement ritual, comprises the clasping of hands between the groom and bride’s paternal uncles in the church as an expression of both family’s agreement for the marriage and their collaboration in the preparations for the wedding.

Kavini: This is a white, rectangular cloth that is typically donned by Christian women in Kerala when they go to church. The kavini could cover their head and shoulders. It is formed from either cotton or silk and is enriched with embroidery or lace. It serves as a symbol of humility and holiness for Christian women.

Kinai Thomman: The leader of the Knanaya Migration at Kodungalloor in 345 AD. He was a Syrian Christian merchant who had trade relations between Mesopotamia and Kodungalloor.

Kindi: A bronze water carrier, which is a traditional utensil in Kerala for washing hands, feet, and mouth.

King Cheraman Perumal: He, the local ruler, graciously accepted the Knanaya Migrants at Kodungalloor, allowing them and their spiritual leaders to exercise and promulgate their religion. He offered seventy-two privileges, because of Thomas of Kinai, to show honour to the community as an esteemed group in the social order.

Kolambi: A traditional spittoon in Kerala made of bronze.

Koluvilakku: A bronze oil lamp with a lengthy handle that is used for wedding rituals like Chantham Chrathal, Mailanchi Ideel, when departing the home for church for a wedding, Nellum Neerum Vekkal, and religious ceremonies like procession for feasts. It was one of the seventy-two privileges the Syrian Christians received from King Cheraman Perumal through Kinai Thomman. It is also known as “pakalvilakku” (Daytime Lamp) symbolizing Jesus, the light of the world.

Kshurakan: Kshurakan is a caste traditionally engaged in the profession of barbers. Historically, their primary occupation was haircutting, shaving, and other grooming services. They perform rituals for Knanaites during the Chantham Charthal ceremony.

Kunukku: A considerable, circular gold earring that is fastened to the upper earlobe, worn by Christian women in Kerala. It is roughly one inch in diameter and adorned with crystal beads.

Kurandi (Peedam): A seat that is around one foot high, comprising four legs with no backrest or arms.

Kuruthola: It refers to the palm leaves the priest blesses and the people use on Palm Sunday. The faithful take these homes and preserve them for Nellum Neerum at the wedding reception and for preparing Passover bread at home.

Manarkolam: An elevated seat for the bride and groom at the wedding banquet hall. Earlier, it was usually covered with a woolen blanket and a white linen cloth. The woolen cloth represents the struggles and temptations faced in life and the white linen symbolizes the triumph over them through moral living. This is a modified version of the specifically designed Huppah the Jews employed for the newlyweds. It is usually decorated with a canopy composed of decorated cloth held up by poles.

Manthrakodi: It is a new cloth or a sari the priest blesses at the marriage ceremony in the church. It is a gift from the groom to the bride at the wedding. Saree is crafted from either silk or cotton and is exquisitely decorated with a colorful design. The groom drapes the saree on the bride's head to show his love and his commitment to protect her. The women keep it as a sacred souvenir of their wedding.

Mantra: The literal meaning of Manthram is prayer. This name refers to the prayer service conducted by the priest on the memorial days and death anniversaries of the deceased.

Margamkali: The literal meaning is "dance of the way." Jesus is the way to the Father that Thomas introduced. This is a traditional dance enacted by men for special occasions like weddings and religious festivals. Twelve people enacted this dance around a lamp, which symbolized Jesus and his twelve disciples. It has fourteen sections of songs narrating the mission of St. Thomas the Apostle based on the book the Acts of St. Thomas. Recently, ladies also perform Margamkali.

Nadavili: A Knanaya wedding customarily includes a cheer that is performed three times: when the wedding group departs from the church, when they are near the reception venue, and when they enter the venue. The uncles and other men will encircle the couple for this cheer. They raise their right hands and chant “Nada ... Nadanadayooo... Nada, Nada, Nada” in one breath. After bringing their hands down, they repeat the action two additional times.

Naloth: The literal meaning of Naloth is prayer of the day. This prayer service is held at the home of the deceased immediately following the burial service on the same day. The family, friends, and parish priest will gather at the house. The priest leads a prayer, consoling the family and praying for the soul of the departed. As a symbol of family unity, the participants share cumin from one plate, and the immediate family drinks from one tender coconut, which the priest blesses and hands over to the eldest son.

Nellum Neerum Vekkal: Blessing with paddy grains and water - The bridegroom’s mother welcomes the newly married couple to the groom’s family with a traditional blessing. Upon the couple’s arrival to the pandal, the mother will greet them with a plate containing seven grains of paddy that have been soaked in water, plus a piece of blessed palm leaf from the previous Palm Sunday. The bride’s mother and groom’s sister will help her hold the plate and lit Nilavilakku as she carries out the ceremony. The bridegroom’s mother submerges a palm leaf or kuruthola into water and traces it across the foreheads of the groom and then the bride in a cross-shaped pattern. It is a prayerful wish for the newly wed for their prosperity and fertility in the family life that they have started.

Neyyappam: A traditional sweet dish in a small ball-shaped form made up of rice flour, jaggery, and coconut milk, boiled in oil. The daughter of the deceased prepares this for the memorial services. Every individual shall receive three neyyappam and one small banana fruit upon completion of the prayer. It symbolizes the bread of the Holy Eucharist.

Paanan Song: The Paanan caste in Kerala has been privileged to sing songs that glorify the royalty. They went to houses to give acknowledgement to Thomas of Kinai for his laudable service to King Cheraman Perumal. The theme of the song is how Thomas brought back the four casts who fled to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) because of their bitter experience from the king. Paanans sing at the wedding celebrations of the Knanaites.

Paalum Pazhavum (Milk and Fruit): As a representation of unity and a wish for a sweet married life, the bride's mother presents the couple with a cup of sweetened milk and slices of fruit (banana). This is part of the ritual of Vazhoo Pidutham (blessing) which includes chanting of traditional songs.

Panchavadyam: An orchestra of five instruments: timila, maddalam, ilathalam, idakka, and kombu. The Knanaites used it to solemnize their wedding procession from the church to home. They could use it because King Cheraman Perumal had allowed them to use it as a privilege.

Pandal: A temporary shed or banquet hall built in front of the bridegroom's house for the wedding reception and banquet. The maternal uncles of the bride and groom used to take part in the erection of its poles.

Pattu: It is a silk cloth that the daughters of the deceased cover the body as a sign of respect. This is a representation of the dressing of the deceased on their way to God in paradise. The ritual is called "pattideel."

Paaya: The pulppaya or paya is a type of mat handcrafted from dried kora grass and is used for many purposes, such as sitting, sleeping, storing, and ceremonial activities in Kerala. This is also used for domestic devotions in connection with the Knanaya wedding.

Peedam (Pedestal): A seat (kurandi) that is around one foot high, comprising four legs with no backrest or arms.

Pettinu Videel (Sending off for Childbirth): The family of the pregnant woman offered her care and support beginning in her seventh month of pregnancy and continuing for a few months after giving birth. At an agreed-upon time, the woman's mother or maternal aunt and her nearest family members would go to the couple's residence and take her to her pre-marital home for care.

Pidy: A food item that is formed into a ball, made from a mixture of rice flour and coconut milk, cooked in boiling water. Chicken Curry is usually served with Pidy. This item is essential when a pregnant woman goes to her pre-nuptial home to give birth.

Purathana Paattukal (Traditional Songs): The Knanaya community preserved its history and teachings in folk songs as oral traditions before the print media. In the seventeenth

century, these traditional songs were first documented on palm leaves, and later compiled and published in a book titled “Purathana Paattukal” or Traditional Songs by P.U. Lukas in 1910.

Puthan Paana: A German Jesuit missionary priest Johann Ernst Hanxleden, also referred to as Arnos Paathiri composed this Malayalam poem. The poem presents the life of Jesus Christ. The consensus is that the poem was composed between 1721 and 1732.

Southists (Thekkumbhagar): This designation distinguished the Knanaites from the other Syrian Christians in Kerala. Those who resided in the North of the Kodungalloor palace were referred to as Vadakkumbhagar and those who had established a settlement in the south were called Thekkumbhagar. The name Knanaites was applicable before the Knanaya migration, as they were originally from Southern Israel or the Jews.

Thaali: A small, thin, and banyan leaf-shaped gold pendant with 21 beads embossed in the shape of a cross. It symbolizes the everlasting union between the husband and wife. The cross symbolizes the sacrificial life of Jesus and twenty-one is the product of three, representing the Trinity, and seven, representing the sacraments. This is a Christianized version of the mangalasutra from Hinduism.

Thalayil Kettu: Knanaya men traditionally wear white-colored turban and a white mundu. The headpiece will have a distinct look with both ends raised up. It is used for wedding customs such as providing Ichappad during Chantham Charthal and Mailanchi Ideel, during the procession from church to home, and kacha thazhukal during the wedding reception.

Thali-kettu (Tying the thali): The groom ties the thali around the bride’s neck with a thread made from seven strands of the manthrakodi. Historically, the bride and groom showed devotion by both kneeling during the ceremony. Now the couples do the knot standing.

Twenty-Eight: This stands for a lunar month, a multiplication of days of a week and four that are Biblically significant numbers. Parents tie thread or gold chain around the waist of a child on the 28th day of birth. Knanaites usually observe the first anniversary of someone’s death according to the lunar year that is 28 days prior to one solar year. This resulted from the ancient practice of the lunar calendar.

Urappikkal: Confirmation of marriage in Malayalam is “Kalyanam Urappikkal.” This takes place at the house of the groom with the representatives of the groom’s and bride’s family and immediate relatives. Prior to that, there would be a discussion on the wedding at the house of the bride.

Urha Mar Joseph: He was a bishop from Urha in the present-day Turkey who came with Thomas of Kinai, four priests, deacons, and 400 immigrants for missionary service in Kodungalloor.

Venpalchor: On the eve of marriage, a white rice porridge was made with white rice and coconut milk. It is the first item served during the meal of Chantham Charthal and Mylanchi Ideel. Jaggery is used to add a unique taste when mixed with palchor.