CHAPTER - VI

SELF-RESPECT MOVEMENT

Generally the changed personal laws or customs prepare a community for its rise in social rank. But to achieve this the community needs prime mover with charismatic leadership. In succeeding such factor and exaltation in their status the leadership of the Ilava community found in Sri Narayana Guru (1854 or 1856-1928) the fusion that was necessary to give the caste cohesion. Guru, in turn, abandoned his habit of wandering and began in comforting them. As a great socio-religious reformer, Guru, outlined many measures in infusing self respect and self confidence among Ilavas and other backward classes but, he especially reorganised the socio-religious customs of Ilavas. He insisted on removal of their unnecessary customs and traditional evil practices. The immigrant Ilavas of Tamilnadu were also influenced by his reform activities and thereby contributed to their social change.

I. SRI NARAYANA DHARMA PARIPALANA MOVEMENT AMONG THE ILLATHU PILLAIMARS:

A great philanthropist and organiser from the Ilava community in Travancore, Dr. Padmanabhan Palpu, physician in the service at Mysore devoted all his spare time and energy to the social and political uplift of Ilavas in Travancore is mainly responsible for the foundation of S.N.D.P. Yogam. In organizing
the S.N.D.P. Yogam Dr. Palpu got the inspiration from Swami Vivekananda.1

On the Sivaratri (Lord Siva's night) of 1888 Sri Narayana Guru installed the 'Siva Linga' (Siva's emblem) at Aruvippuram, near Neyyattinkara in South Travancore and through it he challenged the religious supremacy of the Brahmins. For the orderly conduct of poojahs, a "Temple Worshipper's Association" was formed.2 Mean while Dr. Palpu met Swami Vivekananda in 1892 and discussed about the miserable condition of Ilavas of Travancore.3 He advised Palpu that any social reform, in the Indian setting, should have a religious base, then only it would go deep into the heart of the people. Palpu was convinced by the incitement of Swami Vivekananda and for him dawned an idea of strengthening the "Temple Worshippers' Association" started by Narayana Guru and to deepen the social dimensions in the work of Narayana Guru.4


2 After the installation of 'Siva Linga' at Aruvippuram, every new moon day (Vavoo in Malayalam) the Ilavas of that locality had met on the bank of the Neyyar river to do a peculiar Hindu rite known as Bali. By the initiation of Sri Narayana Guru they were got united and formed an organisation known as "Vavoottu Yogam". In 1899 for the orderly conduct of poojahs Guru converted that organisation into"Aruvippuram Shetra Yogam" (Aruvippuram Temple Worshippers Association).


Palpu met the Guru with an appeal to intensify the scope of the working of the association. Guru at first turned down his overture but later he felt that the upright attempts of Palpu to co-ordinate and strengthen the backward classes deserved encouragement. In the 1903 A.D. the Aruvippuram Temple Worshippers' Association that grown under the leadership of Guru from Vavoot Yogam was converted into Sri Narayana Dharma Parpalana Yogam (S.N.D.P.). It was registered as a joint-stock company with the famous Malayalam poet Kumaran Asan as its first Secretary. The triumvirate of Ilava leadership Sri Narayana Guru, Palpu and Kumaran Asan, prepared their following with a united guidance.

S.N.D.P. Yogam was the Sangha organised, like the Buddhist Sangha, for the dissemination of his ideal of social reform and it was based on the four pillars of truth, cleanliness, integrity and unity. It insisted the monogamy of Ilavas, Sanskritization of their religious rites, renouncement of caste inequalities etc. In the First Annual Conference of the S.N.D.P. Yogam at Aruvippuram in 1904 Dr. Palpu declared that in the past Ilavas were never considered in inferior position as in the later periods. Also he said that there were numerous evidences which have depicted that as they were once lived with the enlightenment of a civilized community. He further said that the Yogam has been


6 Ibid.
founded with a view to maintain the ancient and splendid culture of Ilavas.\textsuperscript{7}

Initially the membership of the Yogam was given only to Ilavas. But in due course membership was provided to all irrespective of caste, creed, religion, language etc.\textsuperscript{8} Sri Narayana Guru, the life long President of the S.N.D.P. Yogam, outlined many measures to uplift them socially, religiously, economically and politically from the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

Illathupillaimars of Tamilnadu have good relationship with the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P. Yogam – an organisation for the propagation of the ethics of Sri Narayana Guru and also his ideal of social reform) of their counterpart at Quilon in Kerala. Influenced by the philosophy of Guru, the Ilavas of Tamilnadu organised a S.N.D.P. Yogam at Vickramasingapuram in 1983.\textsuperscript{9} In the next year branches were organised in different parts of Tamilnadu and developed a Tamilnadu S.N.D.P. Union with S. Muppidathiya Pillai of Vickramasingapuram as its President and S.T. Nayagom of Tuticorin as its

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} T.K. Madhavan, \textit{Doctor Palpu} (Quilon: S.N.D.P. Yogam, 1986), (Malayalam) Reprint, Appendix.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Interview with S. Muppidathiya Pillai, Vickramasingapuram, Tirunelveli Kattabomman district, dated 14.7.1992.
\end{itemize}

In Vickramasingapuram there were nearly seven other branches viz. (a) Dana I, (b) Dana II, (c) Dana III, (d) Salaiteru (e) Kottaram, (f) Karuthayapuram and (g) Ramalingapuram. These branches are still working strenuously for the propagation of social reform ideas of Guru. They convene special meetings and seminar on birth and death date of Sri Narayana Guru and discuss and stress about the importance of Guru's teachings of, 'One caste - One religion - One god for mankind' as a remedy to all socio-religious problems of the present period. The Tamilnadu S.N.D.P. union representatives often attend the conferences and meetings which are to be organised by the S.N.D.P. Yogam of their counterpart in Kerala in their head office at Quilon. At present R. Ganesan from Puliangudi in the Tirunelveli Kattabomman district is selected as the President and S.T. Nayagom of Tuticorin as the Convenor of the Tamilnadu S.N.D.P. Union and its headquarter is at Puliangudi.

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10 Ibid.


a) **SANSKRITIZATION OF RITUALS:**

Many of the Ilava age long religious rituals and social customs were condemned by the Guru. He found that almost all of their customs were unnecessary and meaningless. He scourged their temples dedicated for the demons. He declared that they were the places of foul play and blind belief. He urged them to renounce the superstitious practices and adopt "purified", through the Brahmanical worship and rituals. Further he censured the animal sacrifice and the practice of offering toddy and arrack to the inferior divinities associated with demon worship.

He encouraged Sanskritized religious rites and worship of Brahmanical deities and even composed a group of hymns in praise of Brahmanical deities like Siva, Devi, Vishnu, Subramonia and Pillaiyar.13 His religious reforms had its effects on the Ilavas of Tamilnadu. Ilavas of Srivilliputtur had renounced the practice of inferior divinity worship through the Sanskritization of their religious rites by constructing temples for Brahmanical gods like Vinayagar and Subramonia in the name of Sri Varasidhi Vinayagar and Arulmigu Kalyana Murugan in May 1908.14

But in some places he himself vigorously indulged in demolishing the superstitious places and objects of worship. In

13 Muni Narayana Prasad, The Contributions of Narayana Guru to Indian Philosophy, Souvenir of the VIIIth Annual Conference of the South Indian History Congress (Quilon: Sree Narayana Samskarika Samity, 1988), Article No.10.

14 Srivilliputtur Sri Varasidhi Vinayagar and Arulmigu Kalyana Murugan temple inscription dated on 21st May, 1908.
this connection his reforms among Ilavas of Kottar and Kadukkara (near Nagercoil) in 1915 is a significant one. Ilavas of Nainartoppu street, Kadukkara practised animal sacrifice and also offered toddy and arrack to a graveyard temple. Guru visited it and advised them to give up such practices because they were symbol of uncivilized customs. As a primary step he cleared the temple and introduced Sanskritized worship there. Similar type of worship was also arranged in the Amman temple found in the same village.\textsuperscript{15}

Ilavas of Kottar who lived in eight streets worshipped 42 pidams (pedestals) of inferior divinities such as Madan, Bhoodathan, Shodalamadan, Vangarumadan, Malaipidari, Mallan Karungkali, Karuppan, Irulan, Manthyadishodalai, Manthaiamman, Bhadrakali, Esakki etc.\textsuperscript{16} Guru visited Kottar and advised them to worship one Brahmanical god and to avoid the practice of bloody sacrifice with animals and fowls. Guru removed the following pidams and idols from their Vagayadi street of Kottar.\textsuperscript{17}

\underline{\textsuperscript{15} Illathupillaimars' Fourth State Conference Souvenir, 1987.}

\underline{\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.}

\underline{\textsuperscript{17} M.K. Sanoo, Narayana Guruswamy – Biography (Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd., 1986), (Malayalam) Reprint, pp.296, 297.}
Pillaiyar Temple at Kottar, consecrated by Sri Narayana Guru.

Photo of Sri Narayana Guru erected in the Pillaiyar temple at Kottar as a mark of veneration with their preceptor.
Pedestals and idols of inferior divinities

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<tr>
<th>Pedestals and idols of inferior divinities</th>
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<td>Madan pidam</td>
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<td>Bhoodhathan</td>
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<td>Vankarumadan pidam</td>
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<td>Shodalamadan</td>
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<td>Esakki pidam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Esakki idol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mallan-Karungkali pidam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karuppan, Irulan etc.</td>
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In removing these pedestals, the youth of Kottar showed much interest. When Guru gave the order of destruction, the youths and some elders destroyed the big pedestals and idols of the above said demons.¹⁸ Further, the practice of worship with bloody sacrifices of animals and fowls, at the Amman temple at Kottar also stopped.¹⁹

In 1922, Guru erected Pillaiyar statue in the middle street for their worship.²⁰ These reforms of Guru among the Ilavas of Kottar was successful one. Old custom of naming the children in the name of inferior divinities was dispensed with by them. They began to give modern names to their children. Many Ilavas discontinued their traditional profession of producing and

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
selling of arrack and toddy and engaged in other trade with a
motivation of economic elevation and social status.

In 1923, Guru visited Kalakkad and found the worship of
Uthiramadan with bloody sacrifices in the corner of their street,
Pudutheru by a section of Ilavas. Guru himself destroyed the
Uthiramadan pedestal and advised them to worship superior
divinities like Siva, Pillaiyar, Subramonia etc.²¹ Because of his
religious reform, Ilavas of Kalakkad awakened about their rude
practice of demonism and its implication that led to their social
degradation.

b) ONE CASTE - ONE RELIGION - ONE GOD:

Like their counterpart, S.N.D.P. Union of the Illathu-
pillaimars in Tamilnadu also propagating Guru's philosophy of "One
Caste - One religion - One god for man" - among the masses for the
unity of all religions and also for the creation of a casteless
society. From the beginning of the 20th century the educated and
prominent Ilava leaders of Travancore thought of conversion as a
proper remedy to the humiliation thrust upon them by the caste
Hindus. C. Krishnan, an Ilava community leader, criticised the
illogical customs and observances of Hinduism²² and advocated for
embracing Buddhism. In the annual meeting of S.N.D.P. Yogam in

²¹ Interview with N. Rajakumar Masilamani and C. Sundararaj,
1923, Buddhism was opposed as it had no correspondence with Guru's ideal of religion. But however, some Ilavas embraced Buddhism. The Census of 1931 has cited that there were 64 Buddhist converts, probably from Ilavas. C.V. Kunjuraman, an Ilava leader, was in favour of embracing Christianity. But K. Ayyappan, another Ilava leader, objected to their conversion to Christianity by showing that there were caste distinctions even within the Christian community itself. He demanded that Ilavas should not follow anyone of the religions. Dr. K.P. Thayyil favoured Islam but was not able to get the support of Ilavas. Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj also came under discussion among them. Some persons embraced Sikhism willingly and gave up their old names and themselves styled the Sikh name. Judaism also under discussion for conversion in order to get rid of the Hindu caste ostracism.

It is said that when Guru found that some Ilavas were not satisfied with the progress of his new movement and showed an inclination to secede from Hinduism and follow other religion, he proclaimed the doctrine of "One Caste - One Religion - One God for Man". This doctrine of Guru stimulated their movement to

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
establish the right of all Hindus irrespective of caste, to enter temples and worship god, a right which was denied to the out castes previously. As a result of the Guru's teachings Ilavas realized that they need not seek the help of other religions by embracing it for getting rid of unjust treatment imposed upon them and other depressed classes by the caste Hindus in the name of religion.28

Guru denied both "Varna" (Chathurvarna system or four fold divisions of caste based on occupation) and "Jati" (caste) and advocated that there was no need of these in the life of human beings. Even Mahatma Gandhi also had followed the theory of Guru in his later life. When Guru and Gandhiji met at Sivagiri in Travancore on 12th March 1925, an argument took place between them on the validity of the concept of caste. Pointing out to the mango tree, Gandhiji said that as the leaves were not same in size, so were members of the human race. Guru retorted that on chewing these different kinds of leaves of the tree yield the same taste. Thus he stressed the view that all human beings are formed one and the same caste. Later Gandhiji in one of his speeches at Calcutta used the same metaphor of the Guru to prove the unity of all castes.29

Guru visited almost all the places in Tamilnadu between 1906 and 1926. In 1913, Govindadhas, one of the disciples of Guru helped to create a mutt in the Hunters Road at Veperi in Madras. Guru stayed there for some time and preached his gospel of "One Caste - One Religion - One God for Man". It is said that there are some important persons like Justice D. Sadhasiva Iyer, former Chief Justice of Madras High Court, and Justice Krishnan, followed the teachings of Guru and they strenuously worked for the propagation of his teachings.

During the time of the First World War cholera and plague spread in Kancheepuram. Guru sent his disciple Govindananda swami there to do relief works. There he started a mutt named 'Sri Narayana Sevasramam' with the help of Somasundaram Chettiyar. Still the Dharmavaidhiyasalai functions at Kancheepuram.


30 In 1989, the Tamilnadu Government has changed the name of Hunters road as 'Sri Narayana Guru Road'.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Padmanandaswami, one of the disciples of Guru maintained the Pillaiyarpatti Ashramam. During the period of Anandasaraswathi free medical aid was provided to the poor. At present it is controlled by Kuntrakudi-Tiruvannamalai Aadheena Matam.

In 1914 Santhalinga Swami, one of the disciples of Guru, started a mutt at Tirupparamkuntram near Madurai. Guru stayed in this mutt and advised the Ilavas to dispense with old demonolatry worship. The people who visited him promised to follow his advice. To continue his work he appointed his disciples Sukunanandagiri Swami and Sri Hanumangiri Swami at Tirupparamkuntram. They did service to the welfare of the poor. Sri Hanumangiri Swami started a mobile clinic and sent medicines to the near-by villages in a bullock cart. In 1927 Vidyananda Swami, an ardent follower of Guru started Charitable clinic at Mampalam in Madras.

Guru often visited Tirunelveli, Ambasamudram, Vickramasingapuram, Papanasam, Tenkasi, Courtalam, Tuticorin, Madurai, etc. During such visits he advocated his followers to give up the old profession and give importance to education. He further advised his devotees to give up the traditional practices of devil

35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
worship. In 1926, Guru visited Kuntrakudi Melamatam where he was warmly welcomed by Ganapathy Swami,\textsuperscript{39} one of the spiritual saints of the Ilavas in Tamilnadu. In the same year Guru consecrated a Pillaiyar statue for the worship of the out castes at Bhavani, near Erode\textsuperscript{40} and thus to eliminate their rude religious practices connected with the demonism. Also, he appointed Yazhpanam Swami, one of his disciples, to impart education to the illiterate low caste people in Bhavani.\textsuperscript{41} Guru loved the Tamilians and took efforts for the uplift of the down trodden of the Tamil land. On one occasion he expressed his willingness to stay permanently in Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{42}

In order to adhere his religious practices effectively, Guru realized the necessity of having temples, hermitages (Ashramas), monasteries and a category of celibate monks, priests and missionaries. At the later stage of his life some devotees of Guru incited him that an yearly pilgrimage of his followers to Sivagiri, his spiritual headquarters, would be desirable and it


\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, p.168. Also the Illathupillaimars' Fourth State Conference Souvenir, 1987.

\textsuperscript{41} Illathupillaimars' Fourth State Conference Souvenir, 1987.

would help to integrate the Ilava community. Guru agreed with this view. Accordingly on the 30th and 31st December and 1st January every year the Pilgrims congregate with yellow garments at Sivagiri. The followers are also advised the visit of Sivagiri by a spirit of devotion and not in a holiday mood. After the samathi (earthly sojourn) of Guru,43 his followers from Tamilnadu also attend the pilgrimage to partake in the blessings of Guru.

In Tamilnadu the Sri Narayana Mandiram at the Hunters Road in Madras, Sri Narayana Sevasramam at Kancheepuram and Santhalinga Mutt at Tirupparamkuntram near Madurai, were converted into the centres to disseminate Guru's teachings. In each of these mutts, there is one sanyasin devoted to the study of Guru's work and give training to the students to propagate Guru's teachings. These institutions are parallel to the Brahmanical ones and providing an opportunity to the Ilavas and other depressed classes to participate in Brahmanical Hinduism which had been denied to them for centuries.

c) SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-PURIFICATION THROUGH RATIONALISTIC APPROACH:

Guru brought about many revolutionary changes in the Hindu religious worship of the outcasts. He Sanskritized their religious rites not with an intention of Hindu revivalism but to

43 On 20th September 1928 Sri Narayana Guru became samathi at Sivagiri near Varkala in the Quilon district.
give socio-religious status to "avarnas". The persistence of centuries old practices of untouchability and unapproachability, the denial of fundamental right of freedom of worship and entry into the places of worship of Brahmanical Hinduism to 'avarnas' necessitated him in the construction of temples through consecration of Aryan gods for their worship. In 1917, he proclaimed that "Don't encourage the construction of temples hereafter. People are losing faith in temples. They may realize that construction of temple is a waste of money. Period has so such changed. Even though, they would not consider if we say that temples are not needed now. If they are particular let there be small temples. The main temple shall be educational institutions. Collect money and should be interested in erecting schools. Temples are helpful for the development of purity. It was expected that through temples it will be possible for collecting together the people without caste distinctions. The practice is in adverse. Hereafter make effort to educate the people. Let them become wise. That is the remedy to make them good."\(^44\) During his later life he even modified the system of idol worship and consecrated the mirror at the altar instead of deity and this is called Kannadipratishta (mirror image).\(^45\) He instituted this type of worship at Kalavamkodam in Kerala.\(^46\) Similarly in one temple


at Murukkumpuzha (Kerala) he installed the words of 'Satyam, Daya, Dharma and Santhi' (Truth, Compassion, Virtue and Peace), at the altar. In another temple at Karamukku (Kerala) he installed lamp in the place of deity. He believed that man himself is God, and by serving human beings one realizes God.

P.N. Chopra and others have observed as: "By stressing the unifying power of religion, Sri Narayana Guru led his followers to the consummation of a silent revolution-constructive, permanent and with far-reaching results". About Guru's influence on the masses Dr. P. Natarajan quotes: "Although out of reach of newspaper-men and propagandists, this silent sage was the recognised spiritual leader of more than two million people in South India, to whom his word was more imperative than law. Within a period of less than a decade he had established more than one hundred places of worship on the west coast of India alone, which are day by day growing into centres of educational, philanthropic and economic activity. Crowded meetings are held in which his name is the unifying element. His message to the people is the subject of weekly comment on many platforms, and scores of associations have been organised in various parts of South India to spread his ideals. By the spells of his name, young and old are seen to join hands in a common undertaking; rich and poor are

47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
seen to rub shoulders. It can be asserted that he had set in motion a force which is bound to spread into a new impetus for the regeneration of India and the World".\textsuperscript{50} He advocated absolutely constitutional methods to achieve the social justice and economic well being.\textsuperscript{51}

The Christian missionaries in their work of conversion met with a powerful reactionary force of Guru. This reactionary force prevented the major junk of Ilavas' conversion to other religions particularly Christianity. Further several Ilavas were made to rethink about the change of religious faith and ultimately brought them to their older faith i.e. Hinduism. In South Travancore near Neyyattinkara some Ilavas who had converted to Christianity were after seeing Guru's reform in Hindu religion desired to return to their old faith and he reconverted them with great bliss.\textsuperscript{52} In the Tinnevelly district especially in Kalakkad\textsuperscript{53} and Panayamkulam areas hundreds of Christian Ilavas recoursed their faith to Hinduism because of the work of Guru among them. The London Missionary Society in its Annual Report complained that the total number of the Ilava converts declined

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p.244.
\textsuperscript{53} Interview with C. Sundararaj, Kalakkad, dated 4.5.1993.
because of the influence of Guru among them. Many churches, made of thatched roofs had been demolished and Hindu temples were constructed in those places. Under the prime role of Guru a new self respect movement have emerged among the Ilavas and it also avoided the mass conversion of Ilavas to Christianity.

II. GURU'S TEACHINGS AND REGENERATION OF ILAVAS:

The teachings and the regenerative measures of Guru as the religious and social reformer had its magnificent effect on the Ilava community in Tamilnadu. Guru is the first untouchable who showed an intellectual ability in interpreting the Brahma Sutras, the holy text of the Brahmins. Thus he tried to blockade the root of caste dominance and succeeded in shattering the myth of Brahmin religious hierarchy. He surpassed most of the reformers by totally rejecting caste and said that all men are of the same caste. Like Kerala it created an awakening and self respect among the Ilava counterpart in Tamilnadu. His Sanskritization movement encouraged them more and more to participate in he pure Hinduism, discarding the devil worship and it also obstructed their conversion to other religion.

1. DENOUNCEMENT OF POLIGAMY:

Guru prohibited polygamy and bigamy and stressed the importance of monogamy. As a result the immoral habit prevailed


among them began to demise. He compelled the Marumakkathayies to give at least a portion of the property to the legal wife and children. Ilavas felt conscious about that reform and in course of time the Marumakkathayam system of inheritance completely disappeared from their scene.

2. UNIFICATION OF ILAVAS:

The Pattanam, Midalam and the Malayam division Ilavas started to mobilize themselves with sectional interest. For example in 1912, fifty two Ilava families belonging to Pattanam division in Kottar joined together and formulated rules and regulations for the management of their own division. Guru found such groupism to be a hindrance to the regeneration of the Ilavas and also felt the possibility of that leading to their further degradation due to the lack of oneness. So he advocated the necessity of the social unification of various subsects of Ilavas. He vehemently attacked the various sub-divisions among Ilavas and advised them to integrate it into one unit. As a result the Pattanam, Midalam and the Malayam division Ilavas of Nanchinad and Edanad gradually began to make marriage alliance with each other after shedding superiority complex. Guru tried his level best to hinder effectively the practice of the old customs of Thirandukuli, Pulikudi, Talikettukalyanam etc. In 1905 A.D. an Ilava Mahayogam (conference) was convened at Paravoor.

56 Ibid., pp.38, 39.


58 Interview with V. Thanu Pillai, Parakkai, Kanyakumari district dated 7.11.1992.
near Quilon in Travancore and in that meeting Guru stressed the need for the abolition of the above said old and expensive unnecessary customs.\textsuperscript{59} His request also made the Ilavas to rethink about their social customs in which they spent lavishly.\textsuperscript{60} So they sorted out the money consuming customs and in their various level meetings of their caste stressed the necessity for the reduction of lavish expenditure or to do away with such social customs so that the community could have prosperous economically. The community efforts yielded fruitful results when the Ilavas of Kottar began to celebrate the necessary ceremonies like ear-boring, puberty, marriage engagements etc. without any pomposity.\textsuperscript{61}

Guru helped them in various measures in order to get rid of their social sufferings at the hands of caste Hindus. In 1918, when the Ilavathi barber of Kottar migrated from that place, they became victims to the abasement of the caste Hindus due to the lack of a separate barber to serve them. After considering their degraded position, Guru brought to Kottar an Ilavathi barber named Kochappi from Kanjiramkulam in Trivandrum district.\textsuperscript{62} This type of regenerative measures of Guru from the bottom paved for the growth of self respect among the Ilavas.


\textsuperscript{60} Illathupillaimars' Reply to the Tamilnadu Second Backward Classes Welfare Commission, 1983.

\textsuperscript{61} Illathupillaimars' Fourth State Conference Souvenir, 1987.

\textsuperscript{62} Interview with K. Nanoo, son of Kochappi, Kottar, dated 27.7.1992.
3. CHANGE OF OCCUPATION:

Some of the families of Ilava community continued their hereditary occupation of toddy tapping and arrack distillation. Guru felt that this profession was one of the main reasons for their deterioration and defilement and organised a crusade against it. In 1920 A.D. on his birth day he proclaimed one of his famous tenets against that profession as "Liquor is poison; Do not produce it; Do not offer it; Do not drink it". To get a clarification and make it easily to digest, he had added another one line with the above said statement that, "the body of a tapper stinks, his cloth stinks, his house stinks, whatever he touches stinks". After taking this proclamation into consideration, T.K. Madhavan, celebrated freedom fighter and an ardent follower of Guru, belonging to the Ilava community, organised a "Prohibition Movement in Travancore". As a result of it no Ilava came to take the toddy and arrack shops in auction in different parts of Travancore. 'Abkari' a journal of Anglo-Indian Temperance Association from London published brief sketches about the activities of T.K. Madhavan. Frederick Grab, the General Secretary of that Association, encouraged the commendable activities of T.K. Madhavan and sent praising letters to him.

64 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p.289.
67 Ibid.
During his visit to Tamilnadu in October 1926, Guru met the Ilavas of Tinnevelly and well-advised them thus, "Do not engage in slave work; do agriculture; educate the children; do not spend the money waste". His proclamation against liquor and its allied calling had its effects among the Ilavas of Tamilnadu also. In Tamilnadu, Ilavas who were engaged in distillation and sale of arrack up to the beginning of the 20th century slowly began to change their calling. Influenced by his preaching villages like Virasigamani introduced and incorporated strict laws in their village council administration against the use of intoxicating drinks. The village council passed stricture against five families which pursued their old profession i.e. distilling arrack and threatened them with the banishment out of the village. In deference of the council decision they discontinued the distillation and switched over to weaving profession.

4. MOVEMENTS FOR TEMPLE ENTRY:

As they were one of the untouchable castes of Travancore they were not only banned to enter into the Hindu temples but also prohibited from entering into the Brahmin streets. Those who violated the custom knowingly or unknowingly, were severely punished by imposing heavy fine. An example to cite that on 30th Thai 924 M.E. (1749 A.D.) an Ilava woman named Ayyi Sivanadiyal

70 Ibid.
resided at Patirikarivattom Pandarathoppu of Vanchiur Athikarom in Thiruvananthapuram Desam in South Travancore was fined 18 panam for the pollution caused because of her entering into the Brahmin street of Kandalursalai.\footnote{Mathilakom Record, Vol.46, p.186.}

At Kalakkad in the Tinnevelly district Ilavas had their segregated dwellings in a corner of the village apart from the Brahmin streets and were forced to use a separate way. In 1923, Guru visited Kalakkad and after violating this custom he attempted to pass through the streets of Brahmins to reach the Ilava street 'Pudutheru'. But his passage through the South Car Street of Kalakkad was blockaded by three Brahmin pannayars (landlords) of that street.\footnote{Interview with N. Rajakumar Masilamani, Kalakkad, Tirunelveli Kattabomman district, dated 19.2.1993.} This led to the controversial talk between Guru and the Brahmin landlords. Guru interpreted the Chathurvarna philosophy of the Brahmanical Hinduism and legitimized the access of the avarnas into the Brahmin streets. They were surprised by the philosophical knowlede and Sanskrit Language proficiency of Guru and allowed his passage through their streets. His act of silent revolutionary entry into their streets led to the permanent opening of the Brahmin streets of Kalakkad to the out castes.\footnote{Ibid.}

The denial of their walk on the public road leading to temples and the restriction imposed against their access into the
Brahmanical worship necessitated the Ilavas of Travancore to start Civil disobedience movement. On 24th September 1921, Mahatma Gandhi visited Tirunelveli. On that occasion T.K. Madhavan, one of the famous leaders of the Ilavas from Travancore met Gandhiji at Tirunelveli and discussed with him about the traditional Hindu society's practice of untouchability and unapproachability and the social disabilities suffered by the Ilavas. Gandhiji incited T.K. Madhavan to organise a Civil Disobedience Movement (Satyagraha) in order to eradicate the practice of untouchability in the Hindu temples of Travancore and it is the only alternative through which they can try to enter into the Hindu temples in peaceful means.

Ilavas of Travancore emphasized and legitimized their right of entering into the Siva temple at Vaikkom on the basis of as once they were freely entered into that temple without any restriction. In the roads around the Vaikkam temple even though the Christians and Muslims were allowed to walk but that

75 Ibid.
76 An old Ilava house in the name 'Kalayakkal' was contiguously situated with the Vaikkam Siva temple's northern outer wall. It is said that Ilavas of that house had traditionally possessed some privileges in the Vaikkam Siva temple and even one of the subordinates of Lord Siva found in the Vaikkam temple was also installed in that house. P.K. Madhavan, Op.Cit., p.150. That subordinate divinity might have been probably Enathi-Natha-Nayanar, a famed devotee of Lord Siva, popularly worship in the Siva temple.
elementary right was denied to the Ilavas in the name of unsociable practice of 'untouchability' and 'unapproachability'. Based on the suggestion of Gandhiji, the Ilavas and other out castes decided to start a large scale Civil disobedience movement at Vaikkam. Under the leadership of the Indian National Congress organisation, in Travancore the Civil disobedience movement was started in 1924 to secure the right for the out castes to enter into the temple by eradicating the anti-social practices of untouchability and unapproachability on the roads around the Vaikkam temple. Perumal Panickar, celebrated Ilava leader of Kottar, participated in this movement and earned the name as 'Vaikkam poratta veerar' (hero of Vaikkam) in the locality of Nanchinad. The Travancore government through repressive measures attempted to suppress this movement. But this movement continued and attracted all India attention. The Travancore government arrested T.K. Madhavan along with other participant leaders of this movement and accused for six months imprisonment. In March 1925 Gandhiji visited Vaikkam and succeeded in making a compromise measure with high officials of Travancore government and accordingly they promised the "avarnas" right to way on the roads leading to the Vaikkam Siva temple.

In 1924 the out castes of Nanchinad and Edanad organised a temple entry satyagraha with an attempt of entering into the Kumarakovil (Subramonia temple), near Padmanabhapuram, at the initiative of Vellayan Nadar. They assembled infront of the outer wall of the temple and attempted to enter into the temple. But their effort was foiled even in the initial stage by the Travancore government using repressive police force.

In Nanchinad the streets around the temple at Sucindram (temple for Lord Brahma, Siva and Vishnu) were closed from the entry of the avarnas like Ilavas, Nadars, Paraiahs, Pulayas, Pallans, Kuluvans, Chakkiliyans etc. Further restrictions were imposed that they should not come to the precincts of the temple. They should keep a distance of a furlong from the outer wall limits. The Ilavas were also not permitted to go into the streets of Sucindram temple during the Utsavam (festival) time, though they were permitted to use the streets in the ordinary time. Traditionally in Sucindram temple streets Theru-marachan (street-screen) would be placed at the entrance to all main streets proclaiming the prohibition of entry of the untouchables from the time of flag hoisting ceremony.

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81 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
depressed classes decided to undertake a temple-road entry satyagraha at Sucindram.

On 19th January, 1926, under the initiative of Dr. M.E. Naidu, a well known social worker, a group of volunteers approached the temple streets but they were blockaded by the Brahmins. As a result, on 24th January, 1926 at Kotter they convened a meeting and formulated new measures to conduct the satyagraha successfully. Accordingly a working committee was organised with H. Perumal Panickar of Kotter as the treasurer. On 29th January 1926, they started the second phase of the Sucindram satyagraha in the northern and eastern streets of the temple. But the reactionary movement of the orthodox Hindus compelled them to continue the satyagraha. News of this movement spread throughout southern states and after hearing it, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (EVR), the 'hero of Vaikkam' and the renowned social reformer of Tamilnadu participated in the Sucindram Satyagraha. EVR, Dr. M.E. Naidu and Perumal Panickar spoke about the importance of the satyagraha campaign and it helped to strengthen the movement. Even a section of elites and philanthropists from the Savarnas (caste Hindus) supported the out castes' temple road entry right. By 1928 approach roads to all

85 Ibid.
temples were thrown open to all out castes in Travancore. But to enter into the temple they had to wait upto 1936. On 12th November, 1936 Sri Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma, king of Travancore, issued the Temple Entry Proclamation by which the Ilavas and other out castes were allowed to enter into the temples and thus a great injustice was at last set right.

5. WESTERNIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION:

Guru was not only interested in Sanskritization but also in Westernization. He advocated for 'Strength through Association; Enlightenment through Education' and created perceptivity about the importance of education which improved the lot of the socially backward classes. As a result they attended the school and got education. Followed by the advice of Guru, the Ilavas of Kottar started a primary school in the adjoining place of Pillaiyar temple in the name of Sri Narayana Guru. Later they handed over that school to the Travancore government at a rent of Rs.1 per year. 88

In 1921, Guru visited Srivilliputtur and it is said that after seeing their mutt constructed by the efforts of 64 villages of Mullivala Nadu at Tiruvannamalai, near Srivilliputtur, he had remarked thus 'there is no need of this mutt; but needed a school; don't spend money lavishly'. 89 Followed by the advice of Guru,

89 Ibid.
they focussed their attention on education. Their education helped them to enter into government service and thereby achieved good social status in the midst of caste Hindus.

In order to reduce their illiteracy they started schools in some of their main centres and introduced certain schemes for the educational growth. In 1960 at Kovilpatti they started one primary school. Similarly high schools were started at Tuticorin and at Sammattipuram in Madurai. After the formation of their state level association, they have created an education trust in 1978 and also devised a separate sub-organisation known as "Tamilnadu Sri Narayana Guru Trust". As its first work, in 1984 they started the Sri Narayana Guru Industrial Training Institute at Perumkudi in Madurai.  

Besides their state association sponsored trust, they had been created separate educational trust in some of their concentrated centres for their educational growth. From their educational trust at Kottar in 1984 they started the Sri Narayana Central School. Similarly Sriman Narayana Guruswami Nursery School at Rajapalayam, and Sri Narayana Nursery School at Srivilliputtur had been established from their local educational


91 Interview with R. Arumugam, Kottar, dated 1.11.1992.
trust of that places. Also, from the local educational trust they are giving monetary support to the economically weak students of their community. But utilizing this aid many among them did their education well and had obtained good position in different services. In Rajapalayam from their Pothunala fund (common welfare fund) they spend a sum of Rs.50,000 annually for the educational growth of the students of their community of that locality without taking into the consideration of their richness and poorness. They claimed their educational standard to be poor as about 70% of their population are illiterates. But there are a number of graduates among them and a few are doctors, engineers and lawyers.

6. PUBLIC LIFE AND ILAVA LEADERSHIP:

Because of the reform measures of Guru political consciousness also gradually began to evolve. With an intention of elevation, the Ilavas of Kottar started associations like Sri Narayana Guru Vyaparasangham (Merchant association), Nanchinnattu Ilava Munnetta Sangham (an association for the regeneration of the Ilavas of Nanchinadu). A line of stalwarts and social workers like H. Perumal Panickar, S. Shunmuga Panickar,


P. Tharaviya Panickar and A. Saravana Panickar were emerged from this community at Kottar. They worked for the welfare and the regeneration of the depressed classes.

In Tamilnadu, in addition to the S.N.D.P. Yogam, they have different other local associations in his name as a mark of respect with Guru as he had contributed to the cause of their upliftment. They were formed only after the creation of their Illathupillaimar Sangham in 1974. Through these associations they work for the economic well-being and also the dissemination of the principles of Sri Narayana Guru.

On 2nd October 1977, the Illathupillaimars of Madurai organised Sri Narayana Guru Seva Sangham with N.M. Sivasubramaniam as President and S.S. Durairaj as the General Secretary. This association was started on the basis of Guru's principle with the aim of giving help to economically poor students of their community by forming a trust, giving training to both men and women in cottage industry and also providing employment to those who completed the training, creation of co-operative societies etc. They also decided to propagate ideals of Guru.

Sri Narayana Guru Illathupillaimar Mantram (Association) at Sivagnanapuram street, Dana near Papanasam; Sri Narayana Guru

97 Ibid.
Narpani Mantram, Kottar (Welfare association); Thavathiru Narayana Guru Panpattu Kazhagam (Narayana Guru Cultural Association), Neyveli; Sri Narayana Guru Panpattu Mayyam (Cultural Association), Srivilliputtur; Narayana Guru Narpani Mantram (Welfare association), Virasigamani (1988); Sri Narayana Guru Ilaigner Narpani Mantram (Youth Association), Ambasamudram (1989); Sri Narayana Guru Narpani Mantram, Terkkumedu (1989) etc. are some of the other associations in the name of Guru functioning among the Illathupillaimars for their welfare and the propagation of Guru's teachings.

Illathupillaimars of Tamilnadu hail Guru as 'Periyaswami' affectionately even though they had spiritual saints from their own line in Tamilnadu. His reform movement in Tamilnadu has also contributed to a certain extent in achieving educational and socio-economic elevation and purity in Hinduism among the Illathupillaimars. They have become his ardent devotees like their counterparts in Kerala and also began to concentrate on the formation and construction of educational institutions, welfare associations, marriage halls etc. in his name. As a sign of great esteem with Guru in every function they first unveil his portrait. Infact Guru's teachings had its effects on the Tamil. Because of

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his influence the Illathupillaimars once the distillers of arrack, purified themselves in socio-religious field, changed their impure calling, got educated and entered into a modern way of life.

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