

CHAPTER II

MALABAR SOCIETY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Caste is the most general form of social organisation in India. It is an integral element of Hindu life.¹ Caste as a segmentary system means that people view themselves as belonging to units of different orders in different contexts.² Caste system had split the society into mutually exclusive social groups and prevented social fusion more than any other social institution in the world. It is seen today as an obstacle to all progressive measures in the society and national unity.³ It was essentially related to the production and distribution of material as well as ideological sources. Its formation was based on the transformation of economy from hunting and food gathering to settled agrarian economy. It became more rigid with the emergence of feudalism. The status of a man born in a particular caste was determined by the rank of that caste in the caste hierarchy. Since the caste system was hierarchically graded, it was based on social and legal inequalities.⁴ The inequality of status in caste terms has the sanction of Hindu religion. The caste system provided unlimited power to the high castes to exploit the low

¹ G.S. Ghurye, "Features of Caste System" in Ghanshyamshah (Ed), *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, New Delhi, 2008, p.38.

² M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1997, p. 120.

³ Pauline Kolenda, *Caste in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, 1997, p.4.

⁴ A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Mumbai, 1996, pp.243-244.

castes. The origin of caste was first racial and then occupational but its importance is neither religious nor moral but social and political.

The caste system was unheard of in the ancient Kerala society. It was the Aryan settlers who introduced the caste system in Kerala. It is thought that the Aryanisation of Kerala had reached its peak in the 8th century A.D. It was in the period from the 8th to the 11th centuries that Kerala was enclosed in the strait jacket of the caste system. Till then, the social stratification in Kerala was based on functions and not on birth.⁵ The advent of Brahmins and the projection of the Aryan concept in the earlier period and the advent of new migrants of Paraswarama Brahmins gave a new impetus to caste formation.⁶ The Sangam age witnessed the rudimentary beginning of social stratification. Though the four-fold division of society based on birth had not percolated to the lower strata of society, the presence of Brahmins in the courts of chieftains and their influence upon them are evident in the Sangam literature.⁷ The land grants by the chieftains to the Brahmins in the transitional stage from kinship reduced the distance to the caste and society and gave rise to a new system of production relation transcending the framework of kinship.⁸ As a landed institutional agency of Brahmin landlords the temples also played a crucial role in the multiplication of castes and sub castes.

⁵ Elamkulum, P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1970, p.311.

⁶ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996, p. 145

⁷ Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala-Historical Studies*, Calicut University, 1978, p.3.

⁸ Rajan Gurukul, "The formation of caste society in Kerala-Historical Antecedents" in K.L. Sharma (Ed), *Caste and Celass in India*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 395.

The Kerala society witnessed the formation of caste groups all over the agrarian regions during the 9th and 10th centuries.⁹ Therefore it could be stated that caste system in Kerala was a byproduct of the development of an agrarian society and economy. The caste system in Kerala by joining hands with the janmi system reached its growth in the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries.¹⁰ Kerala was a hotbed of casteism. In no other part of India have caste norms and caste practices been more rigidly or more meticulously observed. It was developed in the form of a hierarchy based on the rigid rules of purity and pollution. That was why Swami Vivekananda called Kerala the 'mad house of caste'.

The social system of Malabar in the 19th century was well-entrenched in the principle of caste and kinship.¹¹ Caste system as an institution created separation and segmentation in the part of each and every section of Malabar society. Even after the advent of the British as a political power the native practices were maintained on the basis of hierarchical order from the sacred to the unworthy.¹² The fourfold classification of Varna system leaves a gap in Kerala as there is no counterpart of the Vaisyas in the Kerala social order. At the top of the social hierarchy was placed the Nambudiris (Malayali Brahmins). The Kshatriyas came next in the order. A group of Antarala jatis or interne diary castes constituted by the Ambalavasis (Temples servants) and

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.401.

¹⁰ M.G.S. Narayanan, "Keralathile Jathisambradayavum Janmi Sambradayavum Oru Charithravalokanam" in M. Gangadharan (Ed), *Jathivyavastha-Padanangal*, (Mal.) Trichur, 1986, pp. 81-82.

¹¹ Adrian. C. Mayor, *Malabar: Land and Society*, Bombay, 1952, p. 25.

¹² K.K.N. Kurup, *Aspects of Kerala History and Culture*, Trivandrum, 1977, p. 39.

samantans were placed below the Kshatriyas. Then there were Nairs who formed the militia of the country. The low castes like Kammalas (artisans), Ezhavas or Tiyyas (toddy tappers), Mukkuvars (Fisherman) came below them and the lowest were the agrestic slaves, Cherumar or Pulayar, Parayan and others.¹³ The upper castes like Nambudiris, Kshatriyas, Ambalavasis and Nairs enjoyed several immunities and privileges. The principles of social freedom and equality found no place in the Hindu social organisation. People were made to live in a society conditioned by inferior relations, recognising their relative positions not as being degrading but as elevating.¹⁴ The low caste people had not the courage to challenge the established order. They thought that it was their bounden duty to perpetuate the unequal and reactionary society.

The Nambudiri Brahmins who formed a very minor part of the population occupied a distinct position in the social order. They were exempted from all kinds of social and religious disabilities. They enjoyed a perfect liberty of action. They had an overwhelming and decisive influence upon the lower castes. It is noted that, "his person is holy, his directions are commands, his movements are processions, he is the holiest of human beings, he is the representative of God on earth."¹⁵ The Nambudiri Brahmins were the absolute owners of the major portion of the landed properties in Malabar.

¹³ M.S.A. Rao, *Tradition, Rationality and Change*, Bombay, 1972, p. 118.

¹⁴ T.K. Ravindran, *Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1972, p.23.

¹⁵ William Logan, *Malabar Manual Vol I*, (Fourth Reprint), New Delhi, 2004, p.127.

They had an absolute taxfree proprietorship of the soil.¹⁶ The predominance of the Nambudiri Brahmin community over the rest of the society to a great extent originated with their ownership of land. As the owners of the chief means of production they enjoyed all facilities and privileges. The law of the land gave them all protection they needed. The rulers were dependant on Nambudiri Brahmins for the administration of justice.

The concentration of land both Janmam and Kanam in the hands of a few formed an important characteristic of the conditions of production in Malabar during the colonial period. Janmam was the full proprietary right of landlords in the soil subject to the payment of the revenue to the government.¹⁷ The Brahmin landlords gained janmam right over vast areas of cultivated land. They did not cultivate the land themselves but leased out to tenants under a variety of tenurial arrangements.¹⁸ Kanam was a tenure partaking of the nature of both a mortgage and a lease. It was one of the commonest tenures in the 19th century. Kanam right was the right to supervise or protect all the inhabitants of a particular nadu or country wherein the land lay, and to enjoy for this service a portion of the next produce of the

¹⁶ N.K.Bhaskaran, "Social Reform Movements and Politics in Kerala," in T.K.Ravindran (Ed), *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol XI, Trivandrum, March-December, 1984, p.206.

¹⁷ W.W. Hunter, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol VI, London, 1881, p.250.

¹⁸ *Census of India*, 1901, Madras Presidency, Part III, Madras, 1902, p.231.

soil (ie, pattam) equal in amount to that enjoyed by the janmi or landlordland
lord.¹⁹

The landlords leased their lands to Kanakkaran or Kanamdar (intermediary tenants) who were primarily of non-Brahmin order. The Nairs seem to have been the foremost among them.²⁰ The Kanakkaran took possession of the land on advancing a sum of money (kanapanam) to the janmi and agreeing to pay rent at the rate fixed according to the quality of the land. In the beginning there was no specified duration of the Kanam tenancy. In course of time a period of twelve years came to be fixed as the usual duration of the tenancy. If agreed by both the parties the tenancy may be renewed for a further period of twelve years for which the Kanakkaran was required to pay a renewal fee fixed by the janmi.²¹ The Kanakkaran could transfer or sub mortgage his interest during the period of tenancy. The tenants were oppressed by the landlords in various ways, the most injurious of which was the practice of giving lands on melcharth (overleases). It was given by the janmi to a third party even before the expiry of the Kanam tenancy.²²

The Kuzhikanam, another tenure, was mainly granted for the improvement of land which was either unproductive or whose yield was very

¹⁹ *Report of Malabar Special Commission*, 1881-82, Malabar Land Tenures, Vol I, Madras, 1896, p.35.

²⁰ Rajan Gurukkal, *n.8*, p.399.

²¹ C.A.Innes, *Malabar (Gazetteer)*, Vol. I & II, (Second Reprint) Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.321.

²² *Kerala Patrika*, Calicut, 14 December, 1895, Native Newspaper Report (NNPR), Madras, 1936, p. 35.

small.²³ The tenant was entitled to enjoy the land rent free or for a nominal fee for twelve years. At the end of that period he must act an ordinary Kanam lease from the janmi. The tenure Verumpattam was the holding of the actual cultivator under the Kanakkaran. It was an annual lease which gave few rights to the tenant. In many respects the Verumpattakaran was socially subordinate to the janmi and Kanakkaran. He was also part proprietor to the extent of one-third of the produce.²⁴ Though the Verumpattakaran was entitled to one-third of the net produce according to customary law, in practice he did not receive anything more than the cost of cultivation. His share was always encroached upon by the intermediary tenure holders.²⁵ He was practically labourer on subsistence wages.

The Nairs as Kanakkars stood at the top of the hierarchy. Below them came the subgroup of Nairs, Tiyyas and Mappilas as Verumpattakkar. The low castes like Pulayas and Parayas as agricultural labourers stood at the bottom. They had no control or right over land. Under the British rule the landlords became more powerful than ever before as a result of the patronage extended to them by the ruling class.²⁶ The British recognised the rights of landlords in land as absolute property rights. They were more concerned with the land revenue. They did not preserve any of the customary rights of the

²³ K.N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State-Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar-1836-1921*, New Delhi, 1992, p.26.

²⁴ P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change-Malabar, 1836-1982*, New Delhi, 1989, p.29.

²⁵ K.K.N. Kurup, *William Logan-A Study in the Agrarian relations of Malabar*, Calicut University, 1981, pp. 32-33.

²⁶ A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala and Freedom Struggle*, Kottayam, 1997, p.55.

tenants and agricultural labourers and left them entirely at the mercy of landlords. They supported feudal lords' claim for the collection of rent, feudal levies etc. By recognising the rights of landlords, the British smoothly accommodated the social framework under their control.²⁷ The result of this exploitative socio-economic order was the steady and continuous pauperisation of the poor peasants.

The Nambudiris possessed the right of consecration and the interpretation of rituals. They also had the exclusive right to preach religious doctrines, to officiate as priests and to function as teachers.²⁸ They were the owners and trustees of the temple properties. All the Nambudiris except those of Payyannur village followed makathayam or patrilineal system of inheritance.²⁹ The eldest male member was the head of the illam. He managed the illam property and the entire family affairs of the illam. He was respected and obeyed by all the members of the illam.

Even the Nambudiri's who were at the apex of the caste structure suffered from the operation of obsolete customs. A peculiar custom of primogeniture in marriage was followed among the Nambudiris. Only the eldest son was allowed to marry within the caste which alone was recognised as genuine marriage. All other younger brothers could only have liaison or

²⁷ K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry Nationalism and Social Change in India*, Allahabad, 1991, p.11.

²⁸ P. Chandramohan, "Growth of Social Reform Movement in Kerala" in P.J.Chcrian (Ed), *Perspectives of Kerala History-The Second Millenium*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 457.

²⁹ M.S.A. Rao, *n.* 13, p. 119.

Sambandham with the females of Kshatriyas, Antaralars and high caste Nairs.³⁰ This practice was followed in order to prevent the disintegration of the illam through the division of property. This marriage was considered a virtual marriage by the woman but for the Nambudiris it was not so. These relationships were loose and at best semi permanent arrangement for a 'nights' sleep' as the Nambudiris called them which could be terminated without notice by either party.³¹ The wife and children of these relationships were excluded from the circle of kinship. They had no right in the property of younger Nambudiri brothers. This system gave rise to various problems like decrease of Nambudiri population, increase in the number of widows etc. Many Nambudiri women never got a chance to marry.³² The prevailing customs forbade them to marry from lower caste men like Nairs. The young Nambudiri girls were given in marriage to aged Nambudiris which resulted in unhealthy children and early widowhood.³³ The widows of Nambudiris were not permitted to remarry.

The Nambudiri women were kept in strict seclusion throughout their lives in order to prevent them from entering into many illegitimate relations which could endanger the purity of the caste. They never went out of the house and were never sent to school. So many of the Nambudiri women

³⁰ M.S.A. Rao, *Social change in Malabar*, Bombay, 1957, p.24

³¹ K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony-Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 181.

³² William Logan, *n.* 15, p. 127.

³³ T.K. Anandi, "Home as the Sacred Space-The House hold Rituals and the Nambudiri Women of Kerala." in K.N. Ganesh (Ed), *Culture and Modernity-Historical Explorations*, University of Calicut, 2004, p. 146.

remained illiterate. To make matters worse there was the institution of Smartha Vicharam, the caste tribunal which tried Nambudiri women accused of sexual misconduct. It may be noted that the accused women along with those men who were mentioned by them were excommunicated from their respective castes under royal orders, if found guilty.³⁴

The Kshatriyas who were next in the order of social precedence also formed a smaller section of the population. They consisted of Rajas, ruling chieftains and Naduvazhis or rulers of subdistricts. They had political, judicial and military responsibilities in their respective territories. They also administered temples and other religious institutions in collaboration with the Brahmanical priests.³⁵ The Zamorins of Calicut, Chirakkal, Arakkal and other royal families in Malabar owned huge proportions of land including wastelands, forests and other lands. Marriage relations by means of Sambandham existed among Kshatriya women and Nambudiri men. However Kshatriya men were forbidden from marrying the Nambudiri women. The union of Kshatriya with Nair women gave rise to the caste of Samanthas. They were next to Kshatriyas in social status and included Eradi, Vallodi, Nedungadi, Unithiri etc.³⁶

The presence of intermediary castes or antarala jatis of temple servants can be considered as a special feature of the caste system in Malabar. Being

³⁴ A. Sreedhara Menon, *n.26*, p.57.

³⁵ K.K.N. Kurup, *n.27*, p.9.

³⁶ L.A.Ravi Varma "Castes of Malabar" in K.K. Thankappan (Ed), *Kerala Society Papers Vol I & II*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p.186.

temple servants and often residing in close proximity to temples, they had greater chances of intimate associations with the Brahmins. They were as a rule well-educated in Sanskrit. Pisharadi, Variyar, Marar, Poduval, Nambeesan etc belong to this category. They used to do services such as sweeping the inner parts of the temple, cleaning the vessels and other accessories used in worship, fetching of firewood, preparing garlands, drumming at the time of worship and the lighting of oil lamps etc.³⁷

The next superior caste, the Nairs, had a dominant position in Malabar society on account of their family relations based on Sambandham with the Nambudiris. They seem to have been the foremost among the tenants of the Nambudiris. They were the Kanankkars or held supervision right over Kanam. Traditionally the Nairs were the militia of the country to be called for military service at any time.³⁸ They trained themselves in arms and constituted an army maintained by kings or ruling chieftains. The Nairs lived in matrilineal joint families called taravads which constituted corporated property owning groups.³⁹ The Karanavan, the senior most male of the family, was the head of the family. All other members of the family were subjected to his authority. The Mysorean invasion was a blow to the prosperous Nair taravads. However with the British occupation of Malabar, the taravad returned to its former position. Some prominent Nair taravads like Kavalapra, Nilambur and Koothali were the owners of large tracts of

³⁷ *Census of India* 1901, Madras Presidency, Vol XV, Part I, Madras, 1902, p. 141.

³⁸ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes in South India*, Vol V, Delhi, 1975, p. 162.

³⁹ H.S. Graeme, *Report of Revenue Administration of Malabar, Dated 18 January 1822*, Calicut, 1898, p.8.

agricultural lands in Malabar. The Kavalapra Nair family leased their lands to the Tiyyas and Muslims.⁴⁰ The Koothali Nair, one of the big land owners of Kurumbranad, had the right of overlordship over four temples and the tenants of the paddy lands held from these temples paid their rent in paddy.⁴¹

The polluting castes like Tiyyas, Kammalas, Kanisans, Mukkuvas, Cherumar or Pulayas, Parayas and several other castes were subjected to gross social and economic disabilities. All the domestic concerns of the lower castes, all their social activities and all their liberty of thought and actions were regulated by the arbitrary will of the upper castes. Not one of them in their religious capacity was allowed to move the little finger except on consultation with the upper castes and disobedience to their orders was often visited with their displeasure and the resulting depreciation of their means of livelihood and even banishment from the society.⁴² Among the lower caste groups in Malabar, the most prominent was the caste of Tiyyas. Their traditional occupation was tending and tapping of coconut trees, but many of them were agriculturists, traders, shopkeepers, private servants etc. Though a large number of them worked in agricultural fields only very few owned land and mostly they were Verumpattam tenants and agricultural labourers. They also served in the military along with the Nairs. Some of them were wellknown warriors who used the title, chekon.

⁴⁰ K.K.N. Kurup, *Kavalapra Papers*, Calicut University, 1984, p.11.

⁴¹ Dilip. M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India-Malabar 1900-1948*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 43.

⁴² T.K. Gopalpanikkar, *Malabar and Its Folk*, New Delhi, 1995, p.12.

In the lower strata of the caste-based society were the depressed castes like Pulayas or Cherumars, Parayas, Kuravas, Nayadis etc. They were subjected to exploitation and humiliation by the upper classes. They were destined to compulsory labour and free services. They were systematically excluded from all positions of power and prestige.⁴³ The Pulayas were the people who were directly involved in the agricultural operations. They tilled the land without having any kind of right over it.⁴⁴ They did not have a life of their own. Their entire life was depended on the masters. They lived to bring pleasure and provide labour to the higher classes. The Pulaya men, women and children worked during the harvest time. The Parayas, another important depressed class, were out castes. In some places they were utilised in agriculture, but generally their occupation was basket making and the, making of bamboo mats.⁴⁵ The lowest race of people in Malabar were known by the name Nayadis or hunters and their condition was not better than the two legged animals. Outside the hierarchical division of the Hindu community there were independent trading groups like the Muslims and Christians. The Muslims or Mappilas who lived in the coastal towns in Malabar were mainly engaged in trade and cultivation.⁴⁶

⁴³ T.K. Ravindran, *n.14*, p.X.

⁴⁴ K. Saradamoni, *Emergence of a slave caste-Pulayas of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1980, p.27.

⁴⁵ K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p. 515.

⁴⁶ S.M. Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, Calicut, 1983, p.13.

Slavery as an elemental institution was widely prevalent in Malabar society. The origin of slavery was closely associated with the caste system.⁴⁷ Slave labour was a major source for production in the 18th and first half of 19th centuries in Malabar. The factory records of Tellicherry left by the English bear a good testimony of slavery in Malabar.⁴⁸ The form of slavery in the 19th century Malabar was largely agrestic. The lower castes like Cherumars or Pulayas, Parayas and Kanakkans were condemned to agrestic slavery. The greater part of the labour involved in cultivation was performed by the Cherumars or Pulayas.⁴⁹ They constituted about half of the whole slave population of Malabar district. The agrestic slaves were at the lowest rung of the feudal setup. Their condition was almost similar to cattles that were used to plough the field. They toiled day and night in the soil and its fruits were exploited by the privileged classes of the society. They had no land, no basic civic rights, and were actually held as slaves belonging to the feudal lord whom they served. But the land system as it goes by the name Janmi-Kudiyan system never recognised the tiller of the soil, the slave.⁵⁰ Dr. Francis Buchanan who visited Malabar at the end of AD 1800 had stated that the Nambudiri proprietors cultivated their estates with the help of their slaves called Cheruman or Cherumar.⁵¹

⁴⁷ K.K. Kusumanna, *Slavery in Travancore*, Trivandrum, 1993, p.15.

⁴⁸ K.K.N. Kurup, *n.12*, p. 70.

⁴⁹ C.H. Jayasree, "Slavery in colonial Malabar" in Kesavan Veluthat and P.P. Sudhakaran (Ed), *Advances in History*, Calicut, 2003, p.211.

⁵⁰ Adoor. K. Ramachandran Nair, *Slavery in Kerala*, Delhi, 1986, p.25.

⁵¹ Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol II, Madras, 1807, p. 562.

The system of slavery was hereditary and a slave continued as a slave until his death. Thus the service of a slave to his overlord was one of a life long contract. They were the absolute property of their lords. The severity of slavery was slave trade. The lord had the right to sell them along with the soil. It very often separated the parents from their children, husband from wife and brother from sister.⁵² The price of a slave varied from Rs. 3 to Rs. 14. In times of famine the children were sold at the rate of four annas per head. The wages given to them by their masters were insufficient for their bare subsistence.⁵³ They received only occasional allowance in the form of paddy or food from the Janmi, Kanakkaran or Verumpattakaran.⁵⁴ Any slave running away from his legitimate owner and joining the working ranks of another master if caught was subjected to brutal punishments at the hands of the former master. The slaves were not employed as domestic servants or personal attendants because of the supreme concept of pollution and purity. The slaves had a great regard and the affection for their masters despite the extreme exploitation of their labour. This was possible because the higher castes could convince them that they were obliged by birth to serve the higher castes.

The abolition of slavery was implemented by the English East India Company in Malabar only by the middle of 19th century. In 1833 they

⁵² N.K. Jose, *Pulayalahala* (Mal.), Kottayam, 1982, p. 92.

⁵³ *Keralapatrika*, Calicut, 16 November, 1895, Native Newspaper Report (NNPR)-1891-1904, Madras, 1936, p.31.

⁵⁴ Kunnukuzhi.S.Moni, *Pulayar Nootandukalil - Historical Study* (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1989, p.126.

declared that no person would be disabled from holding any office or employment on account of his religion, caste and place of birth. Government of India Act V of 1843 abolished slavery in Malabar. The provisions of the act were widely published throughout Malabar.⁵⁵ Though the act abolished slavery there was no improvement in the condition of agrestic slaves. Slavery no longer existed in the eye of the law, but practically the inferior tribes of Malabar continued to be in bondage to their masters.⁵⁶ However to the agrestic slaves, who sweated to serve the janmis or the new agrarian capitalists of the plantations, true freedom remained a mirage.

Untouchability (pollution or ayitham by touch) was the most venomous evil of the Hindu society. Untouchability was not a separate institution, it was a corollary of the institution of the caste system.⁵⁷ It was nothing but the symptom of disease, the caste system. It was the most inhuman form of social oppression. Under no institution was man so deeply humiliated and crushed as under that of untouchability.⁵⁸ It was the chief source of almost all disabilities the depressed classes suffered. The untouchables were subjected to bitter exploitation by the upper castes. There was the complete segregation of the Hindus of one caste from their brethren belonging to other castes in the society. Untouchability existed in a dreadful form in Malabar society. The lower castes from Kammalas downwards were

⁵⁵ Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Part II, Delhi, 1975, p.445.

⁵⁶ *Census of India*, 1871, Madras Presidency, Vol I, Madras, 1874, p. 352.

⁵⁷ R.K. Kshirsagar, *Untouchability in India-Implementation of the Law and Abolition*, New Delhi, 1989, p.23.

⁵⁸ A.R. Desai, *n. 4*, p. 264.

included in the group of polluting castes. The members of polluting castes had to keep themselves at the prescribed distances from those of upper castes. The Nayadis occupied the lowest order in the caste ladder. The distance a Nayadi had to keep from a Brahmin was 300ft.⁵⁹ The prescribed distance of other untouchable castes were for Kammalas, 24ft, Tiyyas 32ft, Kanakkan, 48ft, Pulayan, 64ft and Ullathan, 72ft.

Unapproachability (pollution by approach) and unseeability (pollution by sight) were also so perfectly worked out that expressions such as Tiyyapadu and Cherumapadu indicating the distance at which a Tiyya and Cheruman had to keep away from a Caste Hindu were common in Malabar society. Even the mere sight of a Nayadi or Pulaya was enough for a Nambudiri to consider himself polluted. When the upper caste people came out in the public roads an attendant of theirs went before them shouting 'P_O. P_O.' (get away, get away) so that they would not be polluted by a person of low caste even by a chance encounter within the prohibited distance. Failure on the part of the low castes to make way for the upper castes on the public road even led to their being murdered with the connivance of the custodians of law and order.

The varying degrees of pollution were observed even in the relations between upper castes. The approach by a Nair to a Brahmin was permissible but he must not touch him. If pollution rules were broken the higher castes would impure and they had to perform certain purificatory rites to regain their

⁵⁹ Edgar Thurston, *n.* 38, pp. 275-276.

normal status. A plunge bath in a tank or stream was the method of washing off pollution.⁶⁰ If the temple pond or house was polluted by the polluted caste men, the impurity would be removed by a special rite called Punyaham performed by Nambudiris. The upper castes followed pollution rules strictly and observed all the formalities. The untouchables who violated the pollution rules were subjected to severe punishments. It was the paradox that the lower castes who were themselves subjected to the social disability of untouchability practiced discrimination in their dealing with the castes considered as inferior to them in the social scale. The Pulayas and other depressed castes were considered as untouchables by the Tiyyas. They were denied entry into the temples owned by the Tiyyas. In one of the most humiliating practices the Harijans were forced to give the offerings like money, paddy and cocks etc to the temples of upper castes and even to the temples belonging to backward castes such as those of Tiyyas by standing outside the walls of the temples.⁶¹ There was no intermarriage or even interdining not only between castes but also between the members of various subcastes.

The low castes were the victims of the social tyranny for centuries and continued to live under serious social and religious handicaps. The low caste people were treated in the most inhuman and barbarious manner by the high castes. They were denied even basic human rights. They were denied

⁶⁰ A. Sreedhara Menon, *Social and Cultural history of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 68.

⁶¹ A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *Swami Ananda Thiertham-Untouchability: Gandhian Solution On Trial*, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 93-94.

admission to temples, palaces, schools and places of public resorts. They were not allowed to use public roads and highways as there was always a certain fear of causing atmospheric pollution to high caste people.⁶² They were denied admission to the roads in proximity to the temples and the houses of Caste Hindus. The irony of the situation was that while a non-Hindu like a Christian or a Muslim was not barred from entry in to public roads, approach roads to temples and admission to public schools, those Hindus who happened to be members of the low castes were kept out of these places and subjected to social humiliation. The low caste Hindus who were converted to Christianity or Islam immediately got those privileges conferred on them without any protest from the Caste Hindus.⁶³

Education was a monopoly of the upper castes. They restricted this facility to lower castes in order to protect their interests. By denying education to the low castes, they could easily suppress them and exploit their services for the benefit of upper castes. They also believed that education of lower castes would disturb the caste structure in which they enjoyed supremacy. Ezhuthupallikoodam or the village school for the education of non-Brahmin children functioned in each *kara* or village under an Ezhuthachan or teacher.⁶⁴ The school functioned either in the house of the teacher or in the house of some important persons of the locality. The Tiyyas also used to run Ezhuthupallikoodams, but such institutions were less in

⁶² M.S.A. Rao, *n.* 30, p.22.

⁶³ A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers*, Madras, 1990, p.221.

⁶⁴ P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathonpatham Nootandile Keralam*, (Mal.), Thrissur, 2000, p. 1053.

number. Besides Kalari education was also imparted to students where training was given in the use of arms. In addition to this practice, reading and writing in Malayalam was also taught. The Nairs, Tiyyas and even Christians and Muslims could attain training in Kalaris. There was a total exclusion of depressed castes from all educational institutions. The educational backwardness increased the degradation of these castes. They were unaware of their rights and privileges. As a result the high castes exerted an allround authority in every walk of life.

The members of depressed and polluting castes had no voice or place in the counsels of the state and they could hold no office under the government. There were also at one time manifold restrictions in regard to their dress, ornaments, modes of conveyance, use of domestic vessels, manner of constructing houses etc.⁶⁵ The low castes could not dress like the upper castes. They were forbidden to wear fine clothes. The style of dress prescribed to the lower castes consisted of a single cloth of coarse texture, to be worn alike by males and females no lower than the knee and no higher than the waist.⁶⁶ The low caste people were not permitted to wear gold ornaments, wear shoes, use metallic utensils and to keep milch cows. The low caste man was never allowed to construct a house like the house of an upper caste. Tiling the roofs was only the prerogative of the royal families and

⁶⁵ M.N. Srinivas, *n.11*, p.93

⁶⁶ R.N. Yesudas "Christian Missionaries and Social awakening in Kerala" in T.K. Ravindran (Ed.), *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol VII, Trivandrum, March-December, 1980, p.199.

temples. Others could have only thatched roofs.⁶⁷ The house itself is called by different names according to the occupants' caste. The house of Paraya is Cheri, while the agrestic slave Cheruman lives in a Chala. The houses of the blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, weavers and the Tiyyas inhabited were styled Pura or Kudi. An ordinary Nair resides in a veedu or bhavanam, temple servants in Variyam or Pisharam, Raja lives in Kovilakam or Kottaram, the Nambudiri Brahmins in an illam while his fellow of higher rank calls his house as mana or manakkal.⁶⁸

The lower castes including the Tiyyas were not allowed to sit or stand near the Brahmins, Nairs and other upper caste people. He must stand before an upper caste Hindu in awe and reverence assuming a humble posture. The holding of umbrellas was prohibited to all castes except Brahmins, though rains were pouring up on them. Food was given to the low caste labourers in leaves or in some broken vessels. The food of high castes was referred to as elixir (*Amruthethu*) and that of the low caste was black brew (*Karikkadi*).⁶⁹ The low castes experienced restrictions even in the sale and purchase of goods. The low castes had no right to use the language of the upper castes. He must address a caste Hindu as 'Thampuran' and woman as 'Thampuratty'.

⁶⁷ M.S.A. Rao, *n.2*, p.22

⁶⁸ William Logan, *n.15*, p.85

⁶⁹ Adoor.K. Ramachandran Nair, *n. 50*, p.37.

About himself he had to refer to as *adiyan*.⁷⁰ The polluting castes were prohibited from using Sanskrit names.

The administration of justice was based on the *maryada* or the custom of the land. Dharmasastras were the source of these customs. Brahmins were the custodians of Dharmasastras. They were the law givers and interpreters. It was the special privilege of Brahmin judges called Vaidikars to give judgements in all important civil and criminal cases. The administration of justice was neither impartial or fair. Law was administered in the most discriminatory manner. The penal code was extremely severe as far as the low castes were concerned. The severity of punishments was consistent with the caste status of the accused.⁷¹ The death penalty was imposed even for ordinary offences like theft, killing of cows etc. Trampling to death under an elephant, blowing from the mouth of a canon, *chithra vadham* or hanging spread over three days, mutilation etc were among the common forms of punishment.

The tax system was also discriminatory. The levy of taxes on some pretext or other on the backward communities was the surest way of raising revenues for the state. The Brahmins were always exempted from the payment of all taxes due to their superior status. The Nairs also never paid taxes for the lands possessed by them.⁷² The low castes paid tax on

⁷⁰ M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making – A study of Sahodaran Ayyappan*, Palakkad, 1993, p. 13.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷² K.K.N. Kurup, *n.* 12, p. 47.

everything. They had to pay various kinds of taxes for their huts, boats, looms, nets, oil mills, fishing, hunting and other types of poll taxes.⁷³ They also had to pay a certain fee for the conduct of their marriages. It was also customary to make payments or presentations to the landlord or Naduvazhi on ceremonial occasions and also on the death of a person. It is interesting to note that each man of the lower caste had to pay a tax for the hair he grew on his head and each woman had to pay a breast tax.⁷⁴ The tax defaulters were subjected to inhuman punishments. The series of these iniquitous taxes, fines and gifts imposed heavy burden on the depressed sections of the society.

The position of women was most distressing. Women held a low position in the society. The birth of a girl was unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious. The family was dominated by the male members. The absence of education among women was the main cause for their low status in the society. Parents would not give education to their daughters due to the existence of some blind beliefs about women education. The women were not allowed to move freely in society. The women of lower castes including the Tiyyas were not allowed to cover the upper parts of their body.⁷⁵ The low caste woman must expose her breast at the approach of the Brahmins. Otherwise she will be regarded as immoral. The custom of the low caste women going into Nambudiri illams removing the upper garment

⁷³ K. Saradmoni, *n.* 44, p.34.

⁷⁴ T.K. Ravindran, *n.* 14, p. 8.

⁷⁵ K.P Padmanabha Menon, *n.* 45, p. 201.

was strictly observed throughout Kerala.⁷⁶ The low caste women were compelled to have sexual relationship with Nambudiri and Nair landlords.

There was no uniform system of inheritance among the Hindus. Majority of the Brahmins followed makkathayam or matrilineal system of inheritance while the Kshatriyas and the ruling samantans, Nairs, Tiyyas and some other backward classes in Malabar followed marumakkathayam or matrilineal system of inheritance.⁷⁷ According to marumakkathayam system, the inheritance was traced through female line or a man's legal heirs were his sister's children. The children had to be looked after by mother's family and the paternal wealth and prosperity was never given to the children and wife. The husband was only a 'genitor' for the taravad of his wife, which maintained their sons and daughters.⁷⁸ The marumakkathayam system caused considerable tensions and discontent among the members of the family.⁷⁹ Men and women, who would have formed industrious and independent families, were now huddled together in a huge camp called taravad house. It destroyed individuality and sense of responsibility. It could not stand the advance of education and civilization.⁸⁰

The Hindu society also suffered from economic impoverishment arising from the wasteful expenditure connected with the observance of

⁷⁶ T.K. Ravindran, *n.* 14, p.13.

⁷⁷ M.S.A Rao, *n.*13, p. 119.

⁷⁸ P. Chandramohan, *n.*28, p. 457.

⁷⁹ L.A. Krishna Iyer, *Social History of Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1948, p.111.

⁸⁰ *Report of the Malabar Marriage commission with Enclosures and Appendices*, Madras, 1891, pp. 38-40.

irrational social customs such as talikettukallyanam, tirandukuli, pulikudi etc.

Many Hindu middle class families were economically ruined as a result of these unnecessary and costly ceremonies. These ceremonies prevailed mainly among the Kshatriyas, Ambalavasis, Nairs and on a small scale among the Tiyyas, Kammalas, Mukkuvas, Karisams and other castes.⁸¹ Talikettukalyanam or talitying ceremony is some what analogous to what a Devadasi undergoes before she begins her profession. Talikettukaliyanam was performed on a girl or a batch of girls between the ages of 11 and 13. In a recent case in Calicut ~~there were~~ 27 girls underwent the process at the same auspicious hour under the same roof.⁸² The ceremony prolongs for four days in the case of well-to-do families.

The Kanisan, the village astrologer, was consulted for the auspicious day and hour of the ceremony. Erecting of the pandal, a temporary shed, was an elaborate work marshalling the labour of many people. The pandal was decorated with cloth, garlands, lamps and palm leaves. The Brazier supplied the standing oil lamps required for the ceremony and the Chaliyas, the wicks. After entering the pandal erected for the purpose, the bridegroom is conducted to a seat of honour and there his feet are washed by the brothers of the girls, who receives a pair of cloths on the occasion.⁸³ The astrologer shouts the

⁸¹ P.K. Balakrishnan, *Jathivyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum*, (Mal.), Kozhikode, 1997, p. 338.

⁸² *Census of India*, 1891, Madras Presidency, Vol XIII, Madras, 1893, p. 226.

⁸³ *Report of the Malabar Marriage Commission with Enclosures and Appendices*, Madras, 1891, p. 18.

muhurtham (auspicious hour) and the manavalan⁸⁴ (bridegroom) ties tali (a small piece of gold or other metal, like a locket on a string) around the girls neck. The services of a Nambudiri were registered to tie the tali for the girls amongst some royal families and rich Nairs. The celebration of the ritual was accompanied by much pomp and display. Inside the pandal dancing, music and other amusements were performed as part of the ceremony.⁸⁵ After the ceremony a feasting ('Ayani Unu') of guests and others takes place. According to the custom, a marumakkathayam girl must undergo the talikettu ceremony before she attains puberty. The assumption was that with the tali tying the girl had become an eligible bride. The tali-tier had no right to cohabit with the girl. After the ceremony he receives a suitable present and departs.⁸⁶ Talikettukaliyanam had no legal sanction. In fact it was a mock marriage and a lot of money was wasted on this marriage.

The puberty ceremony or Tirandukuli is another important ceremony generally performed in the society. It was a public declaration that the girl had reached the age of maturity.⁸⁷ When the menstruation occurs for the first time, the chorus of women of her family inform this to the neighbours by making a loud musical sound. The ceremony was conducted at the house of the pubertied girl. It lasts for four days during which the girl ~~the~~ is kept in a separate room under pollution. According to the custom, seeing the sky, a

⁸⁴ T.K. Gopalpanikker, *n.* 42, p. 143.

⁸⁵ William Logan, *n.* 15, p. 135.

⁸⁶ Edgar Thurston, *n.* 38, p. 326.

⁸⁷ P. Bhaskaranunni, *n.* 64, p. 339.

crow or a cat in these four days was inauspicious to a pubertied girl.⁸⁸ On the third day the girl's relatives are treated to a splendid feast. In the fourth day, the girl is taken to bath in a pond where she takes cloth from the washer women or Vannathi and this is called 'Vannathimattu'. Amongst the cherumars and the hill tribes, the girl is usually put in a separate hut for seven days. Songs and devil dances often form part of the ritual of purification. Pulikudi or the drinking of tamarind juice is a ceremony performed during pregnancy. The Pulikudi is variously performed in the fifth, seventh or ninth month of pregnancy.⁸⁹ On the auspicious day and hour selected by the village astrologer for this ceremony, the brother takes a little of tamarind juice in a jack leaf folded like a spoon, and let it run down the blade of a knife into his sister's (pregnant women) mouth. He does this three times. The ceremony ends with a feast to all relatives, neighbours and friends.

The institution of marriage was associated with the social evils such as child marriage, polygamy and polyandry. Polygamy was common among the Nambudiris. The Nambudiris regardless of their age or consideration of marital happiness married a number of times in return for high dowries. The dowry system impoverished even the richest families. The customs and practices observed at the time of marriage, birth and death of a person also were absolutely absurd and irrational. The traditions of a mythical nature exerted a powerful influence upon the lives of the people of Malabar.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁸ C.A. Innes, n. 21, p. 165.

⁸⁹ T.K. Gopalpanikker, n. 42, p. 54.

⁹⁰ *Census of India*, 1891, Madras Presidency, Vol XIII, Madras, 1893, pp. 59-60.

belief in the mythical accounts of demons or evil spirits and monsters were very common in Malabar. The society also practiced various kinds of primitive worships like serpent worship, hero worship, ancestor worship, worship of trees etc. The serpent worship was especially common in Malabar. The people worshipped the serpent offering it milk, eggs, fruits etc.⁹¹

It was the deplorable social condition that paved the way for the emergence of social reform movements in Malabar during the later half of the 19th century. The socio-religious reform movements in other parts of India also made their entry into Malabar. Among them the Theosophical Society entered first in Malabar. The first branch of the society was opened at Palakkad in 1882.⁹² Later its activities spread to Vatakara, Calicut, Kannur, Manjeri, Ponnani and other places in Malabar. The society under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Bessant organised the educated and modern minded youths and started the work for reforming the Malabar society. Its emphasis on the unity of god, human brotherhood, and opposition to caste inequalities attracted the attention of the leaders of polluting castes. The Tiyya leaders like Mitavadi Krishnan, Murkoth Kumaran and Rarichan Moopan became the members of the society and cooperated with its activities. Manjeri Rama Iyer,

⁹¹ Kerala History Association, *Kerala ~~Charithram~~ Charithram, (Mal)*, Vol II, (Mal.), Kochi, 1974, ___ p. 553.

⁹² P.K.K Menon, *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Vol. II, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001, p. 86.

an ardent follower of Annie Bessant was another prominent figure associated with the activities of the Theosophical Society in Malabar.⁹³

The Theosophists campaigned against social evils and worked for the education of women in Malabar. The 'Sanathan Dharmam' magazine started from Calicut in 1911 was the mouthpiece of the Society in Kerala. In 1914 Bessant organised a group of people called 'stalwarts' to fight against the inequalities in society. The Society organised 'misrabhojanam' or 'interdining' at its auditorium ie 'Annie Hall' in Calicut. It also started a school for panchamas at Palakkad. Mrs. Bessant viewed that the closing of certain roads to polluting castes was a shame to the Hindu community. She criticised the doubledealing of Hindus and said that without sharing the benefits of present rights and liberties, the Indians had no right to ask for freedom.⁹⁴

Brahmasamaj began its activities in Malabar with the establishment of its branch at Calicut in 1898. Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan was the moving spirit behind this venture. Brahmasamaj being the advocates of monotheism, universalism and human dignity worked for the eradication of social evils and the uplift of the untouchables.⁹⁵ They were against the denial of the basic rights of the lower sections of the Hindu society. They gave importance to the education of the depressed classes and started Panchama School in

⁹³ *Mathrubhumi*, 6 December, 1927.

⁹⁴ K. Maheswaran Nair, "Keraleeya Navothanavaum Mathanaveekarana Samoohika Parishkarana Prasthanangalum" in K.S. Sreekumar (Ed), *Samskara Keralam Quarterly*, (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, April- June, 1997, p. 49.

⁹⁵ K. Balakrishna Kurup, *Kozhikodinte Charithram*, (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2006, p. 176.

Calicut. They led the depressed classes through the roads where entry was denied to them. The Keerthanas of the Samaj propagated the ideology of religious harmony and monotheism. Kallingal Rarichan Moopan, Advocate C. Krishnan, Brahmananda Swami Sivayogi, Vagbhatananda and Manjeri Rama Iyer co-operated with the activities of the Brahmasamaj.⁹⁶ Its ideology influenced the social reform activities of Brahmananda Swami Sivayogi and Vagbhatananda. Though the Samaj did not flourish well at the organisational level its impact on later social reform movements was tremendous.

Ramakrishna Mission was another important organisation, which gave importance to the eradication of social evils, upliftment of depressed classes, emancipation of women and promotion of widow's remarriage. The mission began its activities in Malabar by starting an asram at Calicut in 1913. Later in 1915 another branch of the Ramakrishna mission asram was started at Koyilandy. The mission believed that service to humanity was the real worship of god.⁹⁷ The mission urged the people to imbibe the spirit of liberty, equality and free thinking.⁹⁸ The Mission started schools, hospitals and widow homes attached to its asrams in Malabar. They admitted all sections of childrens into the schools irrespective of caste, and the hospitals gave medical treatment at free of cost. The mission also conducted interdining for reducing the spirit of caste system.

⁹⁶ M. Achuthan, *Swathanthriya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum*, (Mal.), Thrissur, 1994, p. 55.

⁹⁷ Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 175.

⁹⁸ Kerala History Association, *n.* 91, p. 570.

The work of the Arya Samaj against untouchability and the rigidities of caste system are immemorable in the social reform history of Malabar. The Arya Samajists started their activities in Malabar during the period of Malabar Rebellion. They toured every nook and corner of the affected areas and gave relief to riot victims by opening relief camps at different places and distributing food items, dress and other materials. The main objectives of the Samaj was to bring back those Hindus who were converted to other religions. But the Pulaya converts to Islam fearing the practice of pollution refused to come back to the Hindu religion. It opened the eyes of the samajists and they began their activities against pollution and other social disabilities in the Hindu religion. The Samaj organised a struggle against the restrictions imposed on low castes to walk through the streets of Kalpathi Agrahara in Palakkad. The premises of the Tali Temple at Calicut was another centre of activity of the Arya Samaj. The low caste Hindus were not permitted to do work in the temple premises because of pollution. The Samaj interfered in the matter and they through persuasion and propaganda partially succeeded to change the minds of orthodox Hindus.⁹⁹ But they could not win the battle of temple entry. The Samaj also organised interdining as a challenge to caste system and untouchability. Though the Arya Samajists did not have any concrete programmes for the uplift of the depressed classes, their movement undoubtedly served much in strengthening the sense of self-respect among the depressed classes in Malabar.

⁹⁹ *Mathrubhumi*, 26 January, 1930.

The Servants of India Society (SIS) was another important organisation that worked among the depressed classes in Malabar. It took up the cause of education, rural reconstruction and social reform. The SIS started its work in Malabar as a relief agency after the Malabar Rebellion starting its centre at Calicut. A delegation of SIS under the leadership of G.K. Devdhar visited the affected areas and conducted relief work. The SIS constituted Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust (DMRT). The trust worked for the uplift of depressed classes by imparting education to them. The DMRT schools were started at Tanur, Pavur Kunnu and Eranjipalam. The DMRT Higher Elementary School at Tanur was an important centre of the social reform activities of the region.¹⁰⁰ The SIS used bhajans to create awareness among the people. In the campaign against social evils the SIS and Harijan Sevak Sangh worked hand in hand.

The teachings of the great saint and social reformer, Sree Narayana Guru have had a tremendous influence on the social, religious and cultural life of Malabar. Sree Narayana movement made its entry into Malabar during the early decades of the 20th century. Sree Narayana Guru was born in an Ezhava family at Chempazhanthi, near Trivandrum on 26 August 1856 and was given the name Narayanan which led to his being known by the diminutive 'Nanoo'. Narayana Guru acquired deep knowledge in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Tamil at a very early age and later wrote a number of works in these languages. His deep knowledge in Vedanta and Upanishads made him an original thinker in

¹⁰⁰ Aravind Sharma, *Modern Hindu Thought- The Essential Texts*, New Delhi, 2002, p. 215.

South India.¹⁰¹ He married at the age of 26 but did not lead a normal family life. He left home and became a seeker of spirituality. Subsequently he took to Sanyasa and led the life of a wandering mendicant. He travelled through the length and breadth of South India.¹⁰² During this time he mingled with the people of all religions, castes and sects.

Sree Narayana Guru revolted against Brahmin ascendancy and strove to mitigate the rigors of caste. His mission was to liberate the people from the chains of caste, burdensome customs and traditions. He considered caste system as the greatest evil that seemed to be a threat for humanity. According to him whatever may be the difference in faith, dress or language all people belong to the same caste. He enunciated the famous dictum, 'One caste, One religion, One god for man'. Guru also said, 'whatever be one's religion, it is enough if the individual becomes good.'¹⁰³ As an advocate of unity and equality in society he preached the imperative need for tolerance and goodwill among all communities. He campaigned against the observance of customary rituals and ceremonies. He was an advocate of inter-dinings and inter-marriages as a means of breaking down the barriers of caste.

Sree Narayana Guru set up shrines dedicated to Siva as a parallel system to that of the caste Hindus who denied the entry of low castes in their temples. The first temple was established on Sivarathri day in 1888 at

¹⁰¹ Swapna Samel, *Dalit Movements in South India, 1857-1950*, New Delhi, 2004, p. 349.

¹⁰² A. Sreedhara Menon, *n.63*, p. 227.

¹⁰³ P.K.Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram*, (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1994, p. 512.

Aruvippuram in Neyyattinkara taluk. His right as an Ezhava to consecrate temple was questioned by the orthodox Hindus. He replied that “I have installed only an Ezhava Siva”.¹⁰⁴ This was the beginning of his mission to reform the man, the community and the society as well from within. He later discouraged the worship of idols and substituted mirrors in certain temples so that the worshippers might remember the truth as we are, so are our gods too.¹⁰⁵ Sree Narayana Guru's works were closely associated with the SNDP Yogam, the representative organisation of the Ezhavas formed in 1903.

The waves of Sree Narayana movement highly influenced the Tiyya elites of Malabar. In July 1906 a meeting of Tiyya elites was held at Tellicherry to consider matters regarding the progress of their community. The meeting formed an association known as Sri Jnanodaya Yogam and decided to construct a temple. Sree Narayana Guru consecrated the Jagannatha Temple at Tellicherry on 13 February 1908.¹⁰⁶ He also consecrated the Sreekandeswara Temple in Calicut and Visweswara Temple in Palakkad constructed by the Tiyya elites in these regions. The Tiyyas in Cannanore formed an association known as Bhagavat Bhakti Pradipa Yogam in 1917. The Yogam constructed the Sundareswara Temple in Cannanore and it was consecrated by Sree Narayana Guru. These temples served as a symbol of caste solidarity among the members of the Tiyya community in Malabar.

¹⁰⁴ C.K. Kareem, *Kerala and Her Culture- An Introduction*, Trivandrum, 1971, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ M.K. Sanu, *Narayana Guru*, (Mal.), Irinjalakuda, 1976, p. 85.

¹⁰⁶ Champadan Vijayan and Sreedharan Champad, *Utharaparvam*, (Mal.), Tellicherry, 1977, p. 35.

Thus Sree Narayana Guru succeeded in kindling a new spirit among the educated Tiyys of Malabar.

The social reform movement led by the organisations like Theosophical Society, Brahmasamaj, Ramakrishna Mission, Arya Samaj and Servants of India Society had only marginal effect on the social life of Malabar. They did not flourish well at the organisational level. They accepted the importance of social reform on an ideological level. They did not have any concrete programme for the social and economic uplift of the untouchables. The Sree Naryana movement also did not gain deep roots in Malabar society. They oppressed the low castes as vehemently as the caste Hindus oppressed them. They denied entry to the depressed classes into the temples constructed by them¹⁰⁷. It was only through a prolonged struggle that the depressed classes were allowed to enter the temples consecrated by Sree Narayana Guru in Malabar. They also did not allow the castes below them to walk through the streets in their localities. The Tiyya elites in Malabar were not ready to make links with the depressed classes. They gave prime importance for improving their ritual and social status more than to the social and economic uplift of the untouchables as a whole. Thus the role of Sree Narayana movement in the social reform activities in Malabar is not so remarkable.

The last decades of the 19th century marked a remarkable period in the history of social renaissance in Malabar. The custom-ridden society

¹⁰⁷ *Mathrubhumi*, 27 March, 1923.

underwent revolutionary changes. A spirit of reform swept over the whole of Malabar. A number of social movements, either reformatory, or transformative had taken place during the last decades of the 19th century and the subsequent decades. The works of Basel Evangelical Mission, the thoughts and reform works of † intellectual leaders like Brahmananda Swami Sivayogi, Vagbhatananda and Swami Ananda Theerthan apart from the influence of the nationalist movement succeeded in bringing about social change in Malabar.