PREFACE

The life of the Scheduled Caste people in my neighbourhood presents a truly pathetic and pitiful spectacle, not least in the monsoon season. In the vast expanse of the paddy fields in Vaikom Taluk of Kottayam District, the women working in the fields create images of working animals. They seem to have no idea about happiness in life and are fated to toil round the year to make both ends meet. Their neglected condition continues to the grave. The kind of burial these poor people get also produces a touching scene. They do not have a burial place of their own and are denied a dignified burial for the dead. When will they be able to live and die like human beings? The question is sure to remain unanswered.

The Indian Constitution has made specific safeguards for them; the central and state governments make repeated proclamations to redeem them overnight; the various aid-agencies make declarations in plenty; the media sheds sentimental tears over their conditions. But all these remain castles in the air even after sixty years of independence. The Promised Land remains unattainable and elusive. This thesis is a hazardous journey of investigation and aims at suggesting some remedial measures.

A habitat of the SCs named 'Korickal' is situated within a stone’s throw from the researcher’s residence in a suburb of Thalayolaparampu in Vaikom Taluk in the District of Kottayam. It is a habitat of hundreds of hutments inhabited by poor SC people. Even a freak rain in summer can cause terrible devastation there and destroy
almost all the huts that are huddled together. Are colonies built to make the dwellers drift into penury and poverty? One is tempted to think that these poor people are deliberately marginalized by the elite society. Even the very raison d’etre of the habitat is being questioned when the ravages caused by nature’s fury are witnessed.

The study is based on theory and on direct observation and shared experience. Interaction with the poor inhabiting this area, sharing their traumatizing experiences and spending sleepless nights with them have given me a deeper insight into a hitherto unknown side of the human predicament. My earnest hope is that this study will shed light on certain dark areas of the miserable life of millions of SCs and help alleviate their suffering, be it ever so negligible.

P. P. Chandrasekhar Pillai