

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PULAYAS OF KERALA

Racial Background

Anthropologists, historians, and social scientists agree that the Pulayas belonged to the early inhabitants of Kerala.¹ The Pulayas were one of the primitive dwellers (Adivasis) of Kerala. Primitive Tamil was their language. They were also called Adi-Dravidians by some. They had the basic features of Proto-Australoids mixed with features of Negrito race.² The main features of Proto-Australoids were dark complexion, short stature, flat nose and long mandibles. But the Negros were with coarse scalp hairs. All these features are seen wholly or partly on the Pulayas. According to historical evidences, the Adi-Dravidians came to the South by the end of middle Stone Age and they were hunters.³ They are believed to have lived in Kerala without any outside disturbances for more than two thousand years, i.e., from 4000 BC to 1800 BC. In the 19th century BC, the next race, the Dravidians came here. Even after the arrival of Dravidians, historical evidences show that, both these races--the Adi-Dravidians and the Dravidians--lived here



for about 2500 years and they became a single population till the next race--the Aryans--arrived here by AD 8th century.⁴

Origin of the Name

The Pulayas have been called by different names. There are various opinions over the question of the origin of their names. Scholars see in these names some traces of the origin of their caste. Interestingly enough, almost all names have a link with the traditional occupation of the Pulayas, namely, work in the field. Even though 'Pulayas' is the name by which the entire community is generally known now, they were also called 'Cherumas' till the early part of the 19th century. Logan tried to derive the term 'Cheruman' from the word 'Cheru' which means 'small' in Malayalam. He argued that Cheruman denoted the short physical stature of these people. He believed that a race which had for centuries and centuries been fed by its masters on a minimum of what would keep body and soul together, was pretty sure in the long run to degenerate in size.⁵

An interpretation related to their indigenous origin and their work in the field as agricultural labourers is given by Padmanabha Menon in the "History of Kerala."



According to him, 'Cheruman' or Cherumakkal was derived from the Malayalam word 'Cheru' which means 'soil' and 'makkal' meaning 'children.' The term thus meant 'children of soil' or 'sons of the soil.'⁶ According to tradition accepted by several scholars, Cherumas were the original owners of the land.

However as written by Kusuman, the word 'Cheruman' had the meaning of 'slaves' in certain places of Kerala.⁷

A different observation is made by Mateer. He thinks that the term 'Pulaya' expressed the idea of impurity because the word 'Pula' is used to denote 'pollution' or 'impurity.'⁸

In spite of such differences of opinions, the second meaning seems to have gained wider acceptance among modern historians of Kerala. 'Pulayan' means one who works on land. He is one who works in paddy fields.⁹ In the original sense, Pulayan meant either the owner or caretaker of a field. The word 'Pula' was not used in the sense of pollution, till the period when the Namboothiri domination over Kerala society was established.¹⁰

Corresponding to the position held by the Pulayas in the past, the Pulaya women ('Pulachi') were also given a very high position in the traditional society. As Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai wrote in his book 'Annathe



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Keralam' (Malayalam), the word 'Pula' has also another meaning, viz., 'knowledge.'¹¹ Hence the word 'Pulachi' means one who has knowledge; it is also said to mean 'virgin.' All these probably indicate that the Pulaya women also were given a high place in the past.¹²

The name 'Cheramar' was officially given to the Pulayas as per their request to the Government because they claimed that they were the descendants of 'Chera Emperors' who ruled over Kerala in the AD 1st century.¹³ The name came into official use from the time of Sreemoolam Thirunal Maharaja.¹⁴ But even today, the most widely accepted name is 'Pulayas.'

Historical Background

The Pulayas were the most numerous of the agricultural labourers of Travancore-Cochin, two erstwhile kingdoms which now constitute almost two third of Kerala state.¹⁵ According to tradition, they are believed to have had an influential past. They are said to have owned land and controlled the whole agriculture of Kerala. It is claimed that they even ruled over certain regions of Kerala and that they held high social and economic status. T. K. V. Pillai mentions in the Travancore State Manual, that the Pulayas had a glorious past till AD 700. "The tradition current among the Pulayas themselves points to

their having been an influential community in the distant past."¹⁶ For example, tradition refers to the Pulaya chieftain called Aikkara Yajamanan whose ancestors were Pulaya Kings. He was duly acknowledged as the chieftain and lord by the Pulayas of North Travancore. "The name Aikkaranad still remains to suggest that there is some truth in the ancient tale."¹⁷

Again, the name 'Pulayanar Kotta' a place in Trivandrum city means 'the fort of the Pulaya Chief or King.' Though there is no fort in existence now, the name of the place strongly points toward the existence of one in olden days. A Pulaya princess named 'Kotha' is said to have ruled over Kokkothamangalam in Nedumangad Taluk near Trivandrum.¹⁸ Census Report of Travancore, 1931, also mentions names of places which referred to the Pulayas holding sway over those areas at a previous period.¹⁹ As the Cochin State Manual says, the Pulayas were probably in possession of the country for a long period.²⁰

But historians believe that the arrival of the Aryans by AD 700, marked the decline of the Pulaya supremacy. They accepted the strong from among the local population and made them king or leaders (Kshatriyas) who accepted the Aryans as their guardians and advisers. The Brahmins together with the Kshatriyas are said to have succeeded in making the local population believe in and accept the



superiority of the former. Making use of the influence they gained, the Brahmins built temples and persuaded the original inhabitants to offer their properties as gifts to the Gods and Goddesses who would protect them from all dangers and evils.²¹ Gradually, the temples which grew rich with the farmer's land and money became the property of the Brahmins. "The land and properties transferred came to be regarded as Devaswams and Brahmaswams and enjoyed freedom from devastation by the enemy forces."²² Later, the right of ownership itself was vested on the Brahmins by law. The farmers who wanted to keep their relationship with the land became daily wage workers in their properties. Generally, the farmers were sold along with the land. Eventually, they became slaves of the owner of the land as well as an essential commodity for the workmanship on the land. Thus all the Pulayas became agrestic slaves.²³

Thus by AD 1800, all the glory of the Pulayas had vanished and they were reduced to a state of slavery. Slavery was very strong in Kerala in the beginning of the 19th century.²⁴ There were even slave markets. When the practice of Chaturvarnya became very widespread, the Pulayas and their work in the soil began to be regarded unclean and they became untouchables and unapproachables.



Fall in Social Position

To be considered unclean and therefore untouchable was the lowest position an individual or a group could ever fall to in the sharply stratified Indian society. The untouchable Pulayas began to suffer from various kinds of disabilities--social, economic, educational, occupational, religious, and political.

Social Disabilities

The Pulayas were prohibited from walking through public roads and drawing water from public wells. Apart from untouchability, the very sight of the Pulayas was believed to be polluting and hence they had to keep a distance from the higher castes which was prescribed with arithmetic precision for each caste. Thus they became unapproachables also. The lower servile classes, wherever they went, gave notice of their presence by uttering a particular cry at every four or five paces. If the cry was answered by another uttered in like manner by a member of superior caste giving warning that he was approaching, the former had to instantly quit the road and retire.²⁵

The Pulayas were not allowed to dress like the people of other castes. There were restrictions even on wearing clean and good clothes. Pulaya women were prohibited from wearing upper garments. Instead they were permitted to



wear bead-necklaces so that they could cover their breasts.

Economic Disabilities

The Pulayas were not allowed to possess land. They were paid in kind instead in cash. Women were paid less than men. They lived in miserable huts called 'madam.' They were scantily clothed. The disabilities affected even their purchase and sale.

Occupational Disabilities

The Pulayas were restricted from choosing their occupation. Both male and female Pulayas were mainly agricultural labourers. They also performed most of the manual, unskilled, virtually unclean and least prestigious jobs. As they could not enter a town or village, no employment was available to them, except that of working in the paddy fields. They could neither work as porters nor as domestic servants, for, they defiled everything that they touched.²⁶

Educational Disabilities

The Pulaya children were not permitted to attend schools. Till 1865, all Government schools were meant for the Savarnas. But practically, till 1906, when Ayyankali,



the Pulaya reformer earned permission to start a school exclusively for the Pulaya children, no Pulaya child could attend school peacefully. Teachers were unwilling to teach in Avarna (lower caste) schools. Even after 1906, there were struggles in many parts of the state on the issue of admission of the Pulaya children to the Government schools.²⁷ The Pulaya children were threatened by school authorities and local leaders in some places.

Religious Disabilities

The Pulayas were denied entry to temples for worship. Not only that, they had to stay 64 feet away from the temple. They worshipped at places called Kavu (groves). They believed in a non-empirical world of supernatural beings called 'Pisachus'--demons, which expected propitiation from human beings in various forms. The principal Pisachus which the Pulayas worshipped were Kali, Chathan, Apasmaram, Parukutty, Karinkutty, Murudha, and Mallan. They were worshippers of ancestral spirits also.²⁸

Political Disabilities

Till the beginning of this century, no citizen in the erstwhile kingdoms of Kerala had any right of franchise.



However when the right to vote and elect representatives was granted in the first half of this century and a limited participation in the administration was introduced, the Pulayas and other Scheduled Castes were not given any favourable consideration. They were not given any government occupation as they were uneducated and untouchables; the administration was solely in the hands of the upper castes.

Thus in all respects, the Pulayas were so low in the social ladder that they could not even dream of education or salaried job. They remained subjected to severe exploitation and deprivation by Caste Hindus for several centuries.

Movements Against Slavery

The initial steps against the exploitation of the Pulayas and for the improvement of their social position were taken by the British during their rule.

The British rulers of India took the initiative to stop slavery in Travancore and to free the Pulayas and all other slaves from the beginning of the 19th century. It was the missionaries who influenced the Government to take such a step. As a result of their untiring and persistent efforts, Col. Monroe issued the first order to stop slavery in 1811, except in the field of agriculture.



The government believed that if the agrestic slaves were made free agriculture would not be continued and that it would affect the country's economy.²⁹ Hence this declaration did not benefit the Pulayas much, since the majority of the Pulayas were agricultural labourers. However, with the repeated efforts of the Christian missionaries, another proclamation was issued by Maharaja Sri Utram Thirunal of Travancore in 1853 to free all the slave children. In 1855 slavery was completely abolished in Travancore. This proclamation was made by Maharaja Marthanda Varma. Even before these proclamations were made in Travancore, the Kingdom of Cochin had freed its slaves and abolished slavery through a proclamation by the Diwan of Cochin Sri Sankara Warriar.³⁰

The abolition of slavery through legislations was not accompanied by any economic or social welfare measures from State. So practically, the Pulayas were forced to continue to live as bonded labourers under their masters.

Uplifting Measures

Something more was needed to uplift the Pulayas than mere legislation, declaring slavery a crime. It was the missionaries who first took interest in starting schools for the Pulayas, gave them free education and rehabilitated them.



Along with the missionaries, there arose some social reformers also from among the Pulayas. The role and impact of Ayyankali (1863-1941) are noteworthy. Though illiterate, this man could grasp the significance of education for his people to achieve freedom. He had to face ferocious resistance from the privileged upper castes. He initiated and organised one of the world's first recorded agitation of agricultural labourers in 1905, demanding the admission of untouchable girls to the Government schools. He persuaded his people in the villages of Neyyattinkara Taluk near Thiruvananthapuram (South Travancore) not to work in the fields until the higher caste stopped attacking the Pulaya children and allowed them to study peacefully. The Pulayas in those villages stood firm behind Ayyankali. As a result, the Harijan children were allowed to attend school freely. Thus the strike ended in total victory and Ayyankali called off the strike.

Ayyankali also fought for the right to walk along public roads. He organised a group of sturdy Pulaya youth, defied the caste restrictions and walked along the prohibited roads in his native village, Vengannur. Even though he had to face strong resistance from the upper castes, he and his people fought back. As a result, the Pulayas won the right to walk along public roads.



An important struggle for social freedom launched by Ayyankali was the famous 'Kallumala' (bead necklace) agitation in 1916. He persuaded the Pulaya women in South Travancore to wear upper garments and throw away the bead necklaces which they used for covering their breasts from time immemorial. Though this was resented by the upper castes who considered it as an attempt by the Pulayas to imitate the upper caste women, hundreds of Pulaya women publicly threw away their bead-necklaces at a mass meeting organised at Quilon. This was a great victory.³¹ Several such Pulaya riots took place at different places in Central Travancore also.

Later on, when Mahatma Gandhi took over the leadership of the independence struggle in 1923, the reform movements also gathered momentum. In 1936 the famous Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation was made, allowing the lower castes to enter the temples for worship. After eleven years, such a proclamation was made in Cochin too.³² Ayyankali also, who by then came under the influence of Gandhian ideals, actively took part in the famous Vaikom Satyagraha.³³

While these struggles were going on, gradually the Government was persuaded to introduce welfare measures and schemes to uplift the depressed classes. Educational concessions, occupational guarantees, economic privileges and housing facilities were a few among them.



The Pulayas who benefited from the early social changes became catalysts to spread an awareness among the people of their caste about their individual rights. This heightened awareness further pressurised the society to remove the still existing barriers in the path of the lower castes and help them to improve their position still.

A person does not feel at ease when he starts realizing that there is a difference between the needs conceptualized by him and prescribed for him by the society. As the Scheduled Castes were gradually becoming more conscious about their rights, they did not want the status quo to continue but aspired to bring about radical changes in the existing social structure by removing all vestiges of social inequality.

While the above mentioned reform measures were being effected in the Indian society during the first half of this century, the society itself was undergoing a process of modernization. Due to industrialization and urbanization, the occupational structure itself was undergoing change. New types of jobs were increasing in number, especially in the so-called white-collar and blue-collar jobs. And the modern secular education that was introduced by the British was equipping the population to take up these jobs. The Pulayas realized that the path to social progress was education and modern occupations.



Occupation, the Principal Avenue

The principal avenue through which the Pulayas desired to improve their social status was by adopting white-collar occupations like that of clerks, teachers, etc. for which formal education was the most important requirement. These occupations improved not only the economic position, but the social status also, since these occupations were traditionally followed by the higher castes.³⁴

In the beginning of this century, the Pulayas also began to organise themselves. They realized that this would impart courage and confidence among them, that they would be able to improve their own socio-economic position through various kinds of organized welfare measures and that they would be able to exert sufficient social and political pressure to effect structural changes to remove social inequalities and disabilities. In 1905 Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (Association for the welfare of the poor). Its main objective was to bring all the untouchables together and initiate welfare schemes for the poor. In 1938, when the Pulaya Maha Sabha (the great organization of the Pulayas) was formed, the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham merged with the former. Ayyankali became its first secretary. The Pulaya Maha Sabha aimed at the mental, physical, spiritual, and material



development of the Pulayas. The members of the Pulaya Maha Sabha met every year and Ayyankali used to explain their disabilities before the authorities. KPMS (Kerala Pulaya Maha Sabha) celebrates its annual conference even today.

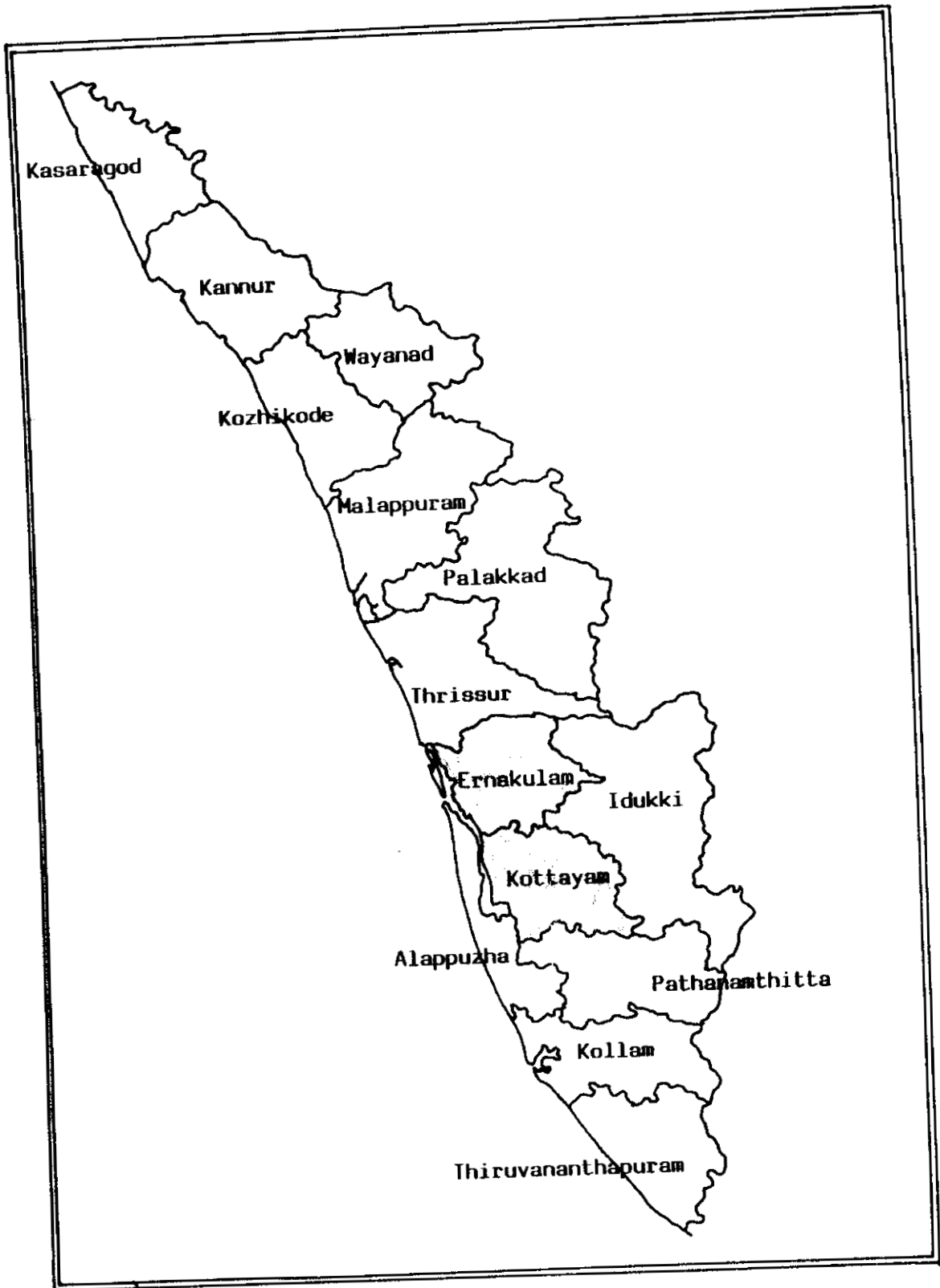
When the Communist Movement began to take shape in Kerala, the lower castes and classes were naturally attracted to it. Even today the core of the leftist movement is constituted of these groups. The involvement of the Pulayas in political movement gave them first a sense of strength and courage and later when the Communist Party came into power in Kerala, the much needed power to introduce socio-economic changes for their advancement. The land reforms effected by the leftist government is the most important of such changes. It helped thousands of Pulaya households to become owners of the land in which they lived.

Thus due to the cumulative effect of several factors, the Pulayas have experienced significant social advancement. Even though a great number of them are still poor, they are already on the path to further progress.

Below we give a profile of the Pulaya population as it is today.



MAP OF KERALA WITH DISTRICTS



Demographic Composition of the Scheduled Castes and the Pulayas of Kerala

Kerala has a total area of 38,863 sq. kilometers with 1384 villages. It has 14 districts, 61 taluks, 1452 revenue villages, and 983 panchayats.

The total population of Kerala, according to 1961 census was 16.90 million. By 1971, it rose to 21.28 million and according to 1981 census it further increased to 2,54,53,680. As per 1991 census, it has shot upto 2,90,98,518.³⁵

Table 1.1 Demographic composition of the Scheduled Castes of Kerala

Year	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
1961	49.60	50.40	8.50
1971	49.98	50.02	8.30
1981	49.46	50.54	10.02
1991	49.00	51.00	9.92

Source: Census Report 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991.



Table 1.2 Demographic composition of the Pulayas

Year	Male	Female	Total
1961	29,369 (48.00%)	31,728 (52.00%)	61,097
1971	2,92,656 (49.00%)	29,432 (51.00%)	5,86,988
1981	4,18,941 (49.60%)	4,26,663 (50.40%)	8,45,604

Source: Census Report 1961, 1971, 1981.

According to 1961 census, 8.5 per cent of the population of Kerala were Scheduled Castes and Pulayas estimated 61,097. As 1971 census estimated, 8.3 per cent of the total population of Kerala were Scheduled Castes; among them 33.13 per cent were Pulayas (5,86,988). 1981 census estimated the total Scheduled Caste population of Kerala as 10.0 per cent of the total population of the State and Pulayas constituted 29.2% (8,45,604). Sex ratio was characterised by female domination (50.4% female and 49.6% male). 7,29,176 (86.2%) of the Pulayas were residents of the rural areas as per 1981 census report. According to 1991 census, 9.92 per cent (28,86,522) of the total population of Kerala are Scheduled Castes. Sex ratio is characterised by female domination (Male 14,22,614 and Female 14,63,908).



The population of the two districts we have selected as our sample is as follows.

According to 1991 census, Ernakulam district is 6.19 per cent of the total area of the state (2409 sq. kilometres). It has a population of 27.98 lakhs which is 9.64 per cent of the total population of Kerala. The percentage of Scheduled Caste population in Ernakulam is 8.58 of the total population of the district i.e. (2,41,719).

If we take the district-wise population data of the Pulayas as per 1981 census, there are 1,66,190 Pulayas in Ernakulam district, which is 5.8 per cent of the total population of Ernakulam district, of which 50.3 per cent are females and 49.7 per cent males.

Kottayam district has an area of 5.67 per cent of the total area of the state (i.e., 2203 sq. kilometres). According to 1991 census, it has a population of 18,19,581 which is 6.27 per cent of the total population of Kerala. The total Scheduled Caste population of Kottayam district is 1,35,876 which is 7.43 per cent of the total population of Kottayam district.

If we take the district-wise population data of the Pulayas as per 1981 census, there are 66,523 Pulayas in Kottayam district which is 3.6 per cent of the total



population of the district, of which 50.3 per cent are females and 49.4 per cent males.

Educational Profile

Unlike in several other parts of the country, the Scheduled Castes of Kerala also have realized the value of education. Education is given a very important place in Kerala. Social reformers who worked for the uplift of the Pulayas encouraged education among them since they felt that it was the chief remedy for all their age-old disabilities. Compulsory Education Act of 1961 provided for compulsory and free education for children in the school-going age. Alexander K. C. (1968) points out education as one of the determining factors of social mobility of the Pulaya ex-untouchables of Kerala.³⁶ For, educational advancement was found to be the crucial factor for occupational mobility and through occupation, for social mobility.

If we analyse the literacy rate in Ernakulam district, according to 1981 census, there was 76.82 per cent literacy in this district, including 80.25 per cent male and 72.88 per cent female. In Kottayam district, literacy was 81.66 per cent including 83.96 per cent male and 79.35 per cent female.



According to 1991 census, the literacy rate of Scheduled Castes in Ernakulam district is 82.37 per cent including 87.29 per cent male and 77.55 per cent female. In Kottayam district, it is 90.28 per cent including 93.99 per cent male and 86.63 per cent female. In Kerala literacy among Scheduled Castes is highest in Kottayam district.³⁷

Literacy Level of Scheduled Castes in Kerala

Table 1.3 Literacy level of Scheduled Castes in Kerala

Year	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
1961	30.50	19.10	24.40
1971	47.10	33.42	41.81
1981	62.33	49.73	56.00
1991	85.22	74.31	79.66

Source: Census of India, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991.

In 1961, the percentage of literacy among the Scheduled Castes of Kerala was 24.4; in 1971 it rose to 41.81 per cent; in 1981 to 56.0 per cent and in 1991 it further increased to 79.66 per cent.³⁸ The percentage of literacy was 33.9 for the Pulayas as per 1981 census and



among the illiterates, 59.0 per cent were females. Among the literates, 15.9 per cent males and 13.3 per cent females only had formal education. There was only 0.9 per cent male and 0.03 per cent female with post graduate degree; 0.02 per cent males and 0.005 per cent females had engineering degree. There were almost an equal number of male and female with degree in medicine.

The above data reveal a definite rise in the educational level of the Pulaya women. The percentage of illiteracy has decreased.

As we have already seen, the Pulayas, like any other Scheduled Castes in Kerala were debarred from entering schools for acquiring education during the 19th and early part of the 20th century. The intense desire of the Pulayas to become educated compelled them to agitate against this disability. It was the private schools established by the Christian missionaries which admitted the Pulayas students for the first time. Meanwhile Ayyankali who led the struggles of the Pulayas against their disabilities especially in the field of education, secured permission to start a primary school for the Pulayas at Vengannur in Trivandrum district. Finally, the Government was compelled to open its own schools to the lower castes and to offer them various kinds of concessions such as fee concession, scholarships and



reservation of a fixed quota of seats in order to enable them to receive education. And the Pulayas began to make gradual progress in the field of education. The five decades after independence have witnessed remarkable progress in the education of the Pulayas. Though majority of the Pulayas and especially their women, are still less educated than many other sections of the society, there is significant mobility in the educational status of the younger generations of the Pulayas. More and more Pulaya children are seeking admission in schools, colleges, universities and in other professional institutions. A few cases will illustrate this point.

A national study of the problems of the Scheduled Caste students of schools and colleges of 14 states in the country including Kerala, conducted by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, which was completed in 1977, illustrates the educational situation of the Scheduled Caste women in the country and the difference between the girls and boys with reference to school and college education in Indian society. One of the striking observations in the study is that girls were poorly represented in the sample. They accounted for only 546 (15.0%) of the 3,644 high school students, and 316 (10.0%) of the 3,263 college students. The marginally higher representation of the girls in the school sample as compared to the college sample supports the recurrent



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observation that the enrollment of girls in education declines at successively higher levels of education. But in Kerala, in the college sample, the percentage of girls is as high as 50 per cent. In school it is 42 per cent.³⁹

According to the data collected from the various schools and colleges in Ernakulam and Kottayam districts including one engineering college there is rise in the percentage of the Pulaya students in the various educational institutions. In 1989-90, out of the total 16 Scheduled Castes students in the first year engineering course, 25 per cent (4 out of 16) were Pulayas, including 2 boys and 2 girls. In 1990-91, 34.5 per cent (10 out of 29), including 3 girls and 7 boys were Pulayas. In 1991-92, 45 per cent (9 out of the total 20 Scheduled Caste students) including 2 girls and 7 boys, and in 1992-93 also, nearly 45 per cent (12 out of 27 SC students) including 4 girls and 8 boys were Pulayas. Thus among the Scheduled Castes who took admission in the engineering college, the highest percentage was from the Pulaya Caste.⁴⁰ The data collected from the engineering college reveal that every year the number of Pulaya students seeking admission in the professional colleges is increasing even though the percentage of Pulaya girls is less compared to that of the boys. Still one can see

remarkable increase in the number of Pulaya girls seeking admission in this institution every year.

Same trend is seen in the case of the other colleges and schools also. In 1988-89, out of the 237 Scheduled Caste students in an Arts College, 109 (46.0%) were Pulayas with 91 girls and 18 boys. In 1989-90, out of the 263 Scheduled Caste students, 128 (48.0%) were Pulayas, of whom 80 were girls and 48, boys. In 1990-91, out of the 286 Scheduled Caste students, 112 were Pulayas (39.1%) including 95 girls and 17 boys. In 1991-92, the percentage increased significantly. There were 302 Scheduled Caste students in the college during that year. Out of them 170 (56.2%), including 98 girls and 72 boys, were Pulayas. In 1992-93 also, there was slight increase in the percentage of the Pulayas. Out of 312 Scheduled Caste students, Pulayas constituted 180 (57.6%), including 105 girls and 75 boys. In 1993-94, the number of the Pulaya students was risen to 190 (60.8%) including 110 girls and 80 boys.⁴¹

The above examples show that every year the percentage of the Pulaya students is increasing, and that the number of the Pulaya girls is much higher in Arts and Science college though the enrollment of the Pulaya girls is less compared to that of the boys in professional college.



In the various schools (except one) in Kottayam and Ernakulam districts, the percentage of the Pulaya girls is higher than that of the boys and every year there is increase in the percentage of the total Pulaya students. Among the total Scheduled Caste students, the majority belong to the Pulaya caste.

Table 1.4 Percentage of the Pulaya students in the various schools

School 1 (Ernakulam District)

Year	Total students in the school	Total SC students	Total Pulaya students	Percentage to total SC	Girls	Boys
1990-91	845	90	54	60.0	24	30
1991-92	837	101	58	57.4	27	31
1992-93	788	96	63	65.6	25	38

Source: Students' Admission Register of Markauma High School, Vengoor.



School 2 (Ernakulam District)

Year	Total students in the school	Total SC students	Total Pulaya students	Percentage to total SC	Girls	Boys
1990-91	452	29	20	68.90	11	9
1991-92	526	36	26	72.20	15	11
1992-93	576	39	32	82.05	23	9

Source: Students' Admission Register of T.V.J. High School, Keerampara.

The above table reveals that there was a steady increase in the percentage of Pulaya girls every year and also that the number of girls was higher than that of the boys.

School 3 (Ernakulam District)

Year	Total students in the school	Total SC students	Total Pulaya students	Percentage to total SC	Girls	Boys
1990-91	764	117	49	41.1	29	20
1991-92	925	130	71	54.6	36	35
1992-93	987	137	81	59.1	47	34

Source: Students' Admission Register of Government High School, Mathirappally.



School 4 (Kottayam District)

Year	Total students in the school	Total SC students	Total Pulaya students	Percentage to total SC
1990-91	367	114	11	9.6
1991-92	394	103	15	10.6
1992-93	364	115	13	11.3

Source: Students' Admission Register of Government Girls' High School, Puthuppally.

Note: This particular school is a girls' school.

School 5 (Kottayam District)

Year	Total students in the school	Total SC students	Total Pulaya students	Percentage to total SC	Girls	Boys
1990-91	163	12	2	16.7	1	1
1991-92	164	8	3	37.5	2	1
1992-93	164	16	4	25.0	2	2

Source: Students' Admission Register of Government Upper Primary School, Ericadu.

The above tables show that there was steady increase in the percentage of the Pulaya students in the various schools. Another finding is the increasing number of the



Pulaya girl students every year. Besides, a good percentage among the total Scheduled Caste students belonged to the Pulaya community.

The study conducted by Joseph Mathew on the educational level of the Pulayas showed that the Pulayas who had secured education upto school level estimated about 44.45 per cent and those beyond school level was 13.8 per cent.⁴²

Employment Profile

In this section we give a brief statistical profile of the employment of women in general and of the Pulaya women in particular in various occupations. The data have been collected from various sources such as census data, reports of the ICSSR programme of women studies, Government surveys and studies of various individuals. Data on the Pulaya women is compared with that of men and also of other Scheduled Caste women and of women in general.

As estimated by the ICSSR programme on womens' studies, the overall labour participation of women in India was 11.0 per cent while that of men was 52.0 per cent. Of the 11.0 per cent, about 86.0 per cent were engaged in agricultural occupations. Thus proportionately more women were employed as agricultural labourers.⁴³



The employment profile of women in the census of 1981 indicates that 79.40 per cent of all economically active women were engaged in agriculture as compared to 63.30 per cent for men. A significant trend observed is that over the years there has been an increase in the proportion of female agricultural wage labour to total agricultural workers at All India level. The proportion of female workers engaged as agricultural labourers in 1961 was 24.61 per cent which increased to 45.57 per cent in 1981. In 1961, 53.32 per cent of the rural female workers were cultivators, but it declined to 33.03 per cent in 1981. Thus a sharp decline was reported by the census data of 1981 in the percentage of female cultivators.⁴⁴

The report of the National Committee on "Status of Women in India," 1975, points out that women's participation has been declining since 1921, both in percentage of workers to the total labour force. While the total number of women workers declined from 41.8 million in 1911 to 31.2 million 1971, their percentage in the total labour force declined from 34.44 per cent in 1911 to 17.35 per cent in 1971.⁴⁵

Informations based on census data indicate that from 1961 to 1981, women's work participation at the All-India level has been declining despite Government programmes for rural development and schemes for employment and income



generation; and despite the introduction of the new agricultural technology.

According to studies, the weaker section is the lowest 10 per cent of the cultivators' and wage-earners' house-holds in rural India. A majority of them are illiterates. They get marginalized. The majority do not know any trade except earth works (including agricultural). 14.0 per cent only have knowledge of trade other than agricultural occupation. In such a situation, the rural weaker sections face low subsistence living and accumulation of debts.⁴⁶ This is more true in the case of the Pulaya women, since the main body of the weaker section consists of the Pulaya women.

In Kerala the Pulayas constitute the majority of the agricultural labour force, and hence the above trend is applicable to the Pulayas mainly.

An indication to the participation of Scheduled Castes in employment can be obtained from an analysis of their percentage among Government employees.

The following table gives the percentage of the Scheduled Castes in the Central Government Service through reservation in 1953, 1966, and 1975.



Table 1.5 Percentage of Scheduled Castes in Central Government Service through reservation

Employment category	1953	1966	1975
Class I (Higher administrative)	20 (0.35%)	361 (1.7%)	1,201 (3.4%)
Class II (Lower administrative)	113 (1.29%)	974 (3.25%)	2,695 (5.0%)
Class III (Clerical)	24,819 (4.52%)	99,017 (8.86%)	1,74,119 (10.7%)
Class IV (Menial, including sweepers)	161,958 (20.52%)	-	2,30,864 (18.6%)

From the table, it is clear that in Class IV employment category, the percentage of Scheduled Castes is much higher compared to that in other categories in the Central Government posts. The percentage of Scheduled Castes is the lowest in Class I. Compared to the percentage of public undertaking in 1965, it is much higher in 1975.

Table 1.6 Percentage of Scheduled Castes in public undertaking in 1965 and in 1975

Employment category	Total in 1965	SC in 1965	Percentage in 1965	Percentage in 1975
Class I	35,512	73	0.20	1.4
Class II	15,820	274	1.07	3.0
Class II	12,61,166	11,603	0.92	13.7
Class IV	-	-	-	26.2



In Kerala, in 1974, 8 per cent of posts in Class I category was reserved for the Scheduled Castes (their population was 8.3 per cent), but only 2 per cent was occupied. Under Class II category, out of the 8 per cent reserved posts 2.7 per cent was held. Under Class III category 7 per cent was held and under Class IV only 2.5 per cent held.⁴⁷

Table 1.7 Representation of Pulayas in Kerala Public Service (1979)⁴⁸

Categories of Post	Percentage of Pulayas
Category I	-
Category II	24.80
Category III	35.39
Category IV	27.34
Category V	22.58
Category VI	-
Category VII	11.18
Category VIII	33.15

(Category I is the highest paid and Category VIII, the lowest paid)

According to the Evaluation Committee's report on 1968 Survey, in Government Service there was only 1.82 per cent Pulayas, in quasi-government it was 3.79 per cent and in other sectors 94.39 per cent.



According to 1981 census, the total number of the Pulayas of Kerala was 8,45,604, out of which more than 50.0 per cent (4,26,663) were females, the majority living in rural areas (86.2%). Total main workers among the Pulayas constitute 2,99,875 (35.4%), marginal workers 57,877 (6.8%) and non-workers 4,87,851 (57.6%). Among the Pulaya marginal workers 59.9 per cent were females. Among the non-workers, 56.1 per cent were females. Among all the Pulaya non-workers, 14.0 per cent females were seeking work or available for work.

As 1981 census estimated, out of the total 4,26,663 Pulaya women of Kerala, 911 were cultivators (i.e., 0.2%); 85,498 were agricultural labourers (i.e., 20.0%); 1.8 per cent in services; 0.6 per cent of the Pulaya women in transport and communication; 0.1 per cent in trade and commerce; 0.3 per cent in construction works; 0.14 per cent in mining and quarrying; 1.05 per cent in forestry, livestock, fishing, hunting, plantation and allied activities; 0.9 per cent in household industries and 2.2 per cent in works other than household industries. Among the main workers, there were a few who followed scavenging. Out of the total Pulaya women of Kerala, 0.2 per cent did scavenging as main work. All the above occupational categories belonged to the main workers section.



In Ernakulam district alone the total number of the Pulayas as estimated by 1981 census was 1,66,190 including 83,444 (50.2%) females. Total main workers estimated 59,762 (35.9%) of which 23,041 were females. Cultivators formed 0.2 per cent of the total Pulaya women in Ernakulam district. Total female agricultural labourers in Ernakulam district estimated 20.3 per cent. In service, it was 2.3 per cent in Ernakulam district. There were 0.8 per cent in transport and communication. Among the total Pulaya women of Ernakulam district, there were 0.2 per cent in trade and commerce; 0.7 per cent in construction works; 0.2 per cent in mining and quarrying; 0.7 per cent in livestock rearing, forestry etc.; 0.2 per cent in household industries; 1.6 per cent in other industries and 0.2 per cent were scavengers.

Marginal workers in Ernakulam district were estimated as 10,860 i.e., 6.5 per cent of the total Pulaya population of Ernakulam district. Out of this, 6076 (55.9%) were females. Total Pulaya non-workers in Ernakulam district, according to 1981 census was 95,561 (57.5%). Among them 54,326 (56.8%) were females.

According to 1981 census, the total Pulaya population of Kottayam district was 66,523, of which female estimated 33,230 (49.9%).



Total main workers in Kottayam district was 23,156 which was 34.8 per cent of the total Pulaya population of Kottayam district. Female main workers constituted 8431 (36.4%) of the total main workers. Marginal workers estimated 4075 (6.1%) in Kottayam district, out of which 2442 (59.9%) were females. Total non-workers estimated 39,291 (59.0%) of the total Pulaya population of Kottayam district, of which 22,357 (56.9%) were females. Among the non-workers, 9298 (23.6%) were job seekers or available for work.

Among the main workers, female cultivators estimated 51.0 per cent which was 0.1 per cent of the total Pulaya female population of Kottayam district. Agricultural labourers estimated 6,786 or 20.4 per cent of the total female Pulaya population of Kottayam district. In service, there was 1.4 per cent; in transport and communication 0.2 per cent and in trade and commerce there was 0.1 per cent female Pulayas. There was 0.1 per cent in construction; 0.03 per cent in mining and quarrying; 1.3 per cent in forestry, livestock, etc.; 0.8 per cent in household industries; 0.4 per cent in other industries and 0.17 per cent in scavenging.

Nirmala Bai (1986)⁴⁹ reveals in her studies that there has been notable decrease in the percentage of non-workers (unemployed) among the Pulaya women compared to



that of 1981 census. Whereas there was 56.1 per cent unemployed Pulaya women in Kerala as estimated by 1981 census, it was only 23.9 per cent according to Nirmala Bai's study (in the present sample, it is still less).

According to Nirmala Bai's study, 49.8 per cent Pulaya women were employed in public sector. 26.3 per cent of the Pulaya women were working as wage labourers. The percentage in scavenging has increased since 1981, might be due to the better remuneration for the job as scavengers in Government institutions, today.

Thus, it is clear that participation of the Pulaya women in labour which contribute social mobility has increased significantly.

According to 1981 census, 60.0 per cent of the Scheduled Caste workers were engaged as agricultural labourers. A substantial number of the Scheduled Caste families followed low income traditional occupations. 80.0 per cent of the Scheduled Caste population of India lived below poverty line in 1984.

To overcome the situation and to improve the condition of the Scheduled Caste, till the end of 1982, about 1,22,000 families belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe were benefitted by the programme of distribution of land.⁵⁰



Towards the end of the second decade of this century, the policy of assigning land to the poor was accepted, especially to the untouchable and establishing colonies in many parts of India (including Kerala). Thus the depressed castes could gain some economic independence. Several other measures were undertaken by the government, which included the organisation of cooperatives.

From what we have observed from the historical sketch and profiles of the Scheduled Castes and of the Pulayas, we get a general situation of the Pulayas. It is clear that their educational, occupational, and economic conditions in general were very low. But their condition has been slowly improving. A comprehensive and specified study of their present educational, employment and economic conditions will help one to compare it with that of the past and to see how far changes have taken place.



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