

## **Chapter – I**

### **SOCIO – RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF THE DEPRESSED CLASS**

The socio – religious condition that prevailed in Travancore was entirely different from the other parts of South India. The society was divided into various caste groups. They came under two broad subdivisions, the Avarnas and the Savarnas. As far religion was concerned, besides Vaishnavism and Saivism, each community worshipped their own gods and goddesses. The worship of war heroes and communal heroes was common. In each village, there was a temple for the common worship for the villagers. Even though there were wars and conquests, they did not disturb the basic social structure of the society. There was unity among the people. But in the later course of Travancore history, the social life of the people showed symptoms of social disabilities.

#### **1.1 Communal Divisions**

In the social life of the people of Travancore caste played a significant role from the early days to the dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> There were seventy two castes in Travancore. These castes had many subdivisions. Among them the powerful were Brahmins, two classes of Nanajatis, eighteen classes of Sudras, six classes of Nichajatis and eight

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<sup>1</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 228.

miscellaneous classes<sup>2</sup>. These Jatis or caste were broadly divided into two classes namely the Savarnas or the privileged castes which included Brahmins and Nambudiri Brahmins, Ampalavasis, Kshatriyas, Nayars, the Syrian Christians and Muslims. All other communities were considered Avarna or unprivileged class.

### 1.1.1 The Brahmins:

The term 'Brahmin' is derived from Brahma the creator God and it is said that from whose mouth the Brahmins have sprang and hence the name.<sup>3</sup> Five sects of them were found in south India known as pancha Dravidas or pancha Gaudas.<sup>4</sup> They were Malayala Brahmins, Tamil Brahmins, Canaris Brahmins, Telugu Brahmins and Maharastra Brahmins. Among these the Malayala Brahmins were regarded as superior class.

The Nambudiri Brahmins were mostly found in the states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The word Nambudiri is derived from two words – 'nambu'<sup>5</sup> and 'tiri'<sup>6</sup> which was an honorific suffix among the Malabar Brahmins. They formed the socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar

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<sup>2</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p.228.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>4</sup> Census of India, 1911, Travancore,

<sup>5</sup> 'Nambu' means sacred or trustworthy.

<sup>6</sup> 'Tiri' means light.

and the traditional land-holders of Parasurama<sup>7</sup> the legendary founder of Kerala. Hammerton comprehensively commented that Nambudiris' directions were commands; his movements were processions; his meal was nectar and he was the holiest of human beings.<sup>8</sup> Nambudiris were treated with utmost reverence in the society and were considered to be the God on earth<sup>9</sup>. The author of Keralopathi went to the extent of saying that only through Nambudiri seed, good kings would be born<sup>10</sup>. The Nambudiris were found in all the taluks of Travancore. In the Southern part of Travancore, Eraniel and Nagercoil are the chief centres even now.

Potti is another group of Brahmins Potti is a Tamil word signifying reverence, and this term is used to designate all Malayala Brahmins except Nambudiri Brahmins<sup>11</sup>. There are three classes of Potti Brahmins corresponding to the three periods of their settlements in the country<sup>12</sup>.

Among the Brahmins, next stood the Paradesi Brahmins. They are non-Malayali Brahmins speaking Tamil, Kanarese, Telugu and Marathi languages. Next to the Brahmin community stood two classes of people viz

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<sup>7</sup> Edgar Thurston, *caste and Tribes of southern India*, Vol. V Delhi, 1975, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> Hammerton, J.A., (ed.), *An Encyclopedia of Human Races all over the world, Their life, customs, History and civilization*, Vol. IV, Delhi, 1985, p.2715.

<sup>9</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of the Nayar Dominance, in society and politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Elamkulam E.N. Kunjan Pillai., *Studies in Kerala History*, Trivandrum, 1970, p. 315.

<sup>11</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

the Aryapattars and Pattattiyars. The term Aryapattar literally means superior Brahmins. There were only two Aryapattar families in 1906<sup>13</sup>.

### 1.1.2 The Ampalavasi

Ampalavasi<sup>14</sup> is the generic name applied to all classes of temple servants in Travancore. There were many sub-divisions in the caste, which were assigned to different services in the Hindu temples, such as preparation of garlands, sweeping of the temple floor, fetching of fire-wood, carrying idols in procession, etc.<sup>15</sup> As a peculiar caste in Travancore<sup>16</sup> the Ampalavasis occupied an intermediary position between the Brahmins and Sudras or Nayars. Each Ampalavasi hoped to regain the lost position<sup>17</sup> by serving his term of life in temples. Despite this, the writer of Keralopati makes mention of them as advanced Sudras<sup>18</sup>.

'Unni' is the largest sub-division comprising four castes-Nampiyassan, Pushpakan, Puppalli and Brahmin<sup>19</sup>. Their traditional occupation is preparing pushpams or garlands for the temple use.

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<sup>13</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., *op.cit.*, Vol.VII, p.247.

<sup>14</sup> The term literally means 'a dweller in a temple'.

<sup>15</sup> Edgar Thurston., *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 28, 1901, Travancore, part I, Report, 1903, p.259.

<sup>16</sup> Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 329.

<sup>17</sup> They are considered as fallen Brahmins.

<sup>18</sup> Census of India, 1901, Travancore, part I, Report, 1903, p. 260.

<sup>19</sup> This caste group is also named as 'push pakans'

### 1.1.3 Malayala Kshatriya

Kshatriyas, by and large, are Malayala Kshatriyas in Travancore. Among them are Bhupala or Maharaja as those of the ruling family of Travancore and Cochin. The Raja of Mavelikara and Cranganore, Koil Thampuram, Tampan, Thirumulppad, Bhantari, Audvahika and Samanta belonged to this sect<sup>20</sup>. At a conference of Malayala Kshatriyas, in Kerala. Samanta Maha Sabha was converted as Kerala Kshatriya Samajam<sup>21</sup>. But the census Report of 1941 differentiates Samanta as a separate caste<sup>22</sup>.

Among the various sub-castes, the Koil Tampurans<sup>23</sup> were found mainly in North Travancore and Cochin. A few male members of them in Beypore in British Malabar were invited to form marital alliances with the ladies of the Travancore Royal family<sup>24</sup> around 1125 A.D. Due to Tipu Sultan's Malabar invasion of 1785 A.D. three males and five females sought shelter in Travancore. Of the five ladies, the fifth one stayed at Changanachery. Her eldest son Raja Raja Varma Koil Thampuram married Rani Lakshmi Bai, the sovereign of Travancore between 1800 and 1805 A.D.<sup>25</sup>. The Koil Thampurans were the earliest among the Kshatriyas who

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<sup>20</sup> Thulaseedharan, K., *Studies in Traditional Kerala Society*, Trivandrum, 1977, p. 32 and Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV., p. 80.

<sup>21</sup> Census of India, 1931, Travancore, part I, Report, 1932, p. 347.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1942 part 11, p.145.

<sup>23</sup> In early records they are referred to as Koil Adikarikal. They were also known by the term Koilppantalas.

<sup>24</sup> Venad Royal House or Venad Swarupam.

<sup>25</sup> Census of India, 1901, Travancore, part I, Report, pp. 286 – 287.

settled in Travancore. They were awarded with a revenue village in central North Travancore in 1728 A.D., in recognition of their sacrifice to protect the life of the prince from the attack of the Pillamars who often interfered in the administration of Travancore.

The Rajas or Tampurans another sub caste of the Kshatriyas lived as seven families<sup>26</sup> all related to the royal blood. Tampans were the fallen people from the status of Tampuran. Under Illayettu Swarupam<sup>27</sup> they were denoted as a ruling class for a long time. The total number of Malayala Kshatriyas was 1,575 in 1901<sup>28</sup> and it increased to 2,936 in 1931<sup>29</sup>.

#### 1.1.4 Nayar

Of the non-Brahminical Hindus in Travancore,<sup>30</sup> the Nayars constituted the largest caste in Travancore<sup>31</sup>. The first scientific census of 1875 calculated them about twenty percent<sup>32</sup>. They are found in all parts of Travancore except Tovala, Agasteeswaram and shenkottah taluks. They

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<sup>26</sup> They were distinguished by the respective regions where they reside viz. Mavelikara, Ennaikkat, Kartigapalli, Mariappalli, Tiruvalla, Parikkara and Aranmula.

<sup>27</sup> Swaruparm means Royal House.

<sup>28</sup> Census of India, 1901, Travancore, part I, Report, p. 290.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1931, Part I, P.145.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1911, Part I, p. 290.

<sup>31</sup> Thulaseedharan, K., *op.cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Robin Jeffrey., *op.cit.*, p. 14.

were numerous in Trivandrum, Nanyattinkara, Mavelikara, Tiruvalla and Quilon.

Kerala Mahatmyam and Brahmin tradition say that the Nayar caste was the result of the union between the Nambudiris and Deva Gandharva and Rakshasa women<sup>33</sup> introduced by Parasurama<sup>34</sup>. They are considered as a mixed race of Aryan and Dravidian. The term 'Nayar' was derived from the Sanskrit word 'Nayaka' meaning a leader<sup>35</sup>.

Most of the feudal chiefs of Kerala were Nayars<sup>36</sup>. They were first mentioned in three copper plates and inscriptions of seventh to ninth century A.D.<sup>37</sup> and rose to the position of small kings by the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Kublakhan, a Chinese Emperor had trade relation with Travancore through two coastal Nayar Chiefdoms with strategic ports<sup>38</sup>. The Nayars with other indigenous castes formed a long standing army of the state<sup>39</sup>.

There were four main sub-divisions of Nayars in Travancore. The Illakkars were the highest sub-class of Nayars. The swarupam Nayars were

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<sup>33</sup> They were considered to be the divine courtesans Kunjan Pillai, P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 296.

<sup>34</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol. V. P. 284.

<sup>35</sup> Panikkar, K.M. A. *History of Kerala*, 1498- 1801 Annamalai Nagar, 1960, p.3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>37</sup> William Logan, Malabar, Vol. I, Madras, 1887, p. 265, quoted by David M. Schneider, Kathleen Gough, (ed), *Matrilineal kinship*, California, 1961, p. 303.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, The two kingdoms were Kolattiri and Travancore or venad.

<sup>39</sup> Padmanabha Menon, K.P., *History of Kerala*, Vol. III, Ernakulam, 1933, p. 327.

the attendants of the Kshatriya families. Padmangalam and Tamil Padam Sudras are the immigrants from Tamil Country and later became Nayars.

### **1.1.5 Ezhavas**

The Ezhavas were spread throughout the length and breadth of Travancore. In certain parts of Travancore they are called the Chovas even now. Regarding their origin it is said that a Pandya princess Alli and her husband Narasimha, the Raja of the Carnatic migrated to Ceylon and became the sovereign of Ceylon. Later their successors returned to the motherland and settled in Kerala by name Ezhavas in remembrance of Ezham or Ceylon.<sup>40</sup> Most of the Ezhavas were tappers and tenders of coconut palm. They followed the customs of Nayars, in Public offices, temple roads and in the houses of the Ezhavas. Their women were prohibited from covering their breasts and wearing certain clothes and ornaments till the second half of the nineteenth century. Keeping cows, using metal vessels, wearing sandals and fire clothes were not allowed for them. In general, they were a people despised by the high castes<sup>41</sup>. As a slave caste of the Nayars, the Ezhavas inherited the social customs of the

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<sup>40</sup> Census of India, 1901. Travancore, part I, Report, p. 278.

<sup>41</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

Nayars. According to 1911 census, the Ezhavas numbered 546, 265 as against 592, 489 Nayars<sup>42</sup>.

### 1.1.6 Nadars

The Nadars were found in large numbers in south Travancore and Tirunelveli district. The Nadars<sup>43</sup> occupy a social status equal to the Ezhavas. It was the only caste prominently speaking Tamil in Travancore<sup>44</sup>. They follow patrilineal system of inheritance but a microscopic section of them in some villages followed the matrilineal system.

In the later centuries, the Nadars of Travancore occupied a social limbo between the Nayars and the out caste groups. They were the highest division of the lowest classes or the lowest of the middle classes<sup>45</sup>. A large number of them were converted into the Christian faith mainly for getting social equality with higher classes of the society. After Tirunelveli riots of 1889, they became popular<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Census of India, 1911, Travancore, part I, Report, p. 258.

<sup>43</sup> They were also contemptuously

<sup>44</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Yesudas, R.N., *A people's Revolt in Travancore, A Backward Class Movement for social Freedom*, Trivancore, 1975, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> The important riots at Tinneveli as Madura called The antishanar riot. A riot between the shanars and the maravas to treat them as high caste with strong antagonism between 1885-1914. G.O. No. 1077, Judicial, July 1899, dt. 20.08.1900.

### 1.1.7 Krishnavakakkar

The term Krishnavakakkar literally means 'belonging to Krishna',<sup>47</sup> the Krishnavakakkar were mainly confined to Eraniel and Kalkulam, the southern taluks of the state. No Krishnavakakkar was found in British Malabar and Cochin. The castes mainly followed the matrilineal system of inheritance and succession<sup>48</sup>. From the suffixes to their name Ayan and Acchi, they were considered as one of the main pastoral castes of south India<sup>49</sup>. They were calculated to be 10, 429 in 1911 census<sup>50</sup>.

Tradition traces their origin to Ampadi<sup>51</sup>, near Madura and from there they migrated to Conjivaram<sup>52</sup>. From there they came to Travancore and presented an image of Lord Krishna to the reigning king Udaya Martanda Varma<sup>53</sup> in the first year of the Malabar Era. The Maharaja asked them to serve in the temple of Krishna within the abode of Sri Padmanabha Swami at Trivandrum. They lived at Vanchiyur near Trivandrum for many years. As most of them followed matrilineal system they observed strictly the birth and death pollution. Thus the daily ceremonies at the temples were constantly interrupted. It was not tolerated by the rulers of Travancore.

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<sup>47</sup> Census of India, 1911, Travancore, part I, Report, p. 261.

<sup>48</sup> The Acts and proclamations of Travancore, Vol. XI. Krishnavaka Marumakkathayem Act 1939, Government of Travancore, 1945, pp. 488-506.

<sup>49</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol.IV, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> Census of India, 1911, Travancore, part I, Report, p. 261.

<sup>51</sup> Also called Ayar pati, it is the native of Lord Krishna.

<sup>52</sup> Census of India, 1931, Travancore, part I, Report, p. 373.

<sup>53</sup> The king was identified as Pallivana perumal, according to another account.

So the Maharaja asked them to remove their residence from Trivandrum at least by three rivers. As a result they settled in the taluks of Earniel and Kalkulam<sup>54</sup>. The Marumakkathayam Krishnavakakkar speak Malayalam whereas the Makkathayis speak a very corrupt Tamil dialect inter-mixed with Malayalam.

### **1.1.8 Nanchinad Vellala**

Situated between the southernmost part of the country. Nanchilnad comprises Thovala and Agasteeswaram taluks of Travancore. Several families from Pandyanad<sup>55</sup> and Coramendal coast migrated to this land, cleared the jungles and settled there. The term 'Nanchilnad' means the land environed by Nanja lands or country fortified by natural barriers. The names of present day villages like Azhagia Pandipuram, Kulasekharanputhur and Cholapuram indicate the supremacy of the Pandya, Chera and Chola kings over this land.

Tradition traces that the last Kuravan ruler of Nanchilnad insisted upon his marriage with a girl of a Mudaliar family. Indignant at his proposal, the Mudaliar people decided to revenge the Kurava ruler. They pretended to agree to the alliance. They erected a huge granite pandal with mechanism for its sudden collapse at a signal. On the appointed day,

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<sup>54</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 74-75.

<sup>55</sup> Tirunelveli.

Kuravan and his people came and were seated in the Pandal. The Pandal collapsed when the signal was given and all the Kuravas including their ambitious ruler were killed. The remaining of the granite structure are found even today at the village of Kurathiyara. In the later part of history this tract of land became the bone of contention between Travancore and the Pandyan rulers. In 1116 A.D. Travancore defeated Raja Simha, the Pandyan ruler and annexed Kottar and Nanchilnad<sup>56</sup>. After becoming the citizens of Travancore, the people of Nanchilnad accepted the matrilineal system of inheritance. Yet it is not a pure matrilineal system in the real sense but a midway of Tamil and Malayalam culture. The law of inheritance so far related to Nankudama (Property of the women) and Ukanthudama (Property right by love), patrilineal while in all other respects they followed matrilineal system.

### **1.1.9 Other castes**

The barber caste, called Ampattan in south Travancore and Krishnavahakars in central and Krishnavakakkar in North Travancore, professed hair cutting and other connected work. Their women were well versed in nursing during the delivery and men were practicing indigenous

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<sup>56</sup> Report of the Nanchilnad Marumakkathaya Vellala committee, 1921, Trivandrum, 1922, p. 4.

medicine. A sect of the caste follow patrilineal and the others matrilineal system<sup>57</sup>.

The Syrian Christians enjoyed a position equal to Nayars. They are the descendants of high caste converts of St. Thomas<sup>58</sup>. Another view about the origin of this class is that they were the descendants of the converts of Cana, a merchant missionary of west Asia who settled in Kerala in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. They maintained ecclesiastical connection with the patriarchs of west Asia till 1498<sup>59</sup>. The Portuguese with the weapon of Inquisition court in their hand, made the Malabar Church under Rome but the Syrian Christians regained connection with the patriarchs in 1653 yet a sect remains loyal to Rome. After the charter Act of 1813, protestant missionaries worked for the conversion of these Catholics<sup>60</sup>. The Syrian Christians in particular and non-Hindus in general follow patrilineal system.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the caste system that developed in Travancore brought about caste hierarchy that was the basis of all evils in Travancore.

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<sup>57</sup> Census of India, 1901, Travancore, part I, Report, P. 270.

<sup>58</sup> Disciple and Apostle of Christ who came to India to preach Gospel and win Souls in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. A.D.

<sup>59</sup> The year marked the landing of Vasco-da-Gama, a Portuguese Sailor to Calicut, Kerala.

<sup>60</sup> Cheriyan, P., *The Malabar Syrians and the church Missionary society*, 1816-1840, Kottayam, 1935, pp. 71-41.

<sup>61</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p. 158.

## 1.2 Communal Hierarchy

The role and influence of the caste system was the root cause of all social evils. The Brahmins were at the top of the society. They were considered as Jenmis of the land or tenants in Chief. They acted as the advisers of the Kings. The Nairs were the feudal lords, who assisted the kings in warfields and in all other areas of the kings day to day affairs.

Immediately below the Nairs were the Ezhavas or Thiyans or Chogans or Chovans. They cultivated the gardens and also grew dry crops. Under the direct supervision of the Ezhavas, the paddy fields were cultivated by the slaves. The Nairs who occupied important places in the government forced the Ezhavas to serve them. The Ezhavas as a class were considered low in social estimation. On grounds of pollution they had to remain at a distance of thirty six feet from a Brahmin and twelve steps from a Nair<sup>62</sup>. They could not rear cows or enter the bazaar for purposes of trade. They could use only coarse clothes and wear ordinary ornaments. They could not live in tiled houses or use umbrellas or move about in conveyances. No Ezhava could enjoy or own landed property.<sup>63</sup> Thus the condition of the Ezhavas was miserable<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> Walter Hamilton, *op.cit.*, Vol.2., p. 179.

<sup>63</sup> Ballard, G.A., Resident in Travancore and cochin letter to the Acting Chief secretary to Government, Fort St. George, dated Cochin, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1870, November 23, proceedings of the Madras Government political Department, G.O. No. 143 dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1879, pp. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Col. Munro to the chief secretary to Government, Fort St. George, dated 7<sup>th</sup> March 1818, Nagercoil, Foreign political proceedings, Fort William, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1818, No. 20, p.66.

The Ezhavas had numerous temples, and their chief deity was Bhadrakali. Several other deities such as Sasta, Virabhadran and Madan were worshipped. Unlike the Nairs, they were not dependent on the Brahmins for doing their religious services since they had priests among themselves<sup>65</sup>. In their own way they were caste conscious and excluded their inferiors in the same way as the Brahmins<sup>66</sup>.

The next in the social hierarchy were the Pulayas, the parayas and the Kuravas. At the time of the advent of the Protestant Missionaries in Travancore, slaves were doing bonded labour for the Nairs and Syrian Christians. On the abolition of slavery they became domestic servants of their masters.<sup>67</sup> Having been thus exploited for a long time, the Pulayas were below the Ezhavas and they were known as Ceruman in Travancore. Etymologically pulaya denotes pollution and cheru signifies the soil<sup>68</sup>. The concept of pollution and low birth was suggested by the term. Naturally the children of these unfortunates were obliged to be born into slavery, but their numerical superiority enabled them to secure certain privileges which guaranteed them steady maintenance. Every noble man or wealthy Nair kept a certain number of them under him. Of course their masters were not supposed to provide them their daily bread. But in Malabar they were

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<sup>65</sup> Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 399.

<sup>66</sup> Christian Mission Intelligencer, November, 1857, p. 256.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas, P., *Hindu Religious customs and Manners*, Bombay, 1960, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> The Indian Journal of Social work (Tata Graduate school of Social work), Vol. I, No.4, December, 1940-41, pp.393-394.

given fixed wages in cash or rice for their labour<sup>69</sup>. As polluted beings they were supposed to construct their huts in swamps and slums where caste Hindus never went<sup>70</sup>. Being a miserable lot, they called themselves 'adiyans' and were expected to place their hand over the mouth when addressing a high-born person<sup>71</sup>. Centuries of degradation made them filthy in their habits. They practiced polygamy but polyandry was unknown. Intellectually they were at the nadir<sup>72</sup>.

They were not permitted to worship Hindu deities, but they worshipped a goddess called Baradevatha. They had no temples for worship but they placed a stone on a mount in the open air and worshipped it as their deity<sup>73</sup> and offered fruits, fowls and liquor. One from their own caste served as the priest. They believed in the power of spirit and offered gifts to please them for earthly benefits. Faith in the supernatural power was very high among them<sup>74</sup>.

Despised and neglected by their superiors, they became a byword for everything that was impure. Their presence near towns and markets was even resented by the members of caste Hindus<sup>75</sup>. One ironical aspect of

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<sup>69</sup> Jacob canter visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>70</sup> Barbosa, *op.cit.*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>71</sup> Hutton J.H., *castes in India – Its Nature, Function and origins*, Bombay, 1961, pp.36-37.

<sup>72</sup> Christian Mission Intelligencer, April 1883, p. 216.

<sup>73</sup> James Forbes, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 401.

<sup>74</sup> Francis Day, *The land of the Perumals*, Madras, 1869, p. 328.

<sup>75</sup> Ward and Conner, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, P. 401.

their life was that they regarded themselves as superior to the Paraya. In case of pollution of touch by a Paraya, a Pulaya washed himself in atonement<sup>76</sup>.

The Parayas were at the bottom of the social ladder. They wore leaves and ate the flesh of wild animals. The Parayas used to eat the carcasses of all domestic animals<sup>77</sup>. Their ordinary profession was cultivation of paddy fields, cleaning of ponds, and tilling the ground using bullocks. Also they engaged themselves in skinning animals, making baskets, bamboo mats, umbrellas and such other menial occupations<sup>78</sup>. Their chief deity was Marutai and believed that after death the spirits of the good would become god like while those of the bad become devils. They had temples dedicated to Marutai whose idol was installed in them. They had their priest called velathan parayan<sup>79</sup>. They were at the mercy of their masters by whom they were bought and sold like cattle and were generally treated inhumanly<sup>80</sup>.

Majority of the slave populations in Travancore sprang from the Pulayas and Parayas. They could even be killed by their masters with

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<sup>76</sup> Francis Buchanan, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, P. 492.

<sup>77</sup> Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 402.

<sup>78</sup> Francis Day, *op.cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>79</sup> Francis Buchanan, *op.cit.*, Vol.2, p. 493.

<sup>80</sup> The Madras Church Missionary Record, Vol. XVII, No. 6, June, 1850, p. 143.

impunity<sup>81</sup>. Even in the courts of law justice was denied. They could not put up huts near public roads. Also they were not permitted to use sircar ferry boats to cross the rivers in times of flood<sup>82</sup>. In order to avoid pollution they were required to keep away from public places, roads and offices.

In addition to Pulayas and Parayas, Kuravas also represented one of the lowest untouchable groups of Kerala. Once upon a time they were powerful and influential. About the 12<sup>th</sup> century a tribal chief called Nanjil Kuravan, declared himself the king of Nanjanad in South Travancore. Later he was overthrown and Nanjanad was annexed to Travancore. Slowly they lost their independent status and became a group of untouchables. They were soon put under all disabilities suffered by the Pulayas and Parayas and like them were bought and sold.<sup>83</sup>

Lastly there were large number of hill tribes in Travancore and Cochin. The most important groups among them were the Mala Arayans, Nayadis and Muthuvans. These people were primitive and they owned allegiance to the chieftains of petty principalities like the Rajas of Pandalam and Poonjar.

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<sup>81</sup> Extracts from the General Memoir of the slavery of Travancore by Jt. Conner, U.T.C. Archives, Church Missionary Society Gleaner (C.M.S), D. III, p. 106.

<sup>82</sup> Christian Mission Intelligencer, April. 1883, pp. 217-218.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph, P.C., *Research studies in the Economic and social Environment of the Indian church*, Kottayam, 1938.

Among the hill tribes, the Mala Arayans were the most important. The appellation literally means 'The Lords of the Hills'<sup>84</sup>. The Rajas of Pandalam and Poonjar exercised various Zamindary rights over them, though later they were taken over by the Travancore Government. Most probably these Mala Arayans were emigrants from the low lands to take up their abode on the hills of the Western Ghats. They looked like the Ezhavas but were distinct from the 'Arriyans' of coastal areas<sup>85</sup>. Fair skinned, they were not inferior to the Nairs in caste estimation<sup>86</sup>. The language that they spoke was a corruption of Malayalam<sup>87</sup>. They were the only inhabitants of the hills who had permanent houses and compounds of their own.<sup>88</sup> They used split canes or bamboo to construct their houses which were thatched with bundles of grass. They were usually cultivators and grew enough grain to meet their immediate needs and as well as for sale. But they never worked as coolies in the low lands, however, attractive was the wages. They did not worship Hindu Gods but deified the spirits of their ancestors.<sup>89</sup>

The Nayadis constituted another category of hill tribes. They were hunters by profession and were renowned as good marksmen. They used to

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<sup>84</sup> Ward and conner, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, P. 139.

<sup>85</sup> Hunt, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 181.

<sup>86</sup> Madras Church Missionary Record, Vol. II, No. 4, April, 1879, p. 112.

<sup>87</sup> Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 420.

<sup>88</sup> Madras Church Missionary Record, Vol. XV, No. 6, June, 1858, p. 170.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas white house, *Lingering of Light in a Dark Land*, p. 129.

guide Nairs and others who went on hunting expeditions<sup>90</sup>. Their dwellings were located on top of the hills with an adjacent valley where there was a stream. Some of them lived in the huts of landlords and served as their watchmen to protect their crops from the ravages of wild animals. They also helped them in ploughing, rowing, weeding, transplanting and reaping.<sup>91</sup> They did not have a religion of their own but worshipped idols.

Muthuvals made up another group of tribals living in hilly areas. They were scattered in little hamlets in various parts of the Western Ghats. They were truthful and affectionate by nature. Agriculture, hunting and fishing were their occupations. An admixture of Malayalam and Tamil was spoken by them<sup>92</sup>. They moved from place to place in forests in small groups. So they never had a permanent abode. They were sun worshippers and were illiterate and ignorant<sup>93</sup>. They earned their livelihood by collecting and selling ivory, cardamom, wax, and honey.<sup>94</sup>

### **1.3 Social customs and ceremonies:**

The social life of Travancore was centered round customs and conventions peculiar to Travancore. In the social life each caste had their

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<sup>90</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, vol.V, p.275.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 276.

<sup>92</sup> Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record (Hereafter abbreviated as T.C.D.R) Vol. 29, No. 5, December 1919, p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> Travancore Cochin Diocesan Records, Vol. XXX, No. 5, December, 1920, p. 94.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIX, No. 5, December, 1919, p. 99.

own customs and ceremonies. They celebrated ceremonies like tirandukuli or puberty ceremony, Sambandam or marriage ceremony called Thalikattu Kalyanum, funeral ceremony and many small rituals from the birth of a child. The early ceremonies of a man from his birth in a matrilineal society of Travancore were Namakaranam or name-giving ceremony, Annaprasannam<sup>95</sup> or food giving ceremony, Karnavedha or ear-boaring ceremony and Vidhyarambham or initiation of the child to education.

The earliest form of marriage from its adoption of the matrilineal system was polyandry. The Nayars adopted polyandrous form of marriage for social causes created by and for the Nambudiri Brahmins. They followed non fraternal polyandrous marriage<sup>96</sup>. This type of marriage corresponds to a kind of group marriage which was a feature of the state of savagery. All the Dravidian communities passed through polyandry and gave up this in the later years. The early literary works confirm the existence of polyandry among the Nayars.<sup>97</sup> Buchanan who travelled in Malabar between 1800 and 1801, remarks that aristocratic Nayar women used to boast of the number of Brahmins and Kshatriya husbands and it is corroborated with the contemporary literature<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Chooroonu.

<sup>96</sup> The Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. XVIII, International Edition, Connecticut, 1984, p.346.

<sup>97</sup> Elamkulam E.N. Kunjan Pillai, *op.cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

Polyandry was an extremely simple and loose form of sexual union which depended for its continuance on the free will of both the parties concerned<sup>99</sup>. The sambandham form of marriage was interconnected with this practice. The practice of two or more brothers keeping a common wife was a corrupt form of polyandry. The following proclamation of Tipu Sultan when he was in Calicut in 1788 reflects the system. "... Since it is a practice with you for one women to associate with ten men, .... and are more shameless in your connections than the beasts of the field; I hereby require you to forsake these sinful practices and live like the rest of mankind"<sup>100</sup>.

The next form of marriage is the matrilineal system of marriage. It was the relation of one or more men to one or more women, which was recognized by custom or law involving certain rights and duties. It was also an economic association which might affect the proprietary right of parties<sup>101</sup>. The de facto and de jure form of marriage among the matrilineal castes of Travancore is Guna-Dosha Sambandham<sup>102</sup>. Sambandham is the principal term denoting marriage<sup>103</sup>. The Sambandham

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<sup>99</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A., *Gazetteer of India*, Kerala, Trivandrum, p. 286.

<sup>100</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol. V, p. 311.

<sup>101</sup> Dravidians Vol. II, Madras, 1970, p. 54.

<sup>102</sup> Report of the Marumakkathayam Committee, 1908, P.XIV.

The word Sambandam denotes marriage.

<sup>103</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol. V, P. 328.

forms of marriage that existed among Nayers were very ancient<sup>104</sup> and through them it spread to other communities. Custom allows a man to seek alliance with a woman of an inferior social status while it prohibits the women to exercise the same<sup>105</sup>.

#### **1.4 Tarawad (Joint family System)**

The matrilineal castes followed the joint family system called Tarawad. A Tarawad included all the members of the matrilineal family with community property<sup>106</sup>. The rights to enjoy the matrilineal property was transmitted through the offspring of the women members of the family<sup>107</sup>. A man's heirs were his sister's children. His wife and children had no legal claims<sup>108</sup>. All the members of a Tarawad lived in a nalukettu house,<sup>109</sup> a single house which could accommodate more than hundred people of over six or seven generations. They lived together within the four walls of the same house and shared a common kitchen. The head of the Tarawad was called the Karanavar.

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<sup>104</sup> Travancore Law Reports, Vol. XX, P. 69.

<sup>105</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., *op.cit.*, Vol.II, P. 357.

<sup>106</sup> The Regulations and proclamations of Travancore, (1097-1100), Vol. V, Trivandrum, 1929, P. 627.

<sup>107</sup> Mammen, K., *op.cit.*, P. 166-7.

<sup>108</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A., (ed.), *op.cit.*, P. 281.

<sup>109</sup> Census of India, 1941, Travancore, part I, Report, 1942, p. 145.

The Karanavar was the law giver of the family. He gave judgements to the wrong doers<sup>110</sup>. In later years the influence of western ideas contributed much to the decline in the orthodox matrilineal set up. The women began to look after their husband for their maintenance<sup>111</sup>. The sentiments of the Karanavan towards his wife and children provoked conflict in his duty. There is no sympathy between the members of the different Tarawads of a joint family. It is not honest that the sisters were engaged in looking after the interests of their own children while the children were to inherit the earnings of her brother<sup>112</sup>.

Among the matrilineal castes, the system of inheritance followed by Nanchilnad Vellalas was a combination of the patrilineal and matrilineal systems<sup>113</sup>. In other words, the joint family system in its fully developed stage was unknown to the community. The wife generally lived with their husband and not in her house. On the death of her husband, the widow and her children acquired a portion of the share of the deceased in his family property known as Ukanthudama meaning right by love<sup>114</sup>. The wife and children were entitled to get this share even if she was divorced. Generally it was given between one tenth and one-fourth of the ancestral property, if the husband had no separate property. If more than one-fourth of the estate

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<sup>110</sup> Sreedhara, Menon, A., (ed.), *Gazetteer of India*, Kerala, Trivandrum, P. 281.

<sup>111</sup> Krishna Iyer, L.A., *op.cit.*, Vol. II, P. 86.

<sup>112</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, P. 281.

<sup>113</sup> Census of India, 1901, Travancore, Part I, Report, P. 337.

<sup>114</sup> Report of the Nanchilnad Vellala Committee, 1921, P. 5.

was to be given, the no-objection of all the female heirs was essential<sup>115</sup>. If a man died without heirs leaving his old wife or wife who was unwilling to marry, was entitled to maintain his estate.

A divorced woman was entitled to maintenance during the life of her former husband if she had no issue. Her share in the property in this way was *nankudama* meaning the property of the *Nanku* or woman<sup>116</sup>. The *nankudama* could not be claimed by a widow. When a widow entered into a *Sambandham* alliance, the second husband should agree to pay her a sum of money as agreed upon by either at the time of his divorce. The agreement thus reached should be written in the form of a deed called *etuppu*<sup>117</sup>.

The matrilineal system of inheritance had the defects of many dimensions. The relation between the members of the family was in no way harmonious<sup>118</sup>. The educated generation clamored for legislations to put an end to these so much this system came to an end.

Nairs were pioneers in the field of fighting against the social evils particularly the matrilineal system.

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<sup>115</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol. V, P. 245.

<sup>116</sup> Report of the Nanchilnad Vellala Committee, 1921, P. 19.

<sup>117</sup> Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, Vol. V, P. 245.

<sup>118</sup> Kavimoni C. Desika Vinayagam Pillai, *Nanchil Nattu Marumakkalvali Nanmyan*, (Tamil), Karaikudi, 1942, P. 85. line 26: *mogpo rz;il mfyhg; bgUtHp kdpjiu ngaha; khw;Wk; ghH;tHp. atipiti cantai akalap peruvali Manitarai peyay marrum Palvali.*

## 1.6 Religious Condition

The people of Travancore were divided by different religious groups. Hinduism had a large following while Islam and Catholic Christians were limited. The Christians were found in the coastal areas and adjacent villages. Catholicism came to this area in 52 A.D. After wards in 1454 Francis Xavier came and established churches. The Hindus worshipped a large number of gods of varied description. Mostly the people were worshippers of Vishnu and Siva. There were minor divinities too and groups of people were worshippers of lord Muruga and Bhagavathy<sup>119</sup>. They worshipped minor divinities also. There were few Jain temples especially in South Travancore.

In Travancore the people mostly worship Vishnu. The most important Vishnu temples are Sri Padmanabaswami temple at Trivandrum Athikesavaperumal temple at Thiruvattar, Parvathipuram temple, Suchindram temple, Kariamanickapuram temple, Puravasseri temple, Parakkai temple, Thiruvithankodu temple, Krishnankoil temple and Thiruppathisaram temple. The Vishnu temple that exists in Thriuvattar is popularly known as Athikesavaperumal temple.<sup>120</sup> The deity Atikesavaperumal is in a sleeping posture facing westward. This temple is considered to be one among the 108 Sacred shrines of Vaishnavites in

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<sup>119</sup> Rao., M.S.A., *Social change in Malabar*, Mumbai, 1957, p. 143.

<sup>120</sup> Nagam Aiya, V., *op.cit.*, Vol. II, P. 50

India.<sup>121</sup> In the 16th Century, Krishna Chyaitanya of Bengal visited this temple. He wrote Sri Brahma Samhita, an outstanding contribution to Hindu Philosophy.<sup>122</sup>

There are many Siva temples in Travancore. The Siva cult took distinct shape in the tenth century A.D. The Shiva temples are very popular in South Travancore also<sup>123</sup>. Many temples were dedicated to Siva by the early Kings<sup>124</sup>. The notable centres of Siva worship are found in South Travancore. They are Trivandrum, Guruvayur, Padmanabapuram, Thiruvarambu, Thirupanikod, Pannipakkam, Ponmana, Manalikara, Thirparappu, Keralapuram, Thirunanthikarai, Suchindram, Nattalam, Thizpannicode, Parvathisekarapuram etc.,

From a very early date Jainism flourished in Travancore. Nagercoil received much prominence as a religious centre of Jainism<sup>125</sup>. The main deity of this temple is the five headed Nagaraja from which the name of the temple has been derived. It is seen from the writings of Tirugnanasambandar that it belonged to the 7th Century, A.D.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Padmanabhan, S., *Temples in Kanyakumari District.*, Nagercoil, 1970, p. 105.

<sup>122</sup> Padmanabhan, *op.cit.*, p.105.

<sup>123</sup> Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol.VI, Part.I, p.3.

<sup>124</sup> Kunjan Pillai, P.N., *Census of India*, 1931, Vol.XXVII, p.28.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 153-167.

<sup>126</sup> T.K.Velu Pillai, *op.cit.*, vol. IV, p. 637.

### **1.5.1 Bhagavathi Worship**

From time immemorial, Parvathi or Durga is worshipped in different localities under different manifestations. She is worshipped in Travancore in the name of Bhagavathi. She is venerated in several other forms, such as those of Mariyamman, Kali and Kantari by the people.<sup>127</sup> The Attukal Devi temple near Trivandrum is a noted Bhagavathi temple.

### **1.5.2 Minor Divinities**

Besides the popular divinities named above, there are other minor divinities worshipped by the Hindus. Such minor gods are Subramanian, Vigneswara, Ayyappan and Hanuman. Besides these superior divinities, there were inferior divinities. The people constructed temples and dedicated them to their gods. They were worshipped by the people with veneration. Inferior divinities, including Pirdari, Marudappan, Sattan and Bathrakali were also worshipped. Animals and plants because of their association with gods and goddesses too come in as objects of worship. Among these are, the bull, the monkey, darbha, a plant of the genus borage, arasu or fig tree and thulasi or ocymum sanctum. Devil worship is common among the Nadars. Devil dancing is very common in temples.

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<sup>127</sup> Samuel Vetharaj, *Temples in Kanyakumari District*, M.A., Dissertation (unpublished), Kerala University, 1981, p.4.

Besides the idols of the gods, some other things are also worshipped in some temples of Kanyakumari District. They include 'Sulam' and 'Khadgam' (sword) both the weapons of Shiva. Besides the above mentioned weapons certain 'Yantras' like 'Sreechakaram' are also worshipped.

### 1.5.3 Superstitious Beliefs

In Travancore superstitious beliefs dominated the day to-day life of the people. Even educated people were not an exception to this. Majority of people had believed in Raghu Kalam. No auspicious function was conducted during this time.

Omen was observed by majority of the families. Seeing a cat crossing their way, seeing a crow carrying a stick, seeing a single Brahmin walking along the road, were considered as evil omens in those days. If someone sneezed during the see off time, the person would go inside the house. He would stay at the house for some more time<sup>128</sup>. Seeing his wife's face, seeing one's own face in mirror, seeing the tail of black cow, seeing the face of a black monkey were considered as good omen<sup>129</sup>. If an owl sat on the roof of a house or on a tree which was nearest to the house, it was

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<sup>128</sup> Durate Barbosa, *On account of the countries on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants* London, 1918.

<sup>129</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p.158.

considered as evil omen. If they faced a dog carrying a bone or a slipper in its mouth, it was considered as danger to life<sup>130</sup>.

#### 1.5.4 Judicial System

The system of Judiciary that existed in Travancore made social life more miserable. Customs and conventions formed the basis of judicial system in Travancore<sup>131</sup>. The King was the fountain of justice. Social customs and practices with strong bearing on Dharmasastras were in force in civil and criminal cases<sup>132</sup>. Caste Tribunals played a major role in the administration of justice in Travancore. In the Tarawads the Karanavar was the judicial authority. His decisions were binding on all the people<sup>133</sup>. Civil disputes were referred to arbitration by three or four creditable persons of the society. Thus the people suffered want of clear cut rules of Judicial system.

The social and religious condition of the depressed class suffered due to caste hierarchy. The Brahmins considered themselves as the superior class and the Nairs below them. They considered others as inferiors. This brought about many problems in the Society. People were controlled by customs, conventions and practices. Further they believed in

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<sup>130</sup> Sreedhara Menon, A., *op.cit.*, p.158.

<sup>131</sup> Padmanaba Menon, K.P., *History of Kerala*, Vol.II, Ernakulam, 1983, p.24.

<sup>132</sup> Achutha Menon, C., *Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam, 1905, p.337.

<sup>133</sup> Padmanaban, K.P., *op.cit.*, 250.

supernatural powers. The high caste made use of the ignorance of the low caste and snatched away their identity. There were many factors that affected the social identity.