

Chapter - II

HURDLES FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES

The caste hierarchy pushed the low castes into the hands of the high castes. Making use of the caste hierarchy and political situation, the high castes suppressed the low castes and denied them the basic human rights. There were other factors too that forced the people to lose their social identity. They were feudalism, slavery, denial of basic human rights and distance pollution both in the social life and religious life.

2.1 Feudalism

Feudalism prevailed in the history of erstwhile Travancore.¹ During the early period of her history, Travancore was known as Cheranadu.² The invasion of the Cholas brought many changes in the socio-economic and political set up of the Chera Nadu. Many small kingdoms and petty principalities cropped up. Those who were in the upper strata of the society made use of the chaotic condition that prevailed in the Cheranadu and established authority over the temple property. Seeking safety, the poor

¹ Peter. D., and Ivy peter, *Liberation History of An oppressed Community*, Nagercoil, 2009, p. 4

² Shangoony Menon, P., (Reprint), *History of Travancore from the earliest times*, New Delhi, 1985, p.1.

citizens handed over their property to the Namboodiris. The Namboodiris became land lords and Jenmy system came into existence in Travancore³.

The whole Travancore was divided into Nadus. Each Nadu was subdivided into many Desams. The men who were employed to supervise the Nadus were called Nadu Vazhis and the Desam were Desavazhis. The Nairs were appointed Naduvazhis and the Namboodiris acted as Desavazhis⁴. They were also called Jenmies. They cultivated the land by using the services of the Nadars, Ezhavas, Parayas and Pulayas. Some of them served as tenants. The Jenmies were exempted from all taxes. They exacted Oozhiam and Viruti services from the low castes.

2.2 Oozhiam

Oozhiam means free services that were rendered to the government⁵. The low castes were forced to do three kinds of Oozhiam services to the state. The first category was regular service to the state as and when circumstances required. The second category of Oozhiam service were duties without receiving any remuneration from the state but they enjoyed government lands. These services were confined to supply provisions to

³ Peter, D., and Ivy Peter, *Liberation of the oppressed. A continuous Struggle*, Nagercoil, 2010, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6

⁵ Peter, D., and Ivy peter, *Liberation of the oppressed*, p. 6.

the religious and charitable institutions.⁶ As such, neither the government nor the Jenmies or any other deputies of the king paid anything. Sometimes, they were forced to work for the circar on Sundays too⁷.

The third kind of Oozhiam service was required for anything when an important event took place once in every twenty, fifty or hundred years. The nature of the duty was that it required joint labour and co- operation of all these people together for eight to ten or fifteen days or some times more. The ancient custom of the country was that those who performed these duties were not paid. These duties were performed to their own sovereign.⁸ But there were instances of complaints from the people of South Travancore.

The duty of dragging timber required for the use of kottaram and other buildings was performed by the inhabitants who possessed land to perform circar duties without hire or wage. But those who took lands in such cases did not drag timber to the Kottaram. Such work was forced upon the poor Shanar caste. They were not paid any wage for the work that they carried out undermining their personal inconveniences and financial loss.

⁶ Letter of Venkat Row, Dewan, December 16, 1828.

⁷ Letter from Roe, Mead to the Board of Directors, London September, 1822, p.3.

⁸ Letter of venkat Row, Dewan, December 16, 1828.

2.3 Viruthi

Viruthi was another kind of feudal service rendered to the government free of cost. Those who held temple or government lands were called Viruthikars.⁹ The Viruthikars were bound to supply needed things to the feudal Lords in addition to free service¹⁰ they rendered to the government. Some times lands were distributed to those people whom they liked. These people also were converted Viruthikars. These Viruthikars in addition to the Oozhiyam or free service were forced to supply all the needed articles to the temples during festivals.

Under this systems, the ryots belonging to the Eazhava, Nadar. Paraya and Pulaya communities were mercilessly oppressed by the rough rule of the village officials. The people belonging to the oppressed communities were obliged to supply provisions to the Palace, Temples and Uttupuras or free feeding centres and forced to render many services on the occasion of the Temple festivals, Palace ceremonies and Royal tours. Families of these untouchable castes were even allotted to certain Jennies and Madampies or the feudal lords who were at liberty to obtain free services or Oozhiam from such families. Totally twenty - five thousand

⁹ Petition from Chanoo and inhabitant's of Eraniel, Kalkulam and Kuzhithurai, Taluks, 1928.

¹⁰ Peter, D., and ivy peter, Liberation of the oppressed, A continuous Struggle, p.6.

people were directly subjected to this barbarous custom¹¹ . Besides these obligations the low caste were forced to do Oozhiam service even on Sundays to the circar land and then to the feudal Lords.¹²

2.4 The Oppressive Exortion

The Oozhiam and Viruti service became more oppressive. All those people who came under the category of Oozhiam and Virutti, were forced to oblige the government without protest. They had to carry salt from the field to the dwelling stations without any assistance.¹³ They had to guard the woods cut from the forest unmindful of the dangers in the forests. Failure to do these services attracted punishments in the form of cruel beatings which were reserved for animals. Not only these, there were other taxes too. They were forced to make payment called Kudivilai or value payable to the holder of the land, for the trees removed from the property that was removed by the Government¹⁴. Another tax called Naduvukur or value for improvements was levied for new plantations and cultivation.¹⁵ Purushantharam or succession tax was another tax paid by the Oozhiam and

¹¹ Dewan's Address, 24 March 1883, See Rev. Samuvel Matter, *Native Life in Travancore*, (London, 1883) pp. 358-359.

¹² Report of the London Missionary Society, September 1819, p.9.

¹³ Samuel Zacharia, *Then Thiruvithankodu, Thiruchari Chartra Churukkam*, (Tamil) Part, Nagercoil 1991, p. 48.

¹⁴ Proclamation, No. 41, dtd. 30.04.1993 M.E.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

viruthikars. Thozhuvari or tax for the cattle shed was collected from the poor people. A kind of poll tax at the rate of 6 % was also collected from the people ¹⁶. These taxes drove the people to poverty.

During temple festivals the Brahmins were freely fed at the cost of the peasants. The peasants were forced to supply rice, vegetables, fruits, milk and Milk products, coconut, sugar, oil and fire wood ¹⁷. Pounding of paddy and rice for the Murajapam¹⁸ was done by the Viruthikars and on festive occasions jaggery was demanded from the Nadars.¹⁹

It was a long standing practice of getting Navabhadam for Ennakkappu to the palace from potters²⁰. There were ten Viruthikars in the Ampalappula taluk for taking rice for palace consumption to Trivandrum. The rice had to be carried by head- loads five times a month and three loads were sent each time. The Viruthikkars carried the loads by turn. Besides the land held by them they were allowed wages at the rate of fifteen chakaram per load and also meals on the wayside Cirkar Uttupuras. Pure

¹⁶ Teresa F. Daniel, Col. Munro's Administration of Travancore, Unpublished M.Litt. These submitted to the university of Kerala, 29.01.1977. pp. 58-60.

¹⁷ Western star, June 1881.

¹⁸ Samuel Matteer, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

¹⁹ Huzur Sadhanam No. 3077/L.R. dated 26 Dhanu 1056 M.E. (Directorate of state Archives, Trivandrum).

²⁰ Devaswam Department Records, File No. 48/1907.

water was brought to the palaces by some Viruthikkars every morning under guard from the river in Karamana.²¹

The next item of Oozhium service extracted from the Viruthikkars was carrying the images of swamys. Their business was to carry the images, the flags during the time of Velakali and Siveli. The other two festivals namely Tirukkartikai and Makarasankranthi also imposed similar duties on them. More than fifty Viruthikkars were called for the services of carrying flags in connection with the annual utsavam in the temple at Ambalappula. One set of flags known as Velakaly was usually carried by Government officers and Madampimars. They were allowed rice - doles of one edangali per day for their services. But the real peasants were obviously denied the right to receive even rice - doles²²

Oozhium services in the state had still more inhuman stories. The unfortunate classes and their families were forcibly carried away from their huts by the Cirkar peons, to be employed to water public buildings, bank halls and granaries, furnish coconut leaves for feeding the state elephants, supply grass for the horses etc. Carrying milk to the British Residents, transporting cadjans from the landing place to halls near the banks of rivers, watching elephant pits in dangerous jungles and thatching public buildings were the jobs additionally forced on them. Besides these, peons were sent

²¹ Devaswam Department Records, File No. 48/1907.

²² *Ibid.*

in quest of the low caste carpenters for any work in the forests and they were detained on such work for four consecutive days.²³

The feudal system imposed heavy burden upon the peasants. Sometimes it caused depopulation as people wanted to get out of all their feudal levies and problem, awaiting dawn of better time. The feudal system and the caste hierarchy drove the people to slavery. Thus, the number of slaves began to increase in course of time.

2.5 Slavery

Slavery, a social evil, existed as a practice in south Travancore from the early period of her history. Throughout Travancore its impact was felt. With the beginning of the caste system in south Travancore, the origin of the institution of slavery is closely associated with it. In Travancore people were divided into various groups: Brahmins, Kashtriyas and the Sudras. Among these, the Sudras were reduced to the status of slaves and because of this, in Travancore, slavery began to grow.²⁴

There were many factors responsible for the origin and growth of slavery in Travancore. In Travancore, the history of early period was fluctuating and the social set-up was also unsteady. During this time

²³ Letter dated 30 September 1869 from the Dewan peishkar of Quilon to the Dewan of Travancore. (K.K.Kusuman, *Slavery in Travancore*, Trivandrum, 1973, p.115).

²⁴ Kusuman, K.K., *Slavery in Travancore*, Trivandrum, 1973, p. 15.

foreign invasion took place from the North. These foreign invaders brought the original inhabitants under their control and settled down in Travancore. The slave communities of south Travancore assumed greater importance and they formed a class of ruling dynasty and they established a government which suited to the people. The Pulayas enjoyed equal rights to that of the high class people, during the second Chera Empire.²⁵ Pulayanar Kottai, a suburb of Trivandrum was the centre of the Pulaya ruler and he established his influence over the surrounding parts.²⁶

The Brahmins came from North and settled in Travancore²⁷. They were responsible for creating caste rules and also caste superiority in the society. In the various regions of Travancore they had established their undisputed dominance over the land and the people as years passed by.²⁸ In the early stages the opposition of the original inhabitants created many problems for the Brahmins. The Brahmins claimed their superiority over the other castes in all fields after securing a safe footing. A section of the natives fascinated by their fair complexion, their religious and social customs considered it a privilege to be in close association with the Brahmins.²⁹ The inhabitants who accepted the supremacy of the Brahmins,

²⁵ Kusuman, K.K., *people's Revolt in Travancore*, p. 25.

²⁶ It is evident from inscriptions that the pulayas enjoyed all privileges of high class people.

²⁷ Saradmoni, K., *op.cit.*, p. 456.

²⁸ Kushman, K.K., *people Revolt in Travancore*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

got special treatment by the Brahmins and they were called Sad-Sudras or good Sudras.³⁰ The other groups who refused to accept the supremacy of the Brahmins continued to be outside of the new social set-ups.³¹ "The joining of the dejected local people with the invaders, resulted in a social convulsion of far reaching consequences. It destroyed the harmonious life of the people for several centuries and paved the way for the introduction of inequalities based on casteism". Thus in Travancore the caste system came into existence.

2.5.1 Responsible Factors for slavery

Many factors were responsible for the growth of slavery in Travancore. The castes below the Nadars and Ezhavas such as Pulayas, Parayas, Paravas, Kuravas, Vettuvans etc., were regarded as slaves. Wars and conquests between petty chieftains and princes were always followed by the capture of the vanquished, and afterwards these vanquished were made slaves. For petty sums of money, the parents used to sell their children to work in the house or in the fields of the rich during the times of famine. Later these rich people converted them into slaves. In case where the women of higher castes associated with men of low castes they were

³⁰ Kusuman, K.K., *people Revolt in Travancore*, p. 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

reduced to slavery and were removed from their parental community.³²
This was depicted by Francis Day in his book "The Land of Perumals."³³

Many of them were pushed into slavery because of the practice of "Pula Pedi"³⁴ Debtors who could not pay back loans sold themselves to creditors and served them as slaves till their liability was over. Individuals had no respect in a caste dominated society. The Brahmins were at the top,³⁵ and they claimed that they descended from Brahma who created them from his head., while the low castes were created from his feet.³⁶ The customs in ancient times for the Rajas was to convert criminals sentenced to capital punishment into slaves. Even members of the defeated kings' family were also sold as slaves by the Rajas. When the high caste females were detected in immorality or breach of caste rules they were exposed to punishments and converted into slaves. A Brahmin woman who lived with a low caste man immediately became the Raja's slave according to caste rules. Nair women, who violated the laws of their community, were liable

³² Kusuman, K.K., *Slavery in Travancore*, p. 28, Francis Day rightly observes, should the conduct of Brahmins women have been brought to light with a low caste and she was tried by Brahmins, and if found guilty, became Raja's slave.

³³ Francis Day, *op.cit.*, 1863, p. 62.

³⁴ According to Gundert, Pula Pedikalam (The period of Pulaya terror) was held in the month of Karjadakam (15th July – 15th August). During these period if a person belonging to a low caste, like Pulayas touched or threw a stone or a stick at a woman of high caste after sunset would lose her caste as well as her connection with relatives, and to accompany him, forever.

³⁵ Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, (rd)., p. 68.

³⁶ James Hough, *The History of Christianity in India from the commencement of the Christian era*, Vol. II, London, (nd), p. 221.

to be sold by the sovereign when they came for transgressions before her relations. Taking advantage of the economic sufferings of the poor peasants, the slave traders reduced them to the status of slaves. Kuravas were another set of slaves who claimed higher status over Pulayas and Parayas.

2.5.2 Mechanism of Possession of slaves

A peculiar custom of transferring the slaves was followed by the people of Travancore. The first method was by 'Jenum' or 'sale', the slave became the property of the master. The property of the slave was transferred to a new master and the value of the slave was also given.³⁷ It was the duty of the new master to look after the slaves in the same manner like the former master. The second method was 'Canum' or mortgage. In this method the proprietor would get two thirds of the value of the slaves by the procedure of Canum. As a token of his partial claim over the slaves he was also entitled to get a small quantity of rice yearly. He could reclaim and recover the slaves on repayment of the money that he had borrowed. He was not liable to pay any interest. He was responsible for returning a slave of equal value, if a slave died while he was in the custody of the new master. The third method of possession of slave was by letting them for

³⁷ Ward and conner, *op.cit.*, p. 142.

pattom or rent. The annual hire of a man slave was eight panams³⁸ and a woman slave was four panams.³⁹ The second and third tenures were highly abominable for the person who exacted the labour and furnished only the subsistence for the slaves. Other than protecting and helping the slaves, he was only interested in grinding his own axe.⁴⁰ Education was forbidden to the slaves. The house of the slave was called "Madam", means a hut and their children were called 'Monkeys' and he could not look at the face of his master and speak freely. "He had to place the hand over the mouth if he wanted to speak or else the breath should go forth and pollute the person."⁴¹ Before getting married a slave had to pay tax then only he was allowed to marry. Even to beget children, the master's sanction was necessary.⁴²

Children born of slaves belonged to the master. Only with the permission of the master the husband should meet the wife and if the master wanted to sell them that was done without any human consideration. In the markets the husband, wife and children were driven like cattle and sold or auctioned sometimes.⁴³ The slaves were lodged like buffalos, when they were at work in the fields. For a stomach full of rice they had to work all

³⁸ Panam. Panam was a coin in circulation during the peiod under study. The equation was as follows. 4 Chakrams – One fanam, 7 Fanams – One Rupee.

³⁹ Kusuman, K.K., *Slavery in Travancore*, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁰ William Logan, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

⁴¹ Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, London, 1987, p. 45.

⁴² Walter Hamilton, *Historical Description of Hindustan and the adjacent countries*, vol.II, London, 1820, p.173.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

day, Thus the caste masters had the right to sell or kill the slaves in a caste-dominated society.⁴⁴

The women slaves were compelled to pay a tax called the breast-tax⁴⁵ and the slaves were compelled to pay for the hair they grew and moustache they had. To ameliorate their sufferings no steps were taken by the government even though the government was informed of these harassments. The slaves were considered as their property by the masters and their position was less than that of animals. The masters employed their slaves in their fields and kept them away from their houses in the later periods.⁴⁶ The slaves were never permitted to touch the masters. If they happened to touch them accidentally they were given death punishment. Even in the fields their work was supervised from certain distance. A prescribed distance was to be observed by the Pulaya if they needed dialogues with men of higher castes, according to Walter Hamilton.⁴⁷

Travancore had long been the house of untouchability, unapproachability and of even unseeability. Such social inhibitions were observed seriously under the sanction of religious and social customs. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda, the great Hindu religious reformer, once

⁴⁴ Samuel Mateer, *Native life in Travancore*, pp. 180-181.

⁴⁵ Krishnan, N.R., *Ezhavas Yesterday and Today*, (Malayalam), National Book Stall, 1963, pp. 175-180.

⁴⁶ Kusuman, K.K., *Slavery in Travancore*, p. 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

described Travancore as the land of lunatics.⁴⁸ Not only the Hindus, but also the Christians and the Muslim had fallen prey to these inhuman usages.⁴⁹ The chief social evil in Travancore, as elsewhere in India was caste.⁵⁰

2.6 Sufferings of the Depressed

In Travancore, the Brahmins held the highest place in society. As owners of all land in the country they depended upon the Nairs for the proper management of the land. The Nairs grew into a warrior class protecting the interests of the Brahmins and in course of time they also joined with the Brahmins to form the upper class. The Ezhavas or Tiyas, the Nadars, the Pulayas and the Parayas were the low castes.⁵¹ These low castes were subjected to glaring disabilities on account of the peculiar social customs which were very strictly followed in Travancore. The treatment which the untouchables received at the hands of the caste Hindus from time immemorial, was unsympathetic and even inhuman.⁵² Broadly speaking the people of Travancore were divided into Avarnas and the Savarnas.⁵³ The

⁴⁸ Swami Vivekananda, the complete works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. III, p. 294.

⁴⁹ Sam Daniel, J., *Travancore at the cross - Roads*, p.9.

⁵⁰ The word caste is derived from the portugese word 'casta' signifying breed, race or kind. Hutton, J.H., *caste in India*, p. 47.

⁵¹ Raghavan, P.S., *op.cit.*, p.54-55.

⁵² Kunjan Pillai, N., *Census of India*, 1931. Vol. XXVIII, Travancore, Part I, p. 432.

⁵³ Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, 1934, p.8.

Avarnas were the low castes such as the Adi- Dravidas, Alavans, Arayans, Baratars, Chakaravars, Chakkiliyans, Chavalakkarans, Ezhavas, Kakkalans, Kaniyans, Kavatis, Kuravans, Marakkans, Maravans, Mukkuvans, Nadars, Nulayans, Pallans, Panans, Panikkans, Paravans, Parayans, Pulayans, Pulluvans, Tantans, Tanta- Pulayans, Valans, Velans and Vedans.⁵⁴ According to the common law of the country, they were considered untouchables. They were strictly prohibited from entering the temples and using public wells, tanks and chatrams.⁵⁵ Equal opportunity of education and employment was denied to the Avarnas. There were instances of educated Avarnas having been denied the opportunity to enter government service for the simple reason that they belonged to the depressed classes.⁵⁶ They were not allowed to walk through the streets where Brahmins resided.⁵⁷ During festivals the entry of the Avarnas in the streets were strictly forbidden.⁵⁸ Rev. Mateer says " Narrow and short sighted laws, exclusive legislation and oppressive monopolies effectually hindered the extension of trade, the growth of commerce, and the speed of agriculture, while barbarous caste restrictions produced disunion and national weakness.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Report of the Temple Entry Committee, 1934, p.8.

⁵⁵ Kunjan Pillai, *op cit.*, p.432.

⁵⁶ Sreedhara Menon, A., *Trivandrum District Gazetteer*, p. 273.

⁵⁷ Chidambarampillai, P., *Right of Temple Entry (nd)*, P. 36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, p. 292.

2.6.1 Untouchability

Untouchability was a unique phenomenon in the Hindu society⁶⁰. The term untouchability is the English rendering of the local expression like "Theetu" in Tamil and ' Pula' in Malayalam which generally convey the meaning ' pollution' ⁶¹. It was believed that the touch of a low caste man would pollute the man of a high caste. Once polluted by the touch of a low caste man, purification was necessary. Hence, the low castes were commonly spoken of as outcastes or untouchables. Thus, if a Cheruman, or Pulayan, was touched by a Paraiyan, ' he was defiled and must wash his head and pray' ⁶². Barbosa writes that a "Nayar woman touched by a Pulayan is outcaste for life".⁶³ If a pulayan touched a Brahmin, he had to take his bath at once and change his Brahmanical thread. On the other hand, if a Nayar was polluted by a Pulayan's touch, he had only to take bath to purify himself.⁶⁴

The untouchables experienced much sufferings in travelling from one place to another. They placed leaves when they were at work in the fields as a sign of their presence to the caste Hindus. They were strictly

⁶⁰ The words untouchables and untouchability were in fact, first coined by the British. (Refer, census of India, 1911 Part I, P. 117).

⁶¹ Hanumanthan, K.R., *Untouchability*, Madurai, 1975.

⁶² Buchanan Franics. *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*.

⁶³ Hutton, J.H., *op.cit.*, P. 78.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

forbidden from entering the market for selling their goods.⁶⁵ If by accident a high caste touched a low caste the former was obliged to purify himself by a bath. The caste Hindus thought that even the food - print of the untouchables would contaminate the surrounding areas. Their women were strictly prohibited from wearing any upper cloth or carrying pots of water on the hip, as the Nair women did.⁶⁶ Thus, they lived in perpetual fear and poverty.

2.6.2 Unapproachability

Unapproachability was also very severe in Travancore. Francis Day says that an Ezhava must keep 36 paces from a Brahmin and 12 from a Nayar while a Kaniyan would pollute a Numbudiri Brahmin at 24 ft.⁶⁷ Mateer gives 36 paces as the distance a Shanana must keep from a Brahmin, and 96 paces as the distance for a Pulayan: from a Nayar a Shanana must keep a distance of 12 paces and a Pulayan 66 paces.⁶⁸ According to Wilson, a Nayar must not come within 3 ft. of a Nambudiri Brahmin, an Ezhavan or Shanana within 24 paces, and a Pulayan or other untouchables within 36 paces.⁶⁹ In the Malabar Gazetteer, C.A Innes writes that the

⁶⁵ Sobhanam, B., *'Genesis of the Social Emancipation among the Ezhavas' Historic*, Vol.II, Madurai, 1984, p.3.

⁶⁶ Yesudas, R.N., *A people's Revolt in Travancore*, p. 32.

⁶⁷ Francis Day, *Land of the Permauls* pp.322 f.

⁶⁸ Samuel Mateer, *land of Charity*, pp. 32 & 46.

⁶⁹ Wilson, *Indian Caste*, vol. II, p. 74.

artisans must keep about 24 feet from a Brahmin, while a Nayadi must keep 74 ft. away⁷⁰. Dr. A. Aiyappan gives a scale of distance pollution for several castes; a Nayar must keep 7 ft. from a Nambudiri Brahmin, an Ezhavan must keep 32' Cheruman 64' and a Nayadi from 74' to 124' .⁷¹ It is on record that an untouchable should stand at a prescribed distance and had to cover his mouth with one hand when speaking to a caste Hindu.⁷² The approach beyond these limits would pollute the caste Hindus. Macaulay writes, " If the poor wretch who tills the soils had ignorantly to cross any Nair in his path, the master draws his sword and kills him on the spot with impunity."⁷³

2.6.3 Unseeability

Not only untouchability and unapproachability but also unseeability was also in vogue in Travancore. The high castes believed that low caste people should not be seen by them on days when they were to be specially pure. The unseeable caste was the Purada Vannan. "They had to work between midnight and daybreak and were not allowed to come out during the daytime because the very sight of them was polluting."⁷⁴ When Nair

⁷⁰ Hutton, J.H., *op.cit.*, p.80.

⁷¹ Aiyappan, A., *Anthropology of the Nayadis*. Trivandrum (nd), p.18.

⁷² Samuel, V.T., *One caste one Religion one God*, p. 23.

⁷³ Sobhanan, S., *Rama Varma of Travancore*, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Hutton, J.H., *op.cit.*, p. 82

nobles came out in the public roads an attendant of theirs preceded them shouting 'po', 'po' which meant 'go away'.⁷⁵ The cruelties committed by the upper class were such that the lower castes feared like chickens at the sight of the kite.⁷⁶ In some places they had to go seeking shelter in the jungles immediately on seeing a caste Hindu. M.S. Appadorai Iyer writes that they repeated the unpleasant sound 'o', oh', o' in order to avoid pollution before seeing the caste Hindu.⁷⁷

2.6.4 Other disabilities

The untouchables were subjected to several other social disabilities also. On account of the extremity of the rigidity of the caste system, the women of the backward classes were not permitted to cover their breasts or to wear ornaments. Their men-folk had to get permission from the king for growing moustache and carrying umbrellas. They were forced by the government officials to pay poll tax. Even for conducting marriages they had to pay a tax to the government.⁷⁸ Cruel punishments were given for default during the time of the collection of such taxes.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Francois Pyrad de Laval, *Voyage to the East Indies*, Vol. II, p. 384.

⁷⁶ Report of the Travancore District Committee of the L.M.S., 1864, P. 4.

⁷⁷ Edgar Thurston, *caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, pp. 51 f.

⁷⁸ Ward and Conner, L., Vol. I, pp.102-105.

⁷⁹ Samuel Mateer, S., *Native life in Travancore*, p. 292.

Some of the depressed classes like the Pulayan, the Parayan and Vetan were brought to the market and sold like cattle and disposed of along with the land on which they worked. They were strictly forbidden to use the highways, public conveyances, hospitals and common wells.⁸⁰ They had no access to the markets even to purchase their necessities.⁸¹ They were not allowed to wear any valuable ornaments nor to use upper garments to cover their body.⁸² They were allowed to live in mud huts constructed near the paddy fields which they had to protect for their masters. They could not send their children to school nor even give them names which were usually borne by the members of the caste Hindus.⁸³ Pulayans could use ornaments of brass and Vetans, Kuravas, etc., could wear only a large number of strings of beads.⁸⁴ Only the high caste people were permitted to live in tiled houses. The depressed classes were also not permitted to use palanquins. It is on record that a Nadar was fined for using the Palanquin.⁸⁵ When the oil-mongers at Kottar used the palanquin they were complained against by another caste and were fined by the Magistrate.⁸⁶ It was after 50

⁸⁰ Kunjan Pillai, N., *op. cit.*, p. 432.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Samuel Mateer, *op. cit.*, pp. 340-341.

⁸⁴ Samuel Matteer.

⁸⁵ Ravindran, T.K., *Vaikkam Satyagraha and Gandhi*, p. 160.

⁸⁶ Ravindran, T.K., *op.cit.*, p.160.

years of continuous struggle and fight that the liberty to women of unprivileged classes for wearing upper cloth was obtained.⁸⁷ The Pariahs and the Chakilians were permitted to live away from the villages occupied by the Brahmins. They were debarred from drawing water from the village well because it was thought they polluted it by their touch. Men of higher qualification among the Ezhavas were not given any employment opportunity in the state because of their caste disability.⁸⁸ The same was the case with the Shanar.⁸⁹

The people who were governed by Marumakkattayam Law were obliged to pay to the Government a succession fee called adiyara. It amounted to 1/4 of the value of the property.⁹⁰ This custom was prevalent in Travancore and it caused severe hardship to the people.

Apart from the above, burdensome taxes were also imposed on the lower castes. A special tax called 'Kuppakkalca' in the nature of poll-tax was imposed on the Parayas and Ezhavas in the

⁸⁷ Proceedings of Travancore Legislative council, 1925, Vol. VI, pp. 58 & 60.

⁸⁸ Ravindran, T.K., *Assan and Social Revolution in Kerala*, p. 67.

⁸⁹ The Shanars came to be called as Nadars according to the orders of the Government of Madras (G.O. 785, 7th July 1921 Law (General) Dept.).

⁹⁰ The Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore 1010-1067, Vol. I, p. 254.

taluk of Tovala.⁹¹ A succession fee called 'Purusantaram' was also levied.⁹² A tax was levied for exercising the privilege of wearing gold ornaments also. Even for celebrating marriages the lower castes had to pay a special fee.⁹³ It is surprising that taxes were levied on those who grew hair and also for covering the breasts of the women.⁹⁴

In such a caste ridden state of Travancore the teachings of Christian missionaries, Swami Vaikunda Sawmikal and Narayanaguru brought about a great change. Vaikunda Swamikal gave a clarion call to all the depressed communities of South Travancore to free themselves from the grip of the caste Hindus. He fought against casteism of the caste Hindus. He fought against casteism and criticised the caste Hindu authorities as 'nisan' (wicked) and warned them. He also condemned Brahmanical orthodoxy.⁹⁵ He fostered interdining among his followers and advised them to construct 'Nizhal Thankals', in order to feed the poor and spread his faith. He instructed the Nadars to construct

⁹¹ *Ibid*, Vol. IV, p. 365.

⁹² Remanatha Iyer, S., *A Brief Sketch of Travancore*, p. 151.

⁹³ Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, p. 292.

⁹⁴ The inhumanity and injustice in the collections and nature of tax compelled an Ilava lady, who was unable to bear the humiliation of the caste Hindu tax collectors to cut off one of her breasts and present it to them (Refer Yesudas, R.N. *op.cit.*, p. 41).

⁹⁵ Sarveswaram, P., 'Sri Vaikundaswamy and Social Reform Movement, Article read in the Seminar on the social Reform in South India, March 14 & 15, Madurai, 1981.

multi-storied houses and violate the foolish customs of the land. He dug a well, popularly called 'Munthirikinaru' which was opened to all people without any caste restriction.

He imparted the ideals of equality and freedom and reminded the Nadars that they belonged to a leading community. He also propagated against the deep rooted caste distinctions found in the society. Due to his constant advice, the Nadars began to wear head-turbans as a mark of royalty and sacred-thread like the Brahmins. As he was poisoned to death by the caste Hindus, he could not succeed in his mission.⁹⁶

The oppressive attitude, the feudal system, the hierarchy of casteism, the superiority of the Brahmins and the Nairs, the oppressive and abnoxious taxes drove the people to the verge of slavery. But they had neither a powerful instrument nor a powerful leader to lead them. Hence, they were looking for a saviour to deliver them from these evils. The people lost their confidence in the sovereign. When the sovereigns and his officials failed to safeguard the interest of the people, the people out of frustration and disappointment over the question of social identity wanted to fight against it. When they looked for a saviour, it came in the form of Christianity. Eventhough Baghavan Muthukutty Swami and Sri

⁹⁶ Rajayyan, K., *History of Tamilnadu 1565-1982*, Madurai, 1972, pp.282-283.

Narayana Guru fought for the people. Their work created social awareness that too was limited to certain areas. But it was Protestant Mission especially, the London Missionary Society that created social awakening and led the people to fight for their social identity.