CHAPTER II

SOCIAL REFORMERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

The later half of the 19th and early half of the 20th centuries witnessed the beginning of powerful social reform movements in South Travancore. The fight against caste disabilities and inequalities which prevailed in South Travancore was waged by enlightened reformers like Vaikunda Swamigal, Sri. Naraya Guru, Chatambi Swamigal and Ayyankali. They condemned the social evils like untouchability, unseability and unapproachability which deeprooted in Travancore Society. They considered these evils as inhuman and ungodly. They devoted their entire time for the propaganda against these social evils in the whole of Travancore. They revolted against Brahmin ascendancy and campaigned for the mitigation of the rigours of caste. Even though their reform movements met with strong opposition from the caste Hindus, they did not flinch back from awakening the people against the social evils. Their active propaganda bore fruit in South Travancore.
2.1. Vaikunda Swamigal

Vaikunda Swamigal was born in 1808 A.D. at Swamithoppu seven kilometers north west of Kanyakumari. He was born in a Nadar family. His father was Ponnumadan and mother was Veyilal. Ponnumadan was a palmyrah climber by profession.\(^1\) From his birth the boy showed some extraordinary talents and they noticed some spiritual essences in the new born baby.\(^2\) As staunch devotees of Vishnu, Ponnumadan and his family did not like the large scale conversion of the Hindus to Christianity. Seeing the pitiable condition of the Nadars and the low caste, they wanted to change that and believed that God will incarnate in this world to destruct the evils and protect the good.

As the face of the baby was radiant with a spiritual glow the people believed that this boy was an incarnation of God. They thought that their sorrows and tears will come to an end through this baby. Seeing the majestic appearance, they named the child as Mudi Sudum Perumal. As this denoted a ruler, the high caste Hindus objected to it and brought it to the notice of the government. Therefore, the government issued an order immediately to change the name of the boy in accordance with the caste rules. In compliance

\(^1\) Umithanu, E., Kasi Udayam, P., \textit{Bhagavan Vaikunda Swamigal Varalaru}, (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1966, p.37.

\(^2\) Bala Rama Chandra Nadar (ed), \textit{Ahila Thirattu Ammanai}, Samithoppu, p.189 (Herein after abbreviated as Ahilam).
with the orders of the government, his name was changed as Muthukutti.\textsuperscript{3}

This arrogant and dictatorial policy of the government and the attitude of the caste Hindus hurt the feelings of Muthukutti which created a feeling of revenge in his mind.

As there was no regular school, Muthukutti studied the \textit{puranas}, and literatures of various faiths and moral works with the help of the learned men of his village. \textit{Thirukural} inspired him about equality and the art of good government. \textit{Harichandrapurana} instilled in him the power of Truth.\textsuperscript{4}

Some incidents which took place in house and society helped to rouse the revolutionary mind in the boy from his early childhood. While he was four years old, a tax collector Veerapathran Pillai from Agastheeswaram district came to collect the tax. He asked the local tax collector to pay 1122 panams for different taxes. The local tax collector requested him to collect the tax in instalment. The ferocious tax collector became angry and hurt the ear of the local tax collector by using the fire locks. The painful situation really hurt the mind of Muthukutti.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{3} Umithanu, E., Kasi Udayam, P., \textit{op.cit.}, pp.41-46.
\item \textsuperscript{4} John A. Jacob, \textit{Then Thiruvithankoor London Missionary Sanga Charitram} (Tamil) 1806-1856, Nagercoil, 1956, p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Darwin, \textit{Munnetam}, Trivandrum, March 2006, p.9.
\end{itemize}
Like his parents, Muthukutti was a great Vishnu Bhakta. He learnt the devotional songs of Vishnu and conducted daily poojas in his house. But he disliked the people who made sacrifices. Love for livestock was in his blood because he worked as a cowherd in his early days. He adopted the principle of work to live. He was very kind and capacious to the poor people. He treated the poverty stricken people and the afflicted with milk of a human kindness. He believed in Dharma and allotted a part of his earnings to feed the poor. He hated the oppressive treatment of the backward people by the high castes in connivance with the Government officials and condemned oppressive taxes like talavari, velaiapadivu, karailykanam, ezhutholai vari and other kinds of poll taxes that were extracted from the people by adopting coercive methods. As a first step, he wanted to visit Tiruchendur and that was the turning point in his life.

On March 2, 1833, during the Masi Thiruvizha, Muthukutti and his family went for holy dip in the sea. But to the great dismay of his relatives, Muthukutti was found missing. On the third day, he rose from the sea and

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6 Ahilam, p.159.
8 Ahilam, p.189.
9 Ibid., p.190.
10 Agur, C.M., Church History of Travancore, Madras, 1903, pp.585-586.
said, “now I am not your son, but the son of Lord Narayana.”¹¹ He told the people who assembled there that Narayana has given rebirth to him as Vaikundar and deputed him to the Dakshina or South for the betterment of the depressed people and to relieve them from oppression.¹²

Muthukutti emphasized a pure and independent life among the Nadars. He strongly criticized the prevailing Hindu social order and the activities of the Nampoodiries. He was very severe in his criticism on the mismanagement and misuse of temple money.¹³ He requested the people to give up the evil practices in their worship.¹⁴ His preaching against the prevailing religious order brought out considerable change in the attitude of the low caste people.

Muthukkutti then returned to his native place and performed a number of miracles on his return journey.¹⁵ The low caste people anxiously welcomed Muthukutti and considered him as their leader whereas the high caste Hindus opposed him and tried to forbid him from entering into their villages. In several places, he was attacked by the caste Hindus and the Muslims. In a particular village, the caste Hindus attacked him because he had washed his

¹¹ Bala Rama Chandran, T., op.cit., p.21
¹² Ahilam, p.218.
¹³ Ibid., pp.226-227.
¹⁴ Ibid., pp.222-223.
¹⁵ Arul Nul, pp.21-22.
legs in the pond that was exclusively for the use of caste Hindus. In another village, Muslims threw stones on him because he came through their street. Bhagavan Muthukutti Swamigal advised his followers to give up all the religious ceremonies which were commonly practiced in the temples.

In 1833 A.D., Swamigal started meditation at Poovandarthoppu. For the first two years, he meditated in a six feet hallow pit called Yoga dapa. During this period, he took only liquid food and fruits. For the next two years, he strived hard and meditated for the abolition of caste system. The caste Hindus disliked his meditation and attempted to disrupt the penance and to dispel the popularity of Muthukkutti. However Muthukkutti Swamigal completed his four years penance without minding the opposition. He welcomed all the lower caste people who thronged to his place. As a result, thousands of lower caste people came from all over south and neighbouring places and represented their grievances to Muthukkutti who continued to console them. Consequently, they worshipped him as the real incarnation of Lord Narayana and called him as Vaikunda Swamigal.

16 Arul Nul, p.22.
17 Ahilam, p.21.
18 Ibid., p.238.
20 Ahilam, p.239.
21 Ibid., pp.239-240.
Vaikunda Swamigal heard the grievances of the people and helped them in all possible ways. By his miraculous power, he cured their diseases and advised them the ways to lead a healthy life. He cured the different diseases like mental disorders and other afflictions like blindness, deafness, paralysis and skin diseases.\(^{22}\) The ability of Swamigal seems to have been so powerful that he was able to heal by giving holy soil and water.\(^{23}\)

His act of healing attracted thousands of people all over the South. People brought their sickfolk to him and prayed for their recovery. In his preachings he emphasized Charity, Truth, Love and Self respect among the people.\(^{24}\) Vaikundar vehemently attacked Swathi Tirunal (1829 – 1847), the Raja of Travancore for his negligence to introduce welfare of the poor low caste people. He called Travancore king as Ananthapuri Neechan and cursed Brahmins as Karineechannar (Black cheater). He condemned British people as Venneechan (White cheater).\(^{25}\) He wanted the expulsion of the reigning Raja. The speeches of Vaikundar against the Raja earned the enmity of the high caste people and the Government.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{22}\) Ahilam, p.240.  
\(^{23}\) Ibid, p. 2.  
\(^{24}\) Ibid., pp.201-209.  
\(^{26}\) Ahilam, pp.119 and 178.
Jealousy over the popularity of this saviour, the caste Hindus organized a plot to kill Vaikunda Swamigal by giving poisonous food, but he escaped from the plot through his miraculous power. Then, they petitioned before Swathi Tirunal. The king heard their grievances and arranged for an enquiry at the Suchindram Temple Mandabam. The caste Hindus reported all the activities of Vaikunda Swamigal and requested his immediate arrest and suppression of his new movement.

The Raja who heard the petition sent his army to Poovandarthoppu to arrest Vaikunda Swamigal. When the army reached Poovandarthoppu, the followers of Vaikunda Swamigal gathered in large numbers, opposed his arrest and prepared for a open fight. But Vaikundar appealed them to remain patient. The soldiers arrested him and severely beaten him. On this attack, those who hated Vaikunda Swamigal abused him by using filthy words and humiliated him to the maximum.

But nothing could dither him. The Raja understood that there was a divine power in him. Hence, he wanted to test the divine power in him. He asked several questions to Vaikundar. “If you are a swami, tell what is in my

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27 Arul Nul, p.37.
28 Ibid., p.258.
29 Ibid., p.263.
hand?” But Vaikundar refused to answer any of his questions. The Raja suspected the divine power and ordered to imprison Vaikunda Swamigal.

During his imprisonment too, large number of devotees rushed to Trivandrum. Even at this critical juncture, Vaikunda Swamigal continued his work of preaching and healing. Crowds of people gathered there spent their days with Vaikundar and worshipped him as their God. Even in his imprisonment, Vaikunda Swamigal was subjected to several inhuman treatments by the government officials and the Maharaja. He was put inside a lime-kiln, in the cage of hyena and also amidst fire. But Vaikundar escaped from all these tortures unhurt. At last the Raja decided to release Vaikunda Swamigal on the condition that he should entertain only the members of his own community. But he refused to make any declaration and he tore the royal order into pieces. The Raja finally ordered the release of Vikunda Swamigal on the first week of March 1839, after an imprisonment of hundred and ten days. Amidst rejoicing his followers took him to Nanchlinadu in a great procession. Vaikunda Swamigal then continued his reform activities and sent his people to penance and trained them about their mode of a new independent

30 Arul Nul, p. 267.
31 Ibid., p. 269.
32 Ibid., pp. 24-25.
33 Ibid., p. 274.
life that Dharma Yuga must come shortly.\textsuperscript{34} His idea of the reign of *Dharma Yuga* made him a great humanist.

The religious reforms of Vaikunda Swamigal were closely linked with his social reform movement. The reason is that, in the early part of the nineteenth century, social reform was linked firmly with religious change\textsuperscript{35} with the coming of Vaikunda Swamigal, a new sect of Hinduism has appeared in the religious history of Travancore.\textsuperscript{36}

As religion is interlinked with the society Vaikunda Swami realized that the only solution to change society is to reform the religion. So he decided to start his reform activities from the religious activities itself.

As the first step of his religious reform movement, Vaikunda Swamigal raised his voice against the Brahmin’s temples. Immediately after his revelation at Tiruchendur, he preached against the Muruga temple of that town and openly criticized the Nampoodiries. He directed his people to abandon all their religious ceremonies in connection with this temple.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Arul Nul, p.146.
\textsuperscript{35} Wadia, A.R., *History and Philosophy of social work in India*, Bombay, 1961, p.34.
\textsuperscript{37} Ahilam, pp.222-223.
He criticized the meaningless rituals, elaborate rites and expensive ceremonies. He prevented his people to offer *kanikkai,*\(^{38}\) to carry *kavadi*\(^{39}\) and frankincense and fruits. He also attacked and condemned all other modes of worship. He also criticized and condemned the institution of *Devadasi* that was in practice in the temple Vaikunda Swamigal attacked all the rituals in the Padmanabha Swami Temple.\(^{40}\)

Like other reform movements of India in the nineteenth century, Vaikunda Swami condemned idol worship. On the eve of his movement, the lower caste people worshipped their gods in the form of idols or images. Since they had no temples for their worship, the idols were white washed and placed on roadside.\(^{41}\) He considered this kind of worship as an uncivilized barbaric custom and hence strictly prohibited his people to worship the images.

Moreover, Vaikunda Swamigal condemned animal sacrifice. But unlike others, he simplified his doctrine against the animal sacrifice. As it was a period of superstitions, the people believed in animal sacrifices to ward off

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\(^{38}\) *Kanikkai*: means offerings either in cash or in kind.

\(^{39}\) *Kavadi* - kind of Semi circular wooden device decorated with peacock feather sometimes they carry gifts to gods.

\(^{40}\) *Ahilam*, pp.222-227

evil effects of the gods.\textsuperscript{42} Vaikundar noticed the religious customs such as animal sacrifices and sprinkling of blood during worship. He considered these evils as uncivilized. So he appealed his followers to give up this form of worship.\textsuperscript{43} In consequence his followers strictly adopted the principle of Vaikunda Swamigal and gave up the animal sacrifices in course of time.

Vaikunda Swamigal also waged a systematic war against devil-worship. The Nadars like other lower castes had numerous devil temples or pey-kovils.\textsuperscript{44} Their staunch belief in the evil forces made their life very miserable. They believed that the diseases are caused due to the wrath of the demons. Hence to appease the gods and to escape from the wrath of their god, they made profuse offerings.\textsuperscript{45} Vaikundar attempted to free the people from the clutches of the demon gods influence of the evil spirits. He declared that he had burnt all the devils with the power he possessed and thus instilled confidence in their mind.\textsuperscript{46}

Vaikunda Swamigal assumed the status of Ayya (Father) to all his followers. His followers are generally called Ayya Vazhi Makkal. They affirmed that the worship of Vaikundar is really a worship of the Supreme

\textsuperscript{42} Dalton, W.H., \textit{op.cit.}, p.97.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ahilam}, p.198.
\textsuperscript{44} Dalton, W.H., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{45} Samuel Mateer, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 213-214.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ahilam}, p. 247.
Being The low caste people satisfied with the worship of their Ayya and felt that there is no necessity to worship in the Brahminical Temples which were completely under the grip of high castes. To maintain respect, he advocated to wear turban on their heads which was usually worn around their waist to show reverence to the high caste.

Vaikunda Swamigal gave equal importance to the economic life of the people. He was of the opinion that the working class should be given reasonable payment for their labour. He directed the people to work for the payment that they receive. He vehemently condemned the oppressive and obnoxious taxation. He asked the Raja of Travancore to abolish all the obnoxious feudal levies like the oozhiyam and viruthi. He advised his community people to give up the extravagant religious rituals and ceremonies.

The social reform movement of Vaikunda Swamigal gained wide spread popularity among the low caste especially among the Nadars. His principles of casteless society, unity of all people are strictly followed by the Nadar community that echoed among the people of other lower order. The

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48 Arul Nul, p.52.
49 Ahilam, p.116.
50 Ibid., p.25.
social order of the Hindu Society underwent far reaching changes due to the influence of Ayya Vaikunda Swamigal. It ushered a critical spirit in the minds of the oppressed class. The Nizhal Thankal that Vaikunda Swamigal infused social consciousness among the Nadars. Vaikunda Swamigal became a source of inspiration for the low caste people to fight for their rights and privileges. This enabled the oppressed class to launch their fight for equal rights in the mode of their dress and worship. He also induced Sri Narayana Guru to launch a reform movement to relieve the Ezhavas from the oppression of the high caste people.

2.2. Sri Narayana Guru

Sri Narayana Guru is one of the greatest reformers of modern India. He was born in 1854 in a family of peasants of the Ezhava community at Chempalanthi in Trivandrum District, which was then a bilingual area where Tamil and Malayalee cultures met. Madan Asan, his father was a cultivator as well as scholar in astronomy and medicine. His mother was Kuttu. In accordance to the local practice which was not common, Madan Asan married two women. By one wife Narayanan and three daughters were born. The other wife had three sons and one daughter, Narayanan was locally called as Nanu. Like Muthukutti Swamigal, he too revolted against Brahmin ascendancy and

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campaigned for the mitigation of the rigorous of caste. He was an exponent of
the principle of equality of men and an opponent of the inequalities in religion
and society. He rendered manifold services to promote the welfare of the
backward and downtrodden people.\textsuperscript{52}

During his young age Nanu was not only naughty but also active. He
used to eat away the fruits and sweets kept as offerings to gods. He was
curious and inquisitive. Nanu displayed eagerness to observe and learn. From
a village teacher by name Mutta Pillai, he learned to read and write
Malayalam. Then he studied Sanskrit and principles of medicine from his
uncle Krishna Vaidyan. He had further education under Raman Pillai of
Karungapalli. He was dedicated in the study of \textit{Thirukkural}, \textit{Tholkappiyam},
\textit{Manimekalai}, \textit{Silappatikaram} and \textit{Thiruvasakam}.

At the age of thirty, Nanu left his home, informing nobody but after
keeping a letter together with a gift of cloth for one of his friends, he walked
southward to Maruthuvalmalai situated on the southern ranges of the Western
Ghats near Suchindram and entered into a cave to perform tapas. When he had
no food, he came out of the cave but could get nothing. At that time, an aged
leper offered him a share of his food to him. He welcomed it and both of them
ate the food. It is believed that as soon as they finished the lunch the old man

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid.}, p.43.
vanished. Subsequently, he spent his whole life for promoting the welfare of the people. Narayana Guru began his public activity as a rebel against the Brahminical tradition. The right to install idols, and to perform poojas in temples were the monopoly of Brahmins but Narayana Guru opposed the same. After bath and prayer, he took a stone of the shape of Sivalinga from the bed of the river Neyyar and installed it for worship at Aruvipuram near Neyyatinkara. After wards, he moved from place to place and established more than sixty temples. He declared the brotherhood of man and equality of all before God. Thus, he augmented the social revivalism.

This bold act of Narayana Guru, upset the Brahmins who dominated the consecration of temples and other connected ceremonies. They questioned the propriety of Narayana Guru to consecrate a temple. But Guru boldly repeated that he did not consecrate Brahmin Siva, but an Ezhava Siva. This reply attracted the Ezhavas and they considered him as their leader and became his followers. The Ezhavas themselves officiated as priests in the temples founded by him. On the walls of the temple, he inscribed the following principles.

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Devoid of dividing walls of caste or rave
Or hatred of rival faith,
We all live here in Brotherhood
Such, know this place to be!
This, Model Foundation.57

Sri Narayana Guru associated himself with the untouchables and intermingled with them. He also took a few low caste boys to his Ashram at Varkala and cultured them to adopt his principles with regard to caste. Narayana Guru instructed the students of his institutions not to ask any one of his caste or reveal to anyone his or her own caste.58 He also campaigned against the observance of certain practices such as Talikettukalyanam, Tirandukuli among the Ezhavas and achieved a large measure of success in persuading them to give up these practices.59 He believed that casteism was the main obstacle in the way of social, economic and political emancipation not only in Travancore but the whole of India.

He firmly believed that it is the rule of Dharma and not the law of Varna that make the lives of the people happy. He considered Varna

mischievous and mystery interpolation in the scheme of Dharma of which a Vedantin cannot find any true trace in the universal philosophical structure of the Hindus. He sought to move this outer layer of meaningless Varnas and expose the right inner substance of the Dharma. Thus, he established the fact that belief in Varna and Jati only negated the fundamental doctrine of nonduality, thereby fostering elements that destroyed the unity and integration of human race. There is no place for decisiveness and distinction between man and man in the basic method and theory of the Advita Vedanta which affirms “That Thou Art” (tatva masi).

Any theory or practice based on the negation of this fundamental Dharma is viewed as against itself. So Guru repudiated the relevance of Varna in the life of an individual and proved that it was an irrational absurdity of a pseudo – science by selfish philosophers. The ‘authors of caste may say that it will prevent unhealthy competition. Those who get all the benefits of the system may say so. Probably their happiness is built in the sufferings of others. Man is not made for castes, for the world or any such thing, and all these are for men. If men are degenerating, what is the good of talking about competition and so forth. Caste degenerates man and it is not wanted. There is

\[61\] Ibid.
no caste; it is foolishness to think that there is.\textsuperscript{62} And emphasizing the fundamental oneness and equality of mankind he declared. ‘One Caste, one Religion, one God for man’.\textsuperscript{63} He was concerned about man, rather than religion: His conviction was that religion is for man and not man for religion. One of his famous statements runs as follows: ‘Whatever be the religion it is enough if the man is improved’.\textsuperscript{64}

On 7 January 1904, Sri Narayana Guru, Dr. Palpu and poet Kumaran Asan, jointly invited many leaders of the Ezhava caste to attend a meeting at Trivandrum to discuss the idea of forming an organization to uplift the Ezhava community under the spiritual and social leadership of Sri Narayana Guru. This meeting decided to form an organization for the propagation of the ethics of Sree Narayana Guru, and he was made as its life President and Kumaran Asan its secretary.\textsuperscript{65} Thus the organization ‘Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam’ (S.N.D.P.) was established on May 15, 1903. It’s first annual session was held at Aruvipuram in 1904 under the guidance of Sri Narayana Guru. The basic aim of the Yogam was to popularize the message of Sri Narayana Guru and bring about the social and spiritual regeneration of the Ezhavas and

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, p.226.
\textsuperscript{64} Kesavan Vaidyar, C.R., \textit{Sree Narayana Chinthakal} (Malayalam), Kottayam, 1972, p.73.
\textsuperscript{65} Sreedhara Menon, A., \textit{Kerala History and its Makers.}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.226.
other backward communities. The S.N.D.P. attracted the untouchables of Kerala with its socio-religious programmes and united them.66

In one of his famous messages Narayana Guru wrote ‘... Though the religion, dress, language, etc. are different, as all belong to the same caste (mankind), there is no harm in intermarrying and interlinking’.67 He expressed the solidarity and equality of mankind in the following words. Animals of the same caste alone procreate, viewed thus all humanity belong to one caste. This realization of Narayana Guru brought him the resin of a universal brotherhood of all.68

He further wrote that both the Brahmins and the Parayas are born of the same caste of mankind. He pointed out that there is nothing particularly holy in the Brahminhood. Even in the Hindu tradition, men born of lower castes had reached unquestionable religious excellence. One of the great Hindu Sages, Parasra was the son of a Paraya. Narayana Guru annotated this as follows.

In bygone days, of a Paraya woman

The great Sage Parasara was born

And even a revealer of Veda was born of a
Virgin of the fisher-folk.

Narayana Guru showed that caste distinction had no relation to the abilities of man; any one can rise to any position of excellence by his own abilities. He asserted that the foundation of caste are unstable even in the Hindu Vedas. Distinctions of caste should be discarded, as they prevent the taking up of vocations or professions according to one’s own aptitude and abilities.

One of the practical excellence in his teaching was that he advised the Ezhavas to be friendly with the people of all castes irrespective of any caste distinction, especially with the Pulayas. He taught that the relationship of the Ezhavas to the people of the castes lower than them should be an example to the people of higher castes. He showed much friendliness to the Pulayas and he instructed the Ezhavas to open schools and Temples to the Pulayas. 69

Narayana Guru was of the firm opinion that education and trade were essential for the mental and material wellbeing of the Ezhavas. He informed the people that emancipation was possible through education. From the beginning of his public career, he paid much attention to educational work. In 1917, in a message he said.

69 Nataraja Guru, op.cit., p.17.
“Do not encourage the construction of Temples. If it is necessary to build small Temples, schools should be the important Temples. People should show much interest in raising money from the people and putting up schools. Attempts should be made to educate the people and that is the medicine for their betterment”. ⁷⁰

He sought external help for the education of the people. He even asked the Pulayas to collect money from among themselves and with that money to educate their children. ⁷¹

Narayana Guru realized that the distinctions of caste and untouchability were serious stumbling blocks to the progress of man. According to his philosophical understanding all are equal before the supreme being.

He had the vision of a casteless society in which all are equals. The idea of ‘equality’ had been popularized in India through western education, and through the spread of western thoughts, even though most of the people from the West maintained their racial superiority in their relationship with the people of India, the idea of equality, writes Nataraja Guru, the well known disciples of Naryana Guru, is perhaps the greatest single contribution brought by western culture to the east, where the stress is on the individual and the

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⁷⁰ Balakrishnan, P.K., Narayana Guru, Kottayam, 1969, p. 76.
⁷¹ KesavanVadiyar, op.cit., p.119.
subjective and yield its full benefit and had turned tonic to life.\textsuperscript{72} Narayana Guru accepted this idea of equality and presented it to the people in a religious and philosophical setting which was truly Indian in every respect.

Narayana Guru attacked ‘Sanatana’ Hinduism for the segregation it created among the people, thus causing many evils in society. He said, ‘Even at the time of Sri Rama, the most ideal king and the incarnation of God, ‘Sanyasam (Priesthood) was forbidden for the Sudras and for similar castes\textsuperscript{73}.

Thus Sri Narayana Guru set in motion a radical socio-religious reform movement. Throughout Kerala, from one end to the other, he built and consecrated scores of grand Temples of Sanskrit deities for lower castes and encouraged others to do so. Moreover, he established \textit{Vedic Patasalas} and invited Pulayas and other depressed classes to join in worship and study. Even though Ezhavas were highly caste conscious, they did not demur at the Guru’s radical innovation. In his Mutts, he admitted all castes and creeds. Even he employed Pulayas as cooks. This was not a half-hearted tinsel reform introduced as a measure of social expediency; its permanency and seriousness permeated the whole life pattern of Kerala. But, unfortunately other provinces and states in India did not care to look at this welcome radical mass movement and imbibe its sprit. As a result of this movement, morally and materially

\textsuperscript{72} Nataraja Guru, \textit{op.cit.}, p.275.
\textsuperscript{73} Balakrishnan, P.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p.163.
Ezhavas became a force to be reckoned with. At the turn of the century, they were a weak community as a suckling swallow; but by 1920, their voice in the political, social and economic fields was something unequalled in Kerala by any other single community.\textsuperscript{74} As they were now ripe for receiving social and political equality, the feeble flutter was still heard in the devotees of the Malabar society. But the major portions of the orthodox section had changed their attitude and approach to social problems and admitted in their thought revolutionary ideas against distance pollution and untouchability. This was the result of the work done by Sri Narayana Guru.

The idealistic and pragmatic philosophy was put to practical use by Sri Narayana Guru for the uplift of millions of downtrodden people of Kerala. As Roman Roland said, ‘He preached if one may say so, a \textit{jnana} of action, a great intellectual religion, having a lively sense of the people and their social needs. It has greatly contributed to the uplifting of the oppressed classes in Southern India and its activities have in a measure allied to those of Gandhi’.\textsuperscript{75} Untouchability, unseeability and unapproachability had become things of the past. Today caste distinctions are less pronounced and inter-caste marriages are general in Kerala when compared to other States.

Through the work of Sri Narayana Guru, the untouchables have entered

\textsuperscript{74} S.N.D.P. \textit{Yogam Golden Jubilee Special}, 1953, p.27.

\textsuperscript{75} Quoted in Krishna Chaitanya, \textit{Kerala}, National Book Trust, India, 1972, p.54.
upon a new age, and made a discovery of their own personality. An unprecedented sense of self respect made them proud people and in the later politics of Kerala they were destined to play a major role. A wave of reforming activity surged over the land at the beginning of this century as a result of the teachings and social works of Sri Narayana Guru. Thus he augmented the Depressed class Movement among the Ezhavas. The effect of Sri Narayana Guru was felt in South Travancore that encouraged the people to fight for their right.

2.3. Chattampi Swamigal

Like Sri Narayana Guru, another social reformer who worked for the abolition of untouchability in Kerala was Chattampi Swamigal. He was born on August 25, 1853 in a Nair family at Kannammula in the outskirts of Trivandrum. Though he did not have much of a formal education; he was endowed with an intellect of high caliber. At the age of 24, he undertook an extensive tour of south India. In the course of which he established contacts with many religious saints of repute and got opportunities of acquiring mastery of Hindu theological literature as well. In his late twenties, he returned to Trivandrum and plunged into religious activities aimed at the eradication of social evils like untouchability.

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His learned discourses as well as works on religion, philosophy and the brotherhood of man, soon won for him a wide circle of disciples. By identifying himself with the aspirations and problems of the common people in his speeches, writings and social activities, Chattampi Swamigal gave the reform movement in Kerala an intellectual appeal, a social basis and a practical turn.

Chattampi Swamigal had a liberal social outlook. He wielded his pen as an instrument of social change. He believed that early society was based on the principles of social freedom and equality and that Chaturvarnya was introduced by the Brahmins in order to further their own self-interest. By projecting the picture of an original casteless society in ancient Kerala and of they have wrought in it by the introduction of Chaturvarnya, Chattampi Swamikal kindled social awareness among the people and gave an impetus to the social-religious reform movement in Kerala.

He always expressed his profound faith in the philosophy of Ahimsa and non-violence. He denounced the primitive custom of animal sacrifice observed in Temples as barbarous and inhuman and thus set the pace for its isolation in Temples owned by the Devaswom Department in Travancore during the Regency of Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931).

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78 Bhaskara Pillai, K., *op.cit*, p.141.
In his religious work ‘Vedadhikaranirupanam’, Swamigal shattered the myth of Brahmins right to the monopoly of Vedic learning and asserts the right of every Hindu, irrespective of caste, have free access to the treasures of the Vedic lore.\textsuperscript{79} His another work ‘Sarvamatasamarasyam’ gives the gist of the truths common to all faith and emphasizes the fundamental unity of religion.\textsuperscript{80}

He worked in close co-operation with Sri Narayana Guru in the common cause of Hindu social and religious regeneration. His death on 1924 was a great loss to the cause of social reform movements in the whole of Travancore.

2.4. Ayyankali

Another noted social reformer of modern times in the cause of eradication of untouchability in Travancore was Ayyankali. He was born on 28 August 1863\textsuperscript{81} into a Pulaya family at Venganoor near Trivandrum as the eldest son of Ayyan and Mala. Being a member of a Pulaya Hindu family, there was no possibility for him to go to a school and possibility of receiving education was remote.

\textsuperscript{79} Chattampi Swamikal, \textit{Vedadhikaranirupanam} (Malayalam), pp.23-25.
\textsuperscript{80} Sreedhara Menon, A., \textit{Social and Cultural History of Kerala, op.cit.}, p.225.
\textsuperscript{81} There are doubt the year of his birth. His biographers generally consider 1883 as the year of his birth. (Chentharasseri, T.H.P., Ayyankali, Trivandrum, 1979, p.42). Some others think that he was born in 1980, Asokan Ayyan Kali, \textit{Malayala Manorama}, Sunday Supplement, November 9, 1980).
Ayyankali became extremely conscious of the low social and economic condition of the Pulayas and the bondage enforced upon them by the higher castes and therefore he fought for the emancipation of his people. His first attempt at asserting his rights and freedom was when he bought a bullock-cart which was then a ‘Luxury’ for the Pulayas. The higher caste neighbours were jealous and annoyed at him for buying a bullock cart.\(^82\)

During this time, Sadananda Swami came to Trivandrum from Cochin. He made an attempt to organize the Nairs to prevent the conversion of the low castes to Christianity in Trivandrum. But his attempt was a total failure. Due to the lack of co-operation from the Nairs for his cause, and they even subjected him to bitter criticism. He then came into contact with Ayyankali, and formed a branch of his organization, ‘Brahma Nishta Matam Chitsabha’ for Ayyan Kali and his people.\(^83\) Through this organization Sadananda Swami and Ayyan Kali tried to bring the pitiable condition of the Pulayas towards the attention of the Maharaja. But they miserably failed to secure any significant advantages.

The first attempt of Ayyan Kali was to assert the right of using public roads for himself and his people who were denied this right for a long time. Moreover, those who remained as Hindus lacked a leader who could organize


\(^{83}\) Bhaskara Pillai, K., *op.cit.*, p.76.
them to claim this right. When Ayyan Kali with his well-trained young men attempted to claim this right on their way to a weekly market, they had to face violent opposition from the high castes. Ayyan Kali and his men forced their way, causing injuries to both groups. This induced the Pulayas in many other places also to claim and enjoy this right. Similar incidents gradually made Ayyan Kali a popular leader of the Pulayas.

In 1907, Ayyan Kali formed an organization by name ‘Sadhu Paripalana Sangham’. The main objective of this was the socio-economic emancipation of the Pulayas. The high caste people especially the Nairs looked down upon with contempt and even gone to the extent of mocking at their organization. At times, when the higher castes used violence against the assertion of social rights by the ‘Sadhu Paripalana Sangham’, Ayyankali and his followers retaliated violence with violence. This in fact was a significant change in the history of the emancipation of the lower castes in Travancore. Subsequently it spread to the other parts like Cochin and Malabar.

The Travancore Government began to nominate representatives to the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly from the low castes in 1907. As a result in 1907 N. Kumaran Asan was nominated as a representative from S.N.D.P. Yogam,

84 Chentharasseri, T.H.P., op.cit., p.60.
the Ezhava organization started by Narayana Guru. During the Dewanship of P. Rajagopalachari, unrepresented low castes were given representation. In 1908 it was reported that ‘the Dewan with the consent of the Maharaja granted permission to the much despised Pariah class to send one representative to the Popular Assembly as a nominee of the Government.

In 1910 a representative for the Pulayas was appointed in the Assembly. The representative was P.K. Govinda Pillai, who belonged to the Nair caste. He pleaded for the cause of the Pulayas very strongly. In accordance with his proposal, a representative was nominated from the Pulaya caste in 1911, and thus from 1912 Ayyan Kali, as Secretary of the ‘Sadhu Paripalana Sangham’ represented his community in the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. He continued to be a nominated member for the next 28 years. In the Assembly he argued for the welfare of his community and put forth their demands. His main concerns were providing education, employment and land.

Ayyankali fully realized the importance of education for the social advancement of his people. As a first step, he opened a school for the Pulayas

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88 The west coasts spectator, Calicut dated October 21, 1908.
89 Chentharasseri, T.H.P., op.cit., p.78.
90 Proceedings of the Sri Mulam popular Assembly, 1912, p.82.
at Venganoor in 1904.91 The Government legislation of 1904 entitled him to total reimbursement of the costs incurred for the school for the Pulayas from the Government. Despite, the poor pulayas would not sent their children to school. Because their children also had to work as coolies with their parents for their daily bread. Very few Pulaya families came forward to educate their children. Hence the school started for the Pulayas did not function properly and it was closed down soon.

In the midst of the diversity the Pulaya children who were ready to go to schools were not given admission even in the schools run by the Government. Therefore, Ayyankali instigated the Pulayas of his area to refuse to work for the Nair landlords until they permitted the Pulaya children to enter those schools for which the Government had already granted permission. In spite of poverty and hunger, many Pulayas of his area refused to work for the Nair landlords. This ‘Strike’ went on for a year and finally the Nairs agreed to give permission for the Pulaya children to attend schools for which the Government had granted permission.92 However, it seems that due to this agitation the permission gained to enter schools was limited to his own area.

In his very first address in the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, Ayyan Kali pointed out that ‘only in seven schools in South Travancore, admission

was granted to the Pulayas and so he urged the desirability of throwing open all the Circar schools in the State to his people’. However, the schools which were situated very near the Temple were exempted from this rule. But in many places the ‘backward classes’ preferred only the Mission schools. However, in putting the Government order into practice, there were difficulties and in many places the Government had to open separate schools for the ‘backward classes’. During this time, Ayyan Kali led movements to admit the children of Pulayas into Government schools.

Ayyankali presented this problem in the Assembly of 1914 as follows: “the authorities in some of the schools would not admit them inspite of the orders, for some frivolous reason. In places where admission was once given to pulaya boys there was no trouble whatsoever for the future . . . some of the teachers of certain schools were at the bottom of the mischief, and not the people”.

In his address in the Assembly of 1915 Ayyankali acknowledged the help and sympathy of the Government in the matter of education for the Pulayas. He requested the Government to institute scholarships for the Pulaya students. He submitted that the half-fee concession granted by the government

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93 Proceedings of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. 1912, p.82.
95 Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1914, p.58.
to the Pulayas in classes above the grade of primary had not benefited them because the Pulayas were too poor to pay the other half. As a result, there were only 30 Hindu Pulaya boys and one girl making use of the half-fee concession. So he pleaded that full-fee concession should be granted to the Pulayas in all the classes. He also wanted to remove all the hurdles in getting admission for girls in schools.  

In 1920, Ayyan Kali requested that the Government Vernacular education till class IV should be compulsory so far as their community was concerned.... He again proposed ‘the system of education should include manual work and some technical knowledge which would enable them to earn a living’. He also requested ‘scholarship might be given to all the Pulaya boys and girls who were studying in the schools and that full-fee concession be granted to them. He further requested that industrial schools might be opened for the Pulayas.

In spite of the concern and concessions of the Government, the percentage of education among the Pulayas was very low. In 1922, Ayyan Kali informed the popular Assembly about the low level of education of the

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98 Ibid.
Hindu section of the Pulaya caste. Not a single pupil of the community had been able to study up to the English School Leaving Certificate examination. According to the Administrative Report of 1921, the Pulayas of this country numbered about three lakhs; but the number of those who attend schools was only 12,381 and of this, the number attending classes above the 5th was only 136.

In 1922 he repeated his request that full fee concession might be granted to the Pulaya community. He also raised a new demand to sanction meals to the Pulaya students at the expense of the Government. ¹⁰⁰

In 1924, the Pulaya representatives in the Assembly agreed that as the converts to Christianity are helped by the state to keep them within the religious fold of Hinduism. This plea attracted the attention of the Travancore Government and the Government immediately introduced a revised rule regarding the full fee concession to the Pulayas and half-fee concessions to the ‘backward classes’ with effect from the academic year 1924-25. Accordingly the students of Pulaya community were granted full fee concession.

In 1927, replying to the requests of Ayyan Kali to provide noon-meals for Pulaya students, the Dewan said, “But now he (The Director of Public Instruction) thinks it will be possible to accept your suggestion and give the money over to the Headmaster of each school to provide each Pulaya Boy or

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1922, p.163.
girl with one Chakram for rice and one cash for salt. It may not be possible to
give them cooked food”. However, the Government did not introduce the
noon-meal scheme at that time, because of the problems involved in it. The
demand of Ayyankali was that it should be given only to the Hindu Parayas,
which the Government found it difficult to accept in principle. But the
Government agreed to extend financial help if some one else started such a
programme.

Ayyan Kali realized that one of their problems was that most of the
Pulayas did not posses any land and they were only tenants of the landlords.
Therefore, he requested the Government from 1912 to assign lands that are
available. He stressed the importance of this and highlighted the difficulties in
getting land for the Pulayas without Government help. The Government
favourably respected and auctioned 500 acres of land in Vilappil pakuthy for
this purpose.

From 1913 onwards Ayyan Kali requested the Government to speed up
the registration of land to the Pulayas. However, in 1918 the Government
sanctioned 242 acres of ‘Puduval lands’ in some villages to be given to the
Pulayas. But these lands could not be secured for the Pulayas because of
practical problems. In 1920 Ayyan Kali requested that the Government should

101 Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1924, p.211.
103 Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1912, p.82.
assign free lands to the Pulayas throughout the State. Ayyankali and Dewan complained about the difficulties in handling over land to the Pulayas.\textsuperscript{105}

In 1922, Ayyan Kali presented a list of places where land could be made available for the people of his community. The favourable response of the Government to the needs of the Pulaya Hindus encouraged the representatives of the Pulaya Christians\textsuperscript{106} and the Parayahs to make similar demands.\textsuperscript{107} But the Government was in favour of the request of the Pulaya Hindus only.

In 1924, the Dewan deplored the fact that the efforts made in the direction of providing the Pulaya Hindus with house sites ‘have not been productive of much result, and in the opinion of the Government the time has not yet arrived for making the welfare of these classes the definite duty of a responsible office . . .’.\textsuperscript{108} Ayyankali replied that much of the land given to the Pulayas had no water facilities and so he requested that good cultivable land might be given to them.\textsuperscript{109}

Though in 1924, the Dewan suggested the appointment of welfare officer for the untouchables, the suggestion was not implemented. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{105} Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1921, pp.29-30.  
\textsuperscript{106} Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1922, p.175.  
\textsuperscript{107} Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1921, p.126.  
\textsuperscript{108} Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1924, p.17.  
\textsuperscript{109} Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1924, p.38.
in 1927 Ayyan Kali urged the Government to appoint an officer as “The protector of depressed classes’. He said, “The only remedy for removing the evil and for the better working of the rules regarding confessional registry was the appointment of a full-time officer as the protector of depressed classes”.\textsuperscript{110}

The attempts of Ayyan Kali were successful in drawing the attention of the Government to the educational needs of the Pulayas and many other concessions needed for their education. As in the case of many other communities, he also demanded employment opportunities for the Pulayas under the Government.

Thus the social reformers came from time to time as atomic individuals and worked to liberate the oppressed class from the feudal lords and other social evils. They ignited the Depressed class Movement in the whole of Travancore and educated the people to fight for self respect and liberation from oppression.

\textsuperscript{110} Report of the Administration of Travancore, 1924, p.25.