CHAPTER 6
SOCIAL MILIEU

In matters regarding social life and social transformations, at several turning points in the past eventful centuries, Chengannur experienced what Kerala as a whole and Travancore in particular had undergone. The emerged social set up and relations had complexities of diverse caste and community hues which prevail to this day although with different impact. Elements capable of inducing harsh social conflicts were several in the area although the overriding presence was one of harmony and at the same time an inevitable progressing through the path of transformation. This chapter examines social life and relations and the transformation experiences of Chengannur in the larger context of Kerala. The attempt is to bring out the presence and, wherever possible, the arrival of diverse elements in Chengannur and their subsequent roles institutionalized as caste and community organizations. The contributions and attainments of individuals are also recorded. The cultural milieu with respect to some of the important art forms is presented as it is integral to social life. Reference to some religious elements are imperative in this chapter as they, particularly the caste element as part of the religious fold, had profound influence in designing the social fabric.

One major concern of History has been the social and cultural evolution of a region or people. In the case of Kerala this has been dealt with by the historians on the basis of available evidences and indications. On the basis of these evidences and indications inferences and conclusions have been made. As
already indicated this chapter tries to examine the development of social institutions, social relations and cultural practices in the background of Kerala’s social and cultural milieu. Kerala is a museum of races and cultures.\(^1\) Among its people are found pronounced traits of Negritos, Proto-Australoids, Mediterraneans and Nordics. Negritos were the earliest people of the land. They were short and had dark puffy lips, broad nose woolly hair and were food gatherers subsisting on roots, nuts and fruits. The Proto-Australoids were long headed and hairy in face and body, and they imposed themselves on the earlier inhabitants. The two races form the aborigines of South India. Over the ages past they got so mixed up that it is now difficult to distinguish the one from the other. The early inhabitants consisting of the jungle tribes and the Cheruman and the Pulayan of the plains, had attained a high degree of civilization when the Mediterraneans came to the region. At that time the emergence of an agricultural society was slowly taking place. However, still there were people in Kerala who were dependent on forest produce and resources from the sea. The Chera period is considered to be the beginning stage of the agricultural society in Kerala. Poozhinad, Kudanadu and Kuttanad were the ‘nadus’ connected with the Cheras. There are references which tell that the Cheras cleared the forest and started cultivation. The donation of land to poets and bards was part of this phase.

The next stage in the development of habitats of Kerala was the colonizations during the period between 3rd and 8th century A.D. These

colonizations created a set up different from the one which grew in the earlier period. One such colonization took place as part of propagation work by the Buddhist and Jain pilgrims. Stories about Buddhists from Srilanka crossing the sea to Kerala are rampant in places like Mavelikkara, Nilamperur and Kilirur in Central Travancore. There is room for such an inference in the context of the trade relations between Srilanka and West coast of Kerala in those days. After the Sangam era, there was the development of 32 Brahmin villages and a number of Buddhist and Jain centres. The settlers in Kerala were able to clear the bushes in the valleys. They did this with the help of iron equipments far more than ever before. The development of the ‘nadus’ was a result of this. Such new habitats were Vempolinadu, Odanad, Nanthuzhinadu, and Munjanadu, all of which developed south of River Periyar. The suzerainty over the Brahmin villages and the agricultural societies was vested with Naduvazhis (the chief of the nadus). The ‘nadus’ which developed during the period of the later Cheras were quite different from the 32 Brahmin villages in the South Kerala. Many of the Naduvazhis controlled the Western Ghats. Poonjar Kovilakam Naduvazhy and Panthalam Naduvazhy were two major ‘naduvazhys’ who rose in power during this phase. Panthalam Kingdom had power over several parts of Chengannur and some parts of Pathanamthitta taluk.

In the Indian context before Sankaracharya (8th century A.D.) animal sacrifice forming part of the yaga was the way of Hindu worship. Here we have to dwell a little on the evolution of the present day Hinduism. Jains who

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3 Acharya Narendra Bhooshan’s Memories.
discarded Vedic sacrifices introduced their own religion based on idol worship and preliminary tantric rites. Their cult continued without any interruption until the emergence of Buddhism. Jains worshipped only male ‘thirthankaras’ and they made large idols replacing the concept of Brahma but retaining the sense of largeness as occupied in the word Brahma in Vedic religion. The Sanskrit word Brahma means huge and big. Nothing is beyond Brahma. Buddhists gave importance to pure and holy way of living and maintaining Dharma or righteousness in the day to day life rather than worshipping a god for salvation. Both these sects were atheistic. The meaning of Thirthankara is one who is ferrying the traveller from one shore to the other. Buddha means man of wisdom. Though both of these cults were atheistic they descended in relation to Vedic faith which was strongly believing in theism and practising worships through sacrifices. This indomitable hereditary culture forced them, in course of time, to give shape to some kind of worship and this slowly emerged into the form of Jaina and Budha viharas or shrines. In due course Sankaracharya did the inevitable by influencing Vaishnavism and Saivism. Even today Jaina and Buddhist influence is present in Vaishnava cult and Budhist influence in Saiva cult. Jaina idols are in the standing or lying form. Vaishnava idols are also in the same postures. Budhist influence in the Saiva temples can be seen in their idols generally in the sitting posture and with the goddess beside. The Radha Krishna concept in Vaishnvaism emerged very late in the thirteenth century Bakhti cult ignited by Meera.

4 Acharya Narendra Bhooshan’s Memories.
5 Ibid.
Slowly the society changed and from the Vedic ‘chathurvarnya’ a clan system became the life style in the villages. The derivation of the clan system was from the Vedic ‘chathurvarnya’. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras came into existence in the cultured society. This fourfold classification of human race automatically prevailed wherever law and order existed. Brahmins acted as advisers, Kshatriyas as rulers, Vaishyas as traders, and Sudras as helpers of these three classes. Every Indian village had this social construction. Though it is difficult to deal with the antiquity of the system it is crystal clear that this system slowly transformed into the caste system based on birth and heritage. Kerala also was not an exception to this transformation. However, Kerala Hindu Community did not have a Vaisya segment within it. The traders were Christians, Muslims and the Jews.

Many historical and social changes occurred in Kerala. There are Kerala Brahmins with their vernacular surnames like Nampoothiri, Nambi, Nambiathithi, Nambiathiri, Elayath, and Moosath. Other Brahmins are Bhatta, Sharma and Potti who were later migrants to Kerala. Bhattas are mainly from Kasi and Tamil Nadu, Sharma from Andhra, Potti from Karnataka and Andhra. In course of time the Kshatriyas of Kerala came to be known in various names such as Kolathiri, Samoothiri, Thampuran, Kartha, Kaimal, etc. While in the Indian context Vaishyas are Sreshti, Setthi, Gupta, Chetti, Vanik and Jethi or Jetti they are not and have never been part of Kerala society. All these names are of Sanskrit origin.

Note: The Malayalam forms of these are: Brahmanan (singular) Brahmanar (plural); Kahatriyan, Kshatriyar; Vaisyar, Vaisyan; Sudran, Sudrar.

Acharya Narendra Bhooshan’s Views.
Although Aryans came to India through the north western passes around 2000 B.C. Aryan entry into Kerala happened much later. It happened for the first time when the Buddhists from North India started settling in Kerala from the 4th century B.C. They came in many small groups. This migration continued till the 4th and 5th centuries A.D.

In the 5th century Mayuravarman and Chandrakanthan who were the rulers of Kadamba dynasty brought a group of Brahmins from Ahichatram. It was the period when the Buddhist religion was in the declining process in South India. The messages of Brahmins represented the modernized form of Hindu religion. In the 8th century they came in large groups from Karnataka and Thulunadu and settled here.\(^8\)

The stories about the origin of Kerala and its early history like those in ‘Keralolpathi’ by Pachu Muthath and ‘Kerala Mahatmyam’ by Gundert describe the legend of the creation of Kerala by Parasurama from the sea bed and the subsequent early social and political history. In fact there were several versions of Keralolpathi. The book kept in Nellikkanturithi Kazhakam\(^9\) north of Payyannur in North Malabar was found out in Kollam era 702 (1527A.D.). Such works are recorded only after they are spread orally for a long time. All these narrations have an identical descriptive form. They have three parts, the first part describes the creation of Kerala and the settlement of Brahmins here, the second part describes the rule of Perumals and the third part includes the song in the name of the ruler who was enthroned as the Perumal.

The legend is that the Thazhamon Madham Thanthrikal of Chengannur was the foremost among the Brahmins authorized to settle in Kerala by Parasurama. It is said that two families crossed the Krishna River and settled in Kerala. One was the Tharanallur family in Kochi and the other the family of Tazhamon Madham in Mudenkavu, Chengannur. This family is famous as the Thanthris of Sabarimala and it is the sole right of the family to be the thanthris at Sabarimala. The legend is that after the creation of Kerala Lord Parasurama donated all the land to Brahmins. The Brahmins established 64 gramas (Malayalam forms: ‘gramam’ (singular) and ‘gramangal’ (plural)) in legendary Kerala inclusive of Thulunadu.

It is seen from historical accounts that Chengannur had a pride of place among the Brahmin settlement gramas because hold political power in the early stages of state formation in Kerala. It was one of the four Gramams which were to act representatively in matters of governance of the land. These four Gramas were: Perinchellur, Panniyur, Parur and Chengannur. Their jurisdiction was as follows: the region from Chandragiripuzha in the north to Karapuzha was under Perinchellur; from there to Karumannurpuzha was under Panniyur; from there to Kumaranallurpuzha was under Parur; and from there to South Kannyakumari was under Chengannur Kazhakam.

One view is that those who participated at the highest level in governance in Chengannur were termed as Pandarathil. Vanjipuzha,
Muthedathu, Edamana, Uooru and Punnarittu were the celebrated names of the illams of these rulers.\textsuperscript{13}

When the Nampoothiris had sway over Kerala in all the legendary 64 gramas they authorized the Kshatriyas, Sudras and other castes of Kerala to get settled. The village temple and its administration belonged to the Nampoothiris. In the southernmost Chengannur grama\textsuperscript{14} there were six thousand Brahmin houses. The local expression of the number of Brahmin families in Chengannur in the early times was “Akathu Moovayiram Purathu Moovayiram” meaning ‘inside three thousand and outside three thousand’. The traditional description of the boundaries of the Chengannur grama was as follows: south of Kaviyurpuzha, west of Kozhithodu, north of Venmanipadam and east of Theveripuzha in Kurandi desam. In this area the illams were one thousand five hundred. Of these the sabha illams were 360. South of these boundary and north of Kanyakumari in Chengannur grama there were 1500 illams. The total of these make the inner three thousand of the total six thousand. As three thousand went out of the area, they were called outer three thousand. From Kanyakumari in the south to Nileswaram there were thirtytwo gramas and from Nileswaram to Gokarnam in the north there were thirty two more gramas. Thus the number of gramas in Malayalam Desam totalled 64. It means Cheramalayalam spread from Kanyakumari in the south to Gokarnam in the farthest north. Chengannur grama appointed the ‘uranmai’ to all the other 63 gramas and in Chengannur grama Edamana Pandarathil was approved as the ‘gramashreshtan’ and

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, vol.1, p10.
\textsuperscript{14} Kalloor Narayana Pilla, \textit{ChengannurKshetra Mahatmyam}, Devaswom Board Publication, p.20.
Vanjipuzha Pandarathil as the ruler of the land.\textsuperscript{15} The gramashreshtan had the pride of place to pronounce the judgement about the spiritual rights and the traditional rituals of the people. The ruler implemented the judgement, as well as protected the people of the area. The absolute authority of these two was controlled by the grama sabha which dealt with governance and the Kshetrayogam with spiritual matters and rituals. 360 illams were elected as members of the sabha. Initially the gramashreshtan, the ruler and the members of the sabha were elected for a stipulated period of time but in course of time they became permanent officers with hereditary rights. The Brahmins of Chengannur gramam were like ‘devas’. As a result of their strict religious life and perfect rituals they were always respected and worshipped in other gramas and by other kings in and around the whole of Kerala. The greatness of the priest is described in the Tamil book called \textit{Nalayiraprabandham}. This book is a collection of songs about 108 Mahavishnu temples sung by 12 blessed Alwars of these great temples of Kerala including that in Thiruvananthapuram.\textsuperscript{16}

Kolathiri, Samoothiri, Thampuran, Kartha, Kaimals, etc. were the Kshatriyas of Kerala. In Chengannur the abode of the Thampuran was Vak Vanjipuzha or Mampally. They were descendents of the royal family at Attingal.\textsuperscript{17} They were deputed for the supervision of collecting janmikaram and the temples of Northern parts of Travancore beyond Kayamkulam. They served as the trustees of the Trippalkadal temple and received six ‘kalams’ (a traditional way of expressing the extent of land) of Paddy lands and a number of

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Travancore Archaeological Series}, Vol., V p.44.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p.31.
gardens along with one male slave and one female slave. As they were the managers of vast landed estates their power increased rapidly.

The Kshatriya Community in Chengannur came prominently through settlement by King of Travancore of a member of Kshatriya families who ran from northern parts of Kerala following ‘Tippu’s Padayottam’. This was mainly around A.D.1775. One family of Kshatriyas was settled at Kandiyyoor in Mavelikkara. Soon the family could establish a Guru-Sishya relationship with the Maruthamon Brahmin family. This family invited the Kshatriya family to their village. Their palaces began to be known after their locations. So came into being the Ennakkattu and Gramam Palaces. The palaces especially Gramam palaces became powerful and big land lords and the title Koithampuran though the martial relationships with the Travancore royal family. After the defeat of Tippu the Britishers took possession of the landed property of these royal families and as compensation they were given ‘Malikhana’. Besides, the King of Travancore allowed the payment of paddy and money for the day to day life. Members who were before 1949 and upto 1949 became eligible for these benefits.

However, the palaces became powerful. Brahmin Illams of the localities disappeared almost fully. Several of the practices of the Koilthampurakkanmar were oppressive. They concentrated only in amassing wealth. Even for the revenue for providing alms (Dama Dharmadikal) special taxes were collected. The members of the lower castes and the Nair community were not allowed to wear clothes above the waste.
It goes to the credit of some of the members of Ennakkattu Palace that they worked for social emancipation. Rama Varma Raja of Ennakkattu Palace who shifted to Tharayil Palace had worked against the prevailing orthodox social system as part of the upliftment of the lower castes he adopted their children and educated them. He brought Dhakhar, a progressive social activists, to the Puliyur Panchayat. He also established a school at Perigaliperingilippurath. R. Sankara Narayanan Thampi and R. Rajasekharan Thampi were members of Tharayil Palace. In India Sreshti, Sethi, Gupta, Chetti, Vanik and Jetti are Vaisyas. Most of these are names that are relevant in the general Indian context. Only the chettie caste whose main abode has been in the neighbouring Tamil Nadu could be seen in Kerala but only sparsely. The main trading community in Kerala were the Christians and Muslims. A very limited number of Jews were also there as traders, but most of them migrated to Israel after its formation. All of these were outside the Hindu community and hence outside ‘chathurvarnya’. However, the ‘Vaisya’ of ‘Chathurvarnya’ did not have its representation in Kerala. Chettipilla in Kerala specialized in agriculture and trade. In Portuguese documents St. Thomas Christians were described as the major cultivators of pepper in Kerala. They were an identifiable group and as several Christian family histories claim were the descendants of those high caste people who followed St. Thomas the apostle in the first century A.D. These Syrian Christians had a strong and respected position in Kerala society. At the time of their emergence as a separate group in

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Kerala they had received patronage from local chiefs and kings. Many St. Thomas Christians were also land owners with no control over them other than that of the king. Those members of this community who had held land from days prior to the emergence of Brahmin headed land system enjoyed considerable property rights over their cultivable land. Moreover churches received large land grants from the local Hindu rulers in remuneration for the favours they received from the institution of church. This led to some sort of communal ownership of land among St Thomas Christians. The influential members of ‘Palliyogams’ (congregations of the churches) were the administrators and caretakers of such lands. They in turn, transferred the lands to ordinary farmers for cultivation. Many local rulers and Brahmin families also used to grant sizable portions of land to some families of the St. Thomas Christians to have them settle down in and around the settlements of high caste Hindus with a view to facilitating prompt purifying touch on the vessels and other household items polluted by the use of low caste Hindus and untouchables. The belief was that the vessels would be purified by a touch on them by the members of these Christian families. In fact such a practice lingered even in the early 20th century. The belief behind this practice was that the members of these particular families of St. Thomas Christians whose ancestors were Brahmins could remove pollution by simple touch on the utensils which could be later used by Brahmins without fear of any contamination. One important result of this system was that many members of the Christian

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community got personal property with ownership rights. Francis Buchanan had recognized Syrians as the only people likely to have brought trade to the interior villages of Malabar\(^\text{20}\). Everywhere in the interior of Malabar a prodigious inconvenience was felt from the want of bazaars or markets. He suggested that a little encouragement to the Nazareens (Christians) might induce “that industrious class of men” to settle in small villages where they might keep shops, greatly to the advantage of the natives. The wife of Rev. John Hawksworth of the Church Mission Society described Syrians as chiefly traders in rice, cloth, country produce, tobacco etc. The beautiful rivers intersecting this province was often thickly dotted with their small canoes, laden with fish, salt, yam, plantain and various kinds of vegetables and fruits. The Brahmins as a caste were averse to trade and some writers see Syrian Christians as filling the role of Vaisyas in the classical four varna Hindu system. Caste Hindus not only accorded Syrian Christians respectable status but also endowed them with the power to cleanse polluted food and objects.\(^\text{21}\)

Muslims in some respects enjoyed certain special privileges in Mannar they had special relationships the Travancore royal family. The kings honoured many with titles like Asan, Panikkar and Kunju. The kings also made arrangements for the Muslims who came here from Tamil Nadu for their worship and stay.

When the Muslims settled in Mannar it was mostly inhabited by Brahmins. In addition they were also settle is belonging to the Veera Saiva sect.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, P.52.  
\(^{21}\) Pius Malekandathil, Op.cit. p.3.3
However, there was complete harmony in relationship among the various communities.

The muslim ancestoran families who lived around Eramathur Mosque had in earlier times helped the transit of money and other things relating to the Thrukkuratti Temple to Mavelikkara and Thiruvalla.

There are instences of co-operation of the different coommunity. It is rememberd that over half a century ago the large pit in the compound of the Eramathr Mosque was killed with the soil of the Kunnathukavu on the eastern side of Thrikkuratti Temple.

All these speak of the harmony in social life among the different communities.

One set of Sudras consisted of Carpenters, Astrologers (ganaka), Washer men (Veluthedathu Nair), Barbers (Vilakkithala Nair). The other class of Sudras belonged to the three clans --- Ambalavasis assisting Brahmins, Nairs assisting Kshatriyas, agricultural labourers assisting the traders. Velas, Pulluvas, Panas, Kuravas, Parayas, Nayadis and many other castes confined to their own crafts.

Before the arrival of Brahmins, the way of life was on the basis of the clan system. One view hold that in the western side of the Ghats (Kerala), was prevailing a self supporting group, the Nair clan, interrelated on the basis of profession allotted by the leader of the clan known as Kurup. This clan was worshippers of the two deities --- one was Kali (Durga) the goddess of War and the other was Naga (Serpent). The Nagas were installed in Kavu, a natural

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22 Acharya Narendrabhooshan’s Memories.
grove the religious sanctity of which prevented any cutting of plants or trees from it. The Kavu is supplemented by an adjacent ‘kulam’ (pond). Even today there are several Kavus prevailing in Kerala. Most devi temples in Kerala where Kali is the deity bear the names ending in ‘kavu’ or ‘kulam’ or ‘kulangara’. Panayannarkavu, Puthiyakavu, Puthenkavu, Kallikavu, Vadesserikavu, Azhakiyakavu, Puthukulangara, Chettikulangara, and Kunnathukulangara are examples. Kurups were the priests in these temples and kavus until a few decades ago.

The main rituals prevalent to this day at a Devi temple are called ‘Kalamezhuthu’ and ‘Kalamezhuthu.’ The former ‘Kalamezhuthu’ denotes a ritual in which usually a picture of a worshipped deity is drawn on a specially demarcated space on the floor using colour powders made of natural substances like rice flour, tamarind powder, lime paste, powder of Vaka leaves, and powder of burnt rice husk. Usually five colours are used. In the other case ‘la’ has the sound as in ‘Galaxy’ and then ‘Kalamezhuthu’ means ‘Kalam’ in which means pot. The drawings are made on the pot with lime paste.

The society was featured by a warrior clan known as Nairs. Acharia Narendra Bhooshan holds that Nairs belong to a group. They are widespread in India --- Nyyar in Punjab, Naik in Maharashtra, Patanayak in Orissa, Nayak in Andhra, Naykar in Tamil Nadu. All these people irrespective of the locality are worshippers of Kali and trees. 23 As already noted in Kerala ‘Naga’ worship had been an invariable component of worship.

23 Acharya Narendra Bhooshan’s Memories.
There are different views on the origin of the Nairs. One view is that they came with the Nampoothiris. Opposed to this is the view that they were a group of people in Kerala like any other group, but whose status rose up through their specially privileged relationship with the Nampoothiris and the royal family. It is held that historically the Nairs belong to the Dravidian culture spreading from Europe to the Eastern part of Asia. Accordingly they were a race not a caste. In Kerala Menon, Menoki, Kaimal, Kartha, Panikkar, Kurup, Pilla are all now considered as Nairs, although in the caste based occupational pattern of the past, each of them had separate functional roles. Gradually Nairs spread all over Kerala. They built mansions known as ‘Nalukettu’ and ‘Ettukettu’ with widespread land around and with very specially built boundary walls. Such an established colony was called Tharavad. Many ‘tharavads’ joined together and formed a ‘thara’. A thara required to have a ‘kalari’ where martial arts are taught. The Nairs became very powerful at the fall of the first Chera Reign. In most village societies Nairs became the lords as the de facto rulers of the region. They acquired the name Nattinnudayar (owners of the ‘nadu’). They were the owners of land and gramas. The social set up of the Nairs was based on ‘marumakathayam’ (matrilineal system of inheritance). They lived in ‘Tharavads’ which were undivided joint families. The ‘Karnavar’ was in charge of administration of the tharavad. The position got bequeathed to the eldest among the sons of the sisters. The women enjoyed social freedom. Their marriage alliances were quite loose. Polyandry was

24 Puthupally Raghavan and M.S. Chandrasekhara Varrier, Nairmedhavithathinte Pathanam, Kottayam, 1979, p.59.
common and the men included those from the different savarna castes including Nampoothiris and members of the royal family. However, this situation is no more there. Though the ordinary Nairs were traditionally farmers they had sufficient education and many entered the nonfarm sectors in and out of the country since long. Many members of the community made valuable contributions to the growth of Malayalam literature.

Events of far reaching significance took place in Kerala during the period of the later periods of rule. The importance of the Tamil language decreased; the Jain and Budhist religions declined. Chavu (Chathan) or Sastha (Budha) became Ayyappan. The deities of Patni, Kottavai, Chamundi, Kannaki and Kali merged and Parvathy (Parasakthi) was formed. Structured temples were built and swelled in number when the Hindu religion spread. Nampoothiris secured high position in the society as the Hindu religion spread. Kshatriyas were formed by elevating Nairs to form the royal families and warriors. Nampoothiris became landlords. The Adwaida teaching of Sankaracharia reconfirmed the superiority of the Nampoothiris. The Nairs effectively conducted the Tharakuttam, Nattukuttam and Desakuttam which democratized governance in Kerala. The caste system came into existence. Nairs who were a special group did not accept the condition initially. When the hold of the Nampoothiris firmed up the caste system gradually influenced the Nairs also. The northern ‘kiriyam’ and southern ‘illam’ were equal in status to that of the Nampoothiris. The administration of the land belonged to the

Swarupams. By 19th century there were almost 140 castes among the Nairs (1911-1931 Census report). The Nampoothiris introduced a ceremony called the ‘Hiraniagarbham’ in order to convert a Nair into a Kshatriya so that he acquired legitimacy to hold a royal position. This ceremony stipulated a person’s entering the stomach of a cow made of gold and then getting out of it. The gold cow and also a great amount of wealth would go to the Brahmins on this occasion. During the time of Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma the strength of Nairs dwindled relatively. The Nairs were shattered by the attack of Portuguese, Dutch and Mysorean invaders. Later the Nairs came down to the level of servants of the Brahmins and the newly formed Kshatriyas. They were ranked as Sudras. They considered any employment under the king prestigious and service to the Brahmins divinely ordained. Socially the alliances of Nair women called ‘sambandam with’ Nampoothiris and Tamil Brahmins totally enslaved them to the whims and fancies of the Brahmins and the royal members, although such relationships brought wealth and prosperity to the family. That contrasts with their earlier picture of having been brave warlords and industrious cultivators, holding agricultural implement in one hand and the sword in the other hand.

Subsequent to the disintegration of the joint family system the Nair community was in deep disarray. Resurgence from this came with the efforts of Mannath Padmanabhan who acted from Chenganacherry a place about 14 kms. away from Chengannur. The resurgent Nair community in Kerala maintained a

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very bold outlook and entered a path upgrading the community to a very progressive condition. The community organized a movement --- the Nair Service Society under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan seceding away from the shackles and lethargy which had gripped the community for a long period during the feudal and immediate post feudal periods. The Nair Service Society --- under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan provided a strong voice, noble thinking and perfect insight, liberating the community from the decay of several centuries. It was already noted that the Nairs were called Sudras. There is ample proof that the social reformers among the Nairs wrote and spoke on many occasions against the use of the word Sudra to describe them. The opinion of Chattampi Swamikal was that the Malayali Brahmins coined the word Sudra in order to belittle the Nairs. It even happened that the government initiated action against Sri Marthandan Thampi who prompted the pupils of the school to write the name Nair along with their first name in the school that he established near the Sri Padmanabha Swami temple in Thiruvanathapuram. \(^{28}\) The movement under the leadership of Kalloor Narayana Pilla in Chengannur and Panthalam areas deserve attention as a matter of historical importance in the various

The educational development under the leadership of the Nair Service Society started with the establishment of the first school under it at Karukachal 15kms away from Chengannur. The actual beginning of the society itself started in this school. The second school to come under its dominion was the Nair

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Samajam School at Mannar in Chengannur Taluk which was a school started and run by the people of the locality. The first high school under N.S.S. was established at Perunna in Chenganacherry. The first college viz. the N.S.S. College at Chenganacherry was established in 1947 and the decision for it was taken at the Mannar meeting\(^{29}\) of the society in the same year.

Social stratification developed around different power centres such as the temples, Brahmins, Kovilakams, Madampis and trade networks. The temples had an elaborate form of social organization along hereditary occupational (caste) groups who served the temple in different capacities. Some of them were Brahmins of lower status such as Santhi, Nambi etc. Non--Brahmins included garland makers, drummers, singers, dancers, oil-pressers, goldsmiths, menial servants and so on.\(^{30}\) This class in Kerala had different sections deputed on the basis of their duty like Asari (carpenters), Kulalas (Potmakers), Ganakas (Astrologers), Vilakithalas (Barbers), Veluthedan (washerman), Panan (tailors), Velan (time keeper and distributor of medicines), Pulluvas (keepers of kavu, temple and pond,) Marrar (priests of funeral, drum beaters) and so on.\(^ {31}\) After a long spread, social, communal and cultural events and practices many inevitable changes evolved in the life of Kerala society. This process is still evident in the day to day life of Kerala.

The social as well as semi-spiritual guide of the above class was Ganaka who maintained a calandar for appropriate timings of the activities in the day to day life of the society and advised the people accordingly. Marriages and other

\( ^{30} \) K.K.N.Kurup, New Dimensions in South Indian History, p.111.
\( ^{31} \) Acharya Narendrabhooshan’s Memories.
ceremonies were scheduled as per the advice of Ganakas. The meaning of the word, Ganaka, is one who calculates and foretells the apt or auspicious time for a particular ceremony. They impart primary education to children of a locality and prescribe Ayurvedic medicines for ailment. Even today some of the members of this caste follow this system. Several of them accepted astrology as their profession because of its high remuneration.

The pot makers and carpenters have caste names as ‘Kulalas’ and ‘Asari’ respectively. People generally used earthen wares for storing, cooking and serving food items. The Kulalas made it an art and craft to design and manufacture earthen vessels out of clay, easily available in the paddy fields. It was socially obligatory for the people to buy at least a few pots and dishes from the kulalas. For this purpose they arranged a festival in durga temples called, ‘Noottonnu Kalam Pongal’. Pongal literally means cooked brine rice in the new earthen pots. ‘Noottonnu kalam’ means 101 pots. This is not an exact number. Here the figure denotes the large participation of people in the festival. In fact the whole village participates in the event.

Asari is the carpenter. Houses were constructed with locally available materials which included mud, wood and grass or palm leaves. The floors of the houses were made of mud and plastered. The wooden structure of the houses was made by carpenters and their helpers.

Other groups of this class are (Kollan) Blacksmiths, (Moosari) Moulders, (Thattan) Goldsmith and (Kallassari) Masons. In course of time five groups later formed the general division ‘Viswakarmajas’. The viswakarmajas constituted a prominent section in Chengannur. The blacksmiths (Kollan) were
very elegant in their hereditary job. They converted blacksmithery into an art and were noted for delicate works especially designing of locks and keys. Gold ornaments of Kerala have been exemplary pieces of jewellery. Ornamental art forms like Palakkamothiram, Pavithrakkettu, Pachathali etc. are examples of such pieces. Palakkamothiram is a long golden necklace the beads of which take its shape from a seed called ‘palakka’. It was worn by warriors and this tradition continues even today. ‘Palakka’ ornament was in earlier times manufactured with ivory. The speciality of Pavithrakkettu is that the beginning and end are untraceable in this ornament. It is made of gold. Now it is specialized only in Payyannur. Pachathali is studded with precious as well as semi precious stones such as ‘marathakam’ (diamonds of green hue). Moosaris excelled in the manufacture of copper and brass vessels. Inner side of copper vessels was plated with tin to prevent the contamination of food by copper sulphate. At Aranmula very proximate to Chengannur town a compound of brass, tin and copper was invented and mirrors were shaped out of this. This is the world famous piece of art known as ‘Aranmulakkannadi’.

Masons generally used either bricks or rubble for construction activities. Sculptured stones for pillars and basement were almost an exclusive feature of temples and palaces. Common houses were generally made of a variety of wood. Use of costly wood like teak or rose wood was rare. In earlier times coconut leaves were used for thatching the houses of even the rich. Today it is used by the very poor people to make their huts.

Veluthedathu Nairs and Vilakkithala Nairs were caste names for barbers and washermen respectively. One trait in their profession in the past was the use
of indigenous materials. Washermen used ashes of coconut leaf stem (‘Madacharam’) and the process of washing began with dipping the clothes in cow dung solution and again dipping them in the solution of ‘madacharam’ specially prepared for this. The extra whiteness was imparted to the cloth with a blue extract from the leaves of a plant called ‘neelachedi’. Wool and silk were washed with the powder form of a seed (pulinchika) which had the property of caustic soda and which was abundant in the courtyards of the houses. The clothes were dried in the shade or sunlight as was needed.

Barbers were known as pandits also in certain regions. Apart from hair cutting, they undertook minor surgeries also in the past. They were trained under Ayurvedic physicians and surgeons in early times. They started their profession with the permission of the local chief only. Both the males and females of this sect used to visit the households whenever their presence was necessary. Coconut oil was used along with alam as germicidal and antiseptic.

The Velan community was the keepers of the calendar in their locality. Every locality had this type of calendar in the past because printed calendars were not available then. Two types of calendars were combined and used by the society viz. the lunar calendar and the solar calendar. According to the solar calendar one year had 365 days which was further divided in twelve ‘rasi’ which was equivalent to a month. One lunar calendar had, on an average, 30 days a month including full and new moons. The number of days as per solar calendar divided by twelve ranged from 29 to 30 days. Even after the adoption of ‘Kollam Era’ both these calendars were in vogue with equal importance.
There were astronomical functions every four years lasting for twenty one days (5.25 x 4).

Velans were the keepers of this Astronomy. On the first day of every solar month they visited every important house in the clan singing and beating a drum. After this performance they accepted their remuneration invariably in kind (rice and coconut). They were suppliers of ‘chunnambu’ (lime paste) which was an essential ingredient commonly used in ‘Thamboolam’ for chewing along with betel leaves, areca nut, and optionally tobacco.

Pathiyan or Chakka, were emerged in plucking coconut and cutting trees. Ulladan acted as protector of ‘sarpa kavus’. Other castes like Parayan (meat cutting), Kuravan (makers of baskets, mats etc), and Pulayan (farm labourers) were considered as outcastes. For every type of job competent persons were engaged and this became a tradition resulting in caste system of a village clan or community.

The caste system as a social institution resulted from the combined impact of two elements that emerged in the development of the clans. One was the Brahmin supremacy in the ‘Chathurvarnya.’ The other was the type of feudalism of the period. The ‘Chathurvarnya’ paved the way for a slavish society. The feudalist system encouraged a social structure based on hereditary division of labour and productivity. The caste system was actually a mix of the social structures of these two systems.

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One of the specific features which distinguish the Indian sub-continent from other parts of the world is the prevalence of the caste system in various ways as a form of social organization. In this respect the state of Kerala was no exception.\textsuperscript{33} As a hierarchical form of social organization the caste system is often considered to be implicitly connected with Hinduism. However, this view ignores the presence of such caste-resembling status groups in such larger communities as the Muslim and the Christian communities in Kerala.

In his book \textit{Homo Hierarchicus}, the French social anthropologist Louis Dumont constructs a model of the caste system.\textsuperscript{34} This model is presented as an attempt to isolate caste system as an ideology --- as a system of ideas and values from a multiplicity of data about the various social practices in India. According to Dumont it is this ideology which orients social reality of the Hindus. The whole caste system is founded on the necessary and hierarchical co-existence of two opposites. Impurity is defined as a religious notion. Caste system is derived from the ideology of purity. Interdependence between castes is expressed as the cause of the division of labour. One of the main characteristics of the caste system is that different groups have their own occupational specializations by which separation between these groups is brought out. Therefore, the conclusion of Dumont is that changes occur in subordinated aspects of the caste system, but the caste system as an ideology does not change essentially.

For many centuries the people of India lived as numerous castes and sub castes. The majority of the critics of the caste system have cursed it as the

\textsuperscript{34} Dumont Louis, \textit{The Caste System and Its Implications}, \textit{Journal of Kerala Studies}, Trivandrum, p. 34.
greatest enemy of the society perpetuating exploitation, class conflicts, oppression, poverty and slavery. Free India forbade the practice of caste in all its forms. (Article-17 of the Indian constitution) There are numerous theories about the origin of caste. The important ones are the traditional, the religious, racial, occupational, familial, tribal, dharma and karma samsara. All these different theories can be reduced to the racial, occupational and religious. The Hindus consider that they have descended from the person of Brahma the creator, Brahmin the priestly caste from his head, the Kshatriya, the warrior caste from his arms, the Vaisya the trading and agricultural castes from the thighs and Sudras and the menial caste from his feet. Whatever be the sociological realities concerning the origin of caste this religious faith undoubtedly worked the most forcible factor in the perpetuation of caste through the past centuries. There was no difference of castes in the world created by Brahma. Brahmanism divided people into castes in accordance with the work undertaken. The Brahmins of the active days of Chathurvarnya are described as people who were fond of sensual pleasure, fiery, irascible, and who had forsaken their duty and fell into the condition of the Kshatriyas. Those Brahmins who derived their livelihood from kine, and subsisted by agriculture, neglected to practise their duties and entered into the state of Vaisyas. Those Brahmins who were addicted to mischief and falsehood and had fallen from purity sank into the condition of the Sudras. Separated from each by these features, the Brahmins became divided into different sub castes. One of the

35 George Menachry, *The St Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Delhi, 1982, p.3.
major projects of brahmanization was the establishment of the caste system as a social order. It is graded inequality dogmatically ushered in. Dr. S.Radhakrishnan, who has been acknowledged as one of the best philosophers of India, offers the following account of the origin of the caste system. The Purushasukta has the first reference to the division of Hindu society into the four classes. To understand the natural ways in which this institution arose, we must remember that the Aryan conquerors derived their separate identity by differences of blood and racial ancestry from the conquered tribes of India. All the original Aryans belonged to one class, every one being priest and soldier, trader and tiller of the soil. There was no privileged order of priests. The complexity of life led to a division of classes among the Aryans.

The caste system among the Hindus of Kerala was one of the most rigid caste systems in India. The difference in social status between people of high castes and people of low castes was large that it found distance pollution. Members of lower castes were obliged to maintain certain well defined distance from the members of the high castes in order to avoid the risk of polluting them.

About the origin of the caste system in Kerala not much can be said but in any case a division of the society into castes did not emerge before the end of the Sangam Age. There is not even a reference to the four caste structure in the works of the Sangam period. The social structure of that period was suited to the characteristics of various clans like Eyina Cheraman, Azhiyan Puraiyar, Maravan, Kuravan, Malayan etc. who lived in various places of distinct

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37 T.H.P. Chetharassery, Keralacharithradhara, p.115.
geographical identity and they followed professions suited to the geographical locations of residence. People who belonged to one clan did not confine to one type of work alone, and did various jobs as required. One of them acted as the chief. An example of occupational pattern decided by geographical location was the predominance of hunting and collection of hill produce in the hilly regions. In Sangam works of the second century and even before it there was no mention about the caste system. Pliny did not write about such a system in the Chera land. In Periplus though there are descriptions of Chera society it is not mentioned that the caste system had originated on the basis of kinship families developed as ‘kula’ and in course of time ‘kula’ developed as clan. The caste system was unknown to the people of Chera nadu even in the eyes of Megasthenes. During the third century B.C. every inhabitant of this region was described as Cheran. Differences in the occupations in the five types of ‘Tinas’viz Marutham, Kurinji, Mullai, Palai and Neithal described in the Sangam works do not indicate any hereditary caste based occupational pattern. For example, in the ‘marutham’ while the people gave prominence to farming and cattle rearing, there were people of the same clan in that area who were engaged in carpentry, pottery, hair cutting, cleaning, washing, iron works, fishing, brewing, weaving etc. At the same time people belonging to the clannish chieftain were not engaged in any of these jobs. They kept away from the sun and rain leading a luxurious life, engaged only in the protection of the gothra and village. All these people centralized at one place --- by the banks of the river or a lake --- and improved their profession. Such centres later transformed into towns and cities. As these productive forces developed,
agriculture, trade, and other jobs improved. Further, professions based on division of labour developed instead of ‘gothra’ based profession. It was necessary that everyone had to follow their profession permanently so that the society would improve and the individual would become expert in that profession. In course of time the children started doing the work of the parent and the various professions began to develop specialised in the same gothra. In this period there were no such caste elements as Nampoothiris, Nairs, Ezhavas, or Pulayas. It was generally accepted that in those early periods those who did intellectual work without physical labour were honoured greater than people who did physical labour. It is not known when exactly the hereditary nature of professions got evolved in the society. It seems that at some time towards the end or after the Chera period and with the ascendancy of the Brahmins the society was moving towards a social structure having separate castes with the supremacy of the Brahmins accepted by everyone. With the various kings submitting to this supremacy, the caste based hierarchy established itself in the society. And thereafter, until the beginning of the 18th century, the caste system was closely related to the political and economic organization of society. The region known as Kerala today was divided into several large and small kingdoms all of which were characterized by about the same kind of political organization. Each kingdom was divided into a number of nadus (districts) of which only one or two were ruled directly by the king himself. On behalf of him all the ‘nadus’ were ruled by the so called ‘naduvazhis’. The principal

38 K.N.Ganesh, Keralathinte Innalakal, p.78.
obligation of a naduvazhi to the king was to place soldiers at the disposal of the king. He also had some ceremonial obligations to the king. However, for the rest, a naduvazhi was rather independent. The power of naduvazhi found expression in the number of soldiers he was able to mobilize. A powerful naduvazhi might try to summon soldiers from other naduvazhis and thus contest the position of the king. But through such processes one kingdom might crumble to make way for another. The nadus were divided into ‘desams’ which were led by ‘desavazhi’. The desavazhi would place his soldiers at the disposal of the naduvazhi when needed.

The economies of the different kingdoms were predominantly agrarian by nature. Land was not marketable but an object of various complementary rights. Just like political power such rights were not held by individuals but by families in which the rights were passed from generation to generation via the head of the family. The supreme rights with regard to land were called janmam rights and the holders of these rights were called janmis. Nampoothiriris were an important group of janmis and all political authorities were janmis too. The remaining holders of janmam rights belonged always to the highest Nair sub castes. Janmis kept to themselves only a small part of land for cultivation. The lowest castes in the hierarchy were employed for the works on these lands. Most of the land was leased to ‘Kanakkars’ who usually belonged to the lower subcastes of the Nairs. In many instances these ‘kudiyans’ who themselves cultivated the land they rented in but it also frequently occurred that they in

their turn practised subletting a part of it. The scenario ensured and evolved over the years was one of very extensive and complex chains of hereditary tenure relations. In exchange for the tenure of land, fixed surplus of the harvest was handed over to those who held superior rights, and at ceremonial occasions presents were offered.

Below and outside these tenure relations were the lowest castes Pulayas and the Parayas. The families of non-agriculture specialists like carpenters, blacksmiths, astrologers etc. enjoyed the right to have their own house and compound and to maintain their own gardens. They rendered their services to janmis and tenants in exchange for receiving fixed quantities of paddy and other products at each harvest. Each specialist held the hereditary right of serving certain families. The economy mainly was barter economy, in which money played a subordinate part. The principal merchandises were spices.41

In the course of the 18th century several kings tried to centralize the administration of their kingdoms. The old system in which naduvazhis put soldiers at the disposal of the king began to make way for a system in which the king relied on a central army of his own thus becoming less dependent upon naduvazhis. The most determined political centralization took place in Venad when in 18th century King Marthandavarma of Venad supported by a modernized army managed to subdue the whole of southern Kerala which eventually became Thiruvithamcore (Travancore). The traditional armies of the smaller princes and naduvazhis were disbanded. All naduvazhis and desavazhis

41 K.N. Ganesh, Kerala^{-}thinte Innalakal, p.79.
were deprived of their ‘janmam’ rights and lost their judicial recognitions. The tenants became dependent upon the arbitrariness of the janmis who could evict them easily. In Travancore all tenants of the state were made legal proprietors of land in 1865 only during the time of Srumulamthirunal. In 1867 an additional measure was taken which made it very difficult for proprietors of land to evict tenants.42

After A.D. 850 a social reformation and resurrection occurred in the Indian society. This is related to Sankarachariya who was preaching against the philosophy of the Buddhist and the Jains. His effort brought tremendous changes in India. Sankarachariya rejuvenated Hinduism by promoting the Bhakti Movement and establishing two sects viz. the Vaishnavites and the Saivites. Jains who were hailing from aristocratic upper class families accepted Vaishnavism while the common people accepted Saivism. This heralded the decline of Jainism and Buddhism. This social tendency prevails even today throughout the country.

These changes in the mega context of Kerala had their impact on the religious composition and faith pattern of the people of Chengannur which in turn conjured up a situation warranting social harmony based on co-existence. Some idea of how this came about is available. In Chengannur Brahmins of Tazhamon Madham who were the high priests and those of Vanjipuzha Madham, the rulers of the region practised Vaishnavism. However, the priests of Tazhamon Madham combined Saiva and Sakttheya (Devi) with Vaishnavism

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so as to appease the common people. Tazhamon Madham adopted Vikhneswra, the Saiva god, and goddess Durga as their deities. This can be considered as social reconditioning for the smooth sail of the society. The Nairs and Ezhavas were martial groups who were the worshippers of goddess Durga who mythologically originated from the ‘jata’ (hair knotted on the head) of Lord Siva.

The Ezhavas are another set of people who came into the scene. There are different views on the beginning of the Ezhavas in Kerala. One view is that they came from Ezham (the present Srilanka). There is another view which holds them as warriors (Chekavar). They formed a distinct community for long. One view holds that they were Budhists earlier, and in the wake of the general trend of the Budhists coming in the Hindu fold as either Vaishnavites or Saivites, Ezhavas in course of time became worshippers of Siva and Devi. It may be remembered that both these deities were worshipped by Nairs as well. So while between Saivites and Vaishnavites there was a conflict, the one element of worship that could find a ground for unity between the Nairs and Ezhavas was the worship of ‘Siva’ and ‘Devi’.

In the former version, the Ezhavas who had migrated from Ezham had settled in and around ‘Karappuram’ (the present day Cherthala) in large numbers. Karappuram was part of the kingdom of Kochi. But later it got transferred to Travancore when Tippi attacked Kochi. Their spread to Chengannur which is not far off from Cherthala occurred gradually. The presence of the idols of the Budha in the nearby places of Ambalapuzha
(Karimakkattan), Mavelikara, and Budhanur is often cited as proofs of Budhists in Central Travancore in large numbers.

Apart from the caste based hierarchy within the Hindu community an aspect of importance to social history was the relation between the Saivite and Vaishnavite sects in India. History tells of the evolution and raging of their conflict and final reconciliation. It will be useful to have some picture of this especially in the context of the decline of Jainism and Budhism in Kerala. It had some relevance in the context of Chengannur as well. Already mention was made of this while describing the presence of the Ezhavas in the region.

According to puranas Nahusha compelled his advisers called Saptharshi (seven seers) to approve his theory of animal sacrifice in the ‘yagas’ (sacred fires). Probably this may be the beginning of the inclusion of meat in sacred fires and food. Those who opposed this element in the prevailing Vedic culture became Jains. The first atheistic religion of India is Jainism. Jainism has no place in the history of India as a reformatory religion. The Jain atheists could not accept the scriptures that were introduced as divine pronouncement by god through the seers or prophets given to mankind. Jains are followers of vegetarianism even today. Therefore there is a possibility that they descended from those who were practising Ahimsa even in the post Nahusha period. Almost all rulers of Indian hierarchy accepted Jainism and only some orthodox Brahmins continued with the Nahusha concept in the worship. Their descendants even today continue this practice in the yagas. Those who became Budhists in due course subscribed to Ahimsa in their philosophy.
There is a place called Parumala, along Chengannur-Mannar road not far away from Niranam. One view holds that Niranam is also called by the name Parumala. Kesari Balakrishnapilla opines that Parumala was traditionally a market place. Niranam in the west and Nilakal in the east are the regions from which the Christians of Chengannur trace their ancestral past. The earliest archaeological information about the foreign trade links of Chengannur was provided by the old Roman coin found in the nearby village of Puthenkavu. The recent findings of the excavation in Alamthuruthy by the State Archaeological Department confirms the existence of ancient trade links of this region with Rome. The coins of the East Roman Emperors during A.D. 401 to 518, when Theodosus to Justinan ruled the empire from Constantinople, have been recovered from Puthenkavu. There is a legend that in A.D. 442, Anatholius, the general of Theodosus, presented a silver casket to the church to keep the bodily remains of Apostle St. Thomas in a particular church. The tomb of the Apostle was then situated at a chapel in Malayattur. It was only in A.D. 669 that Knai Thomas brought and got settled a Syrian colony in Kerala from Bagrini in Arabia. At that time it was part of Syria. So it emerges that the St. Thomas Christians were present in Chengannur in AD 400, a period much before the advent of Knai Thomas, a fact the presence of these coins along with the legend would indicate. (The relevance of trade in the migration of Christians to Chengannur was dealt with in Chapter 4 and therefore is not repeated here.)

43 Kesari Balakrishna Pilla Charithrathinte Adiverukal, p. 181. The book itself is not generally accepted among scholars. See the introduction to the book. Hence the view should be looked at with caution.
44 Manorama Azhchopathippu, 1124 Chingam, p.2.
The presence of the Christian population in the busy streets is conspicuous in Chengannur. In fact an Angadi (market) is significantly associated with them. There is a Puthentheruvu (new street) in Chengannur a name that indicates the existence of an old street beforehand. In fact the new street was constructed adjacent to the place where the old street was situated. The new one became essential to accommodate the increasing crowd following migrations.

There was migration of people of different faith to Chengannur especially from the Sabarimala region. This needs some elaboration. The history of the region has relevance for the history of migrant population of Chengannur. As is well known the area where the temple is situated is a forest region now.\textsuperscript{45} Some claim that the temple has a history of 2000 years and others say it is only 600 years old. In particular senses both opinions seem to be true. For one thing there are strong positions both in favour of and against the view that Sabarimala was a Buddhist temple right from the end period of the B.C. era. The area was then inhabited and was for long under the Pandyan control. Then around A.D. 1340 landslides and earthquakes accompanied by great deluges caused major changes to the regions stretching from Central Travancore to Kochi.\textsuperscript{46}

In fact some Christian family histories have recorded this change. However, the Pandyan dynasty disintegrated unable to withstand the attacks on them much before the calamities. Malik Kafur, the general of Alauddin Khilji, invaded Mathura in 1310. He could easily overpower the Pandyan kingdom which was weak. The Pandyan kings ran away and hid themselves. Then again

\textsuperscript{45} Acharya Narendrabhooshan, \textit{Devathakalude Sankalpam}, p.113.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, P.127.
in 1319, there was another attack in the Sabarimala-Nilakal region and thousands of people ran away and turned refugees. The attackers are generally referred to as ‘Pandi Para Pattam’. The leader of the attack was Fakir Puli who belonged to the Ramanadu district of Tamil Nadu. Earlier he was serving in the army either as an officer or as a messenger.

The attack occurred after a branch of Mathurai royal family which fled from Mathurai following the attack by Malik Kafur had established its authority in this region with Panthalam as the headquarters. The flight was in tune with the war principle that the defeated ruler should dismantle or take shelter in far off places. The King of Panthalam resisted the attack by Kafur. However, it is believed that the inhabitants of Sabarimala-Nilakal region consisting of Jains, Budhists, Christians and Hindus had run away to new abodes even before this resistance could be waged.

Acharya Narendra Bhooshan holds the view that in the story in which the King of Panthalam had to send the young ‘Ayyappan’ to face the ‘Puli’ is actually the story of the attack by Fakir Puli. He also denies the probability of ‘Para Patta’ to be a strange creature. There is a version which holds that ‘Parampatta’ referred to a large mass of men called ‘Pandiparayas’ whom the Fakir Ali set on rampage against the inhabitants of Sabari-Nilakal Region. Another version is that these were a kind of wild creatures living among the rocks or in the hilly tracts and on deterioration of the natural habitats they came down on the plains. There is a belief among the people that ‘Parampatta’ was an extinct peculiar creature which had the shape and tail of a goat and which made people immobile by pumping a poisonous gas and thereafter sucked their blood.
causing death. It was reported that such creatures were found in Malaysia and Philippines even in recent times.

Another calamity lives in the memory of the people. Some ancient Christian families have recorded this in their family history. The accounts given in the histories of Kanjirapally family and Erappuzha Kadavil family are particularly noteworthy. In 1341 there was a terrible landslide in the eastern hills of Kerala and an earthquake felt in the stretch from Central Travancore to Kochi. Both these caused a very fierce flood which changed the course of the rivers Periyar and Pampa.

Periyar joined the sea at Vaipinkara shifting away from the age old Kodungallur port. Similarly, River Pampa flowed to the Vembanad Lake deviating its end from the ancient Puracad Port. The river in Ambalapuzha disappeared. The presence of Chakara (large collection of fish in the sea relatively near the sea) at Puracad may be due to the fertile soil deposited by the Pampa over the years before the eventful shift. Following this natural calamity Cherthala region, west of Vembanad Lake rose up from the sea and as a result Niranam in the east which was a port city became an inland region. The forest and hills of Karumadi region were swallowed into the earth and was submerged in water leading to the formation of Karinilam (fields of black soil). This was further borne out when the drudgers which were carrying out the digging operations for the construction of the Thottapally spillway got damaged by the large logs of wood immersed in the mud and water. The idol of Buddha known

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as ‘Karumadikkuttan’ in Karumadi near Ambalapuzha proves the presence of the Buddhist believers in the region even as late as the first deluge.

In Chengannur the different groups of people accepted and strengthened their own religion, social systems and customs but they as a whole did so always without spoiling the smooth and harmonious progress of social life in a place of diverse rigorous religious faith and practices. In other words social harmony was accorded pride of place. It is not that there were no violent conflicts. A few instances and contexts of such conflicts are on record. But such conflicts arose mostly as a result of the inadvertent actions of a few miscreants or narrow minded people. The majority of people lived in harmony and wished for it. Skirmishes have taken place but wise counsel and intervention of leaders and elders of different communities have always limited the conflicts without flare up. One such instance of conflict between a group of Christians and Nairs was what has come to be known as ‘Puthenkavu Lahala’ in which a Gandhian like Chittedath Sankupilla had to hold out a dagger and dare the Christian miscreants who created the trouble. Some of the issues of conflict, especially certain regressive and forced obligations of Christians to the temples, also disappeared over time in the wake of general social transformation that were taking place in Kerala particularly the ‘Navothana’ movement and the reformation efforts from within the fold of every group of communities.

Chapter 3 gave some glimpses of the political movements and its final culmination in achieving social emancipation. The different communities enacted protests against the system not only politically but also through social movements. Different communities organized themselves under the banner of
social organizations. Apart from the conflicts that arose from the caste differences within the Hindu community there were conflicts within the Christian Community as well. Some of the important of these conflicts were discussed in Chapter 5 on religious institutions. But conflicts of a communal nature were neither massive nor widespread. They were limited petty skirmishes and did not represent the attitude of the very large segment of the people.

SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS

Social organizations have played vital role in the lives of the people of Kerala and they continue to do so. They have not only achieved progress of the people within their fold, but also made mighty contributions to the transformation of the society. Several of these organizations had either their origin or course of life on caste basis in one way or other. Most of them originated and grew with the noble aim of striving for the social and economic emancipation of the respective castes --- although at times they have verged on chauvinistic approaches. The social emancipation had a political side as well. Since this aspect has been dealt with in chapter 3 in this section attention is confined to the case of the caste based social organizations that have been working in Chengannur. These organizations had significant contributions to the social and economic emancipation and progress of the communities for whom they have been organized, by their role first in the so called ‘Navothana Movement’ that took place in the first half of 20th century in Kerala and second in their later community based activities. Two organizations which were active in Chengannur were the Nair Service Society (N. S. S.) and the Sri Narayana
Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S. N. D. P.) and the Dalit organisations. Attention is given to these organisations in the following sections.

**Nair Service Society (N.S.S.)**: The Nair Service Society is an organization created for the upliftment and welfare of the Nair community with headquarters at Perunna in the town of Chenganacherry in the Kottayam district. The Nair Service Society is a three tier organization with ‘karayogams’ at the base level or village level, taluk unions at the intermediate level and the organization at the state level.\(^{48}\) The society owns and manages a large number of educational and social institutions and hospitals. In Chenganur 105 ‘karayogams’ are functioning. There are 99 Vanitha Swayam Sahayi institutions (women’s self help institutions) functioning under the Chenganur taluk union.\(^{49}\) One of the great achievements of the N.S.S. as a social organization is on the education front. Started with a one class lower primary school in 1916, N.S.S has now many educational institutions under its aegis.

N.S.S. was formed in 1914.\(^{50}\) Very modest in its beginning with a village vakil as its key figure it grew over the years into a wealthy and effective social organization which it is today. The founder and architect of the N.S.S. was Mannath Padmanabhan. He was a man of great vision and native wisdom.\(^{51}\) Rather an unknown vakil in a village court he rose to rally a disintegrated community into collective action and better way of living. Several monumental institutions from one end of the state to the other speak of the fruits of his

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{51}\) More details are available in the *Journal of Kerala Studies*, June-September, 1977.
labour. The entire amount required was collected literally through door to door begging; the asking was for one coconut, one pound of rice one ‘anna’, one rupee and the like. He remains a shining model of what man can achieve through imagination, perseverance, devotion and hard work. He was one of the greatest ‘karmayogis’ produced by Kerala. This brought him the admiring label “noble and genius beggar.” The complex customs and practices associated with matrilineal system were destructive to individual initiative and enterprise and productive of a host of evils in the social life of Nairs. The incessant efforts by the society helped the abolition of matrilineal system, a reform that revitalized the Nair community by leaps and bounds. It enabled them to face boldly and effectively the challenges of a competitive society. From hindsight it could be said that the modernization process that began with the end of matrilineal system prevented the Nairs from decay. It drew them away from the delusions of past glory to an awareness of realities and compelled them to work out a strategy of growth and development.

The Nair regulations of 1912 and 1924 provided for the partition of joint family and had thus virtually given the go-by to the traditional system. However, the change was neither smooth nor sweeping. Matrilineal ‘spirit’ continued to influence many Nair families. While the change from matrilineal system to patrilineal system was relatively easier and quicker in metropolitan and urban areas, it was rather slow in many parts of rural Travancore. Everywhere wealth of the joint families were partitioned on the basis of legally executed deeds. However, the change was mostly on paper and the management of the family and its properties continued as of old on a matrilineal basis. Thus
as a nonlegal operative mechanism, matrilineal system may be said to have survived even after its legal disappearance. Vestiges of its spirit may be still visible in some parts of the rural interior.

Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924) urged the Nair community to get to modernization as quick as possible by breaking the bondage of tradition and by overthrowing the heavy weight of ignorance and superstition. As a first step he suggested the ending of the mutually exclusive subdivisions within the Nair community. The leaders of the Nair community managed to bring the major sister communities of Travancore to a political focus which ultimately resulted in the submission of the Travancore Memorial, widely known as the Malayali Memorial, to the Maharaja Sri Moolam Thirunal. The Christians, the Ezhavas and the Muslims were also signatories to the memorial; they rallied round the common grievance of lack of opportunities experienced by them in the civil service of the state which was all along the prerogative of Tamil Brahmins.

**Sri Narayana Dharmaparipalana Yogam (S.N.D.P.):** This organization was registered on 15 May 1903 under the Travancore Regulation Act of 1063. Sri Narayana Guru was its patron and the life time president. Mahakavi Kumaraswami was its first general secretary. The main aim of the S.N.D.P. Yogam was stated as striving for human brotherhood and well-being and establishing temples, sanyasi mutts, educational institutions etc.

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52 *Journal of Kerala Studies*, p.444.
The organization came into existence as part of the social reforms movement Sri Narayana Guru was propagating against caste discrimination and for the upliftment of the downtrodden. As a member of the Ezhava community he had certainly in his mind the emancipation of that community. However, his views and teachings were of universal applicability and therefore when he led the formation of S.N.D.P. it was expected to serve the fulfilment of the tenets of his teachings that went beyond the bounds of any particular community. However, as is well known, in the particular social circumstances obtained in the state the organization became an activist forum managed by members of the Ezhava community. S.N.D.P. started a state wide process of transformation and radical reform of the social, religious and economic endeavours of the Ezhava community. This was accompanied by a mass campaign for the abolition of untouchability and for obtaining political recognition, as part of the general wave of social protest movements in the state. The stigmatized caste identity was repudiated, and class mobility was sought.

In this respect the ‘Thokka Samaram’ in Budhanur assumes importance. The event related to the obligations of the different communities to provide the materials to lit the lamps at the Kunnathukulangara Kshetram. These materials were the ‘thokka’, mud and oil. The Christian community had already stopped the practice of giving the oil. The obligation of the backward communities for bringing the materials for the ‘Deepakzhcha’ on Medam 10 was inviolable. The local S.N.D.P. unit under the leadership of Athmananda

Swami which was engaged in reformatory activism boycotted the festival and did not bring the ‘thokka’. This event and course of history was the expression of the growing resentment to the religious social hegemony and religious estrangement that prevailed in the society.

A new group identity was centred around generalized ideals of progress and mobility. New imperatives were set: education to all, respectable employment, thrift and accumulation of wealth, abolition of untouchability, and entry into the mainstream Hindu fold. The movement was partially successful. Ezhavas managed to gain access to education, public office and temples. With the introduction of universal franchise, they have also been able to project and promote their caste interests at a wider political level. While the caste tag still remains far removed from the ideal set by Sri Narayana Guru Ezhavas have gone forward towards re-defining themselves. The activities of the Yogam brought significant changes. S.N.D.P. Yogam has worked for the improvement of the social and economic conditions of the Ezhava caste. Social mobility has been articulated through the Yogam. The activities of the Yogam and the modern means of communication enabled different sub castes of the Ezhavas living over a wider cultural area to be drawn into social mobility and establish horizontal solidarity among them. Originally the Chengannur unit was of Thiruvalla Taluk including Chengannur, later the unit of Chengannur came up when Thiruvalla Taluk was sub divided. There were several persons who worked for organising the S.N.D.P. Unit in Chengannur. Apart from Kannara Gopala Panikkar a person who rendered great service in organising the Chengannur unit was P.R.Kochukunju.
Dalit Organizations: By the dawn of the 20th century, the socially depressed classes of Kerala, on account of their contact with socially advancing communities, gradually came forward in the public life of the state breaking the shackles of ignorance and neglect. The spectacular rise and progress of the Ezhava and Nair communities as a result of organized effort through their organizations like the S.N.D.P. and N.S.S. was a powerful stimulus to other communities. The socially backward communities became conscious of the necessity of forming their own caste organizations for the purpose of collective bargaining which alone, they knew, would bring equality in civil rights and privileges till then denied to them. The lot of the communities like the Pulaya, Paraya and Kurava communities was deplorable. Denied of educational facilities, they remained illiterate. For ages past they were barred from owning land and this economic disability kept them entirely at the mercy of caste Hindu landlords. All channels of drive and initiative were closed to them by the age old customs and conventions. The struggle of the Civil Rights League, an organization formed by the Christians, Ezhavas, and Muslims during 1917-1922 and the conspicuous gains secured by the agitators was inspiring to these communities. They became unusually conscious of their power and potentialities and the necessity of fighting for their legitimate rights in the social set-up in the state. The formation of Adima Mahajana Sabha consisting of the four socially depressed communities of Kerala, viz. Pulaya, Paraya, Kurava and Vettuva was an important step in the realisation of such rights. The Adimar themselves analysed the basic issues of their degradation and unmistakably came to the conclusion that it was the educational and economic backwardness
that brought on them the shackles of servitude. The rigidity of caste rules and customs was another stumbling block that precluded them from coming up.

The state of Kerala was notorious for its inhuman social practices such as untouchability, unseeability, atmospheric pollution and unsociability. The Hindu society during these days was stratified on the basis of the illusion of purity of ‘jati’. The system reached such a vicious height that Swami Vivekananda once called Kerala a lunatic asylum. The 20th century Kerala witnessed a flood of Hindu movements, which intended to reform the society in order to arrest the flow of Hindus to other Dharmas. The pioneer amongst the reformers was Kumara guru or Poikayil Appachan who hailed from Eraviperur which is not far off from the Historical Region of Chengannur. For the realization of his dreams he started an organization known as Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (Divine Congregation of Revealed Salvation) (P.R.D.S.). The songs of Poikayil Appachan (Poikal Appachante Pattukal) could exert a powerful influence in conscientising the lower castes. To an extent he was successful in his task in saving the fare of Hinduism.

**Kerala Pulayar Mahajana Sabha (K.P.M.S.) :** The Kerala Pulayar Mahajana Sabha draws its inspiration from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar the architect of Indian constitution and leaders like Shri. Ayyankali, his co-activists Shri. Vellikkara Chothi and Shri. Kurumpan Daivathan.

The Chengannur unit of K. P. M. S. was formed on 26 January 1975. The organisation strives for the general welfare of the Pulayar Community although it has yet to come of age mainly because of inadequate finance.
Other Organisations: There are several other community organisations functioning on the social front in the different parts of Chengannur. These include Kerala Thandar Maha Sabha, Sambava Maha Sabha, Akhila Kerala Viswakarma Mahasabha and Vilakkithala Nair Smajam.

Islamic Organisations: Islamic organisations are spiritually oriented. But they accomplish social services as well. These are Sunni Yuvajana Sangham, Dikra Halka, Muslim Youth Movement and Nuzarathul Masakhin. They undertake welfare oriented social activities aimed at creating a glorious society based on equality as envisaged by Prophet Muhamad Nabi. Different programmes like Dikru, Salath, Mass Prayer, ‘Annadanam’ (serving free food) are undertaken at various places. People of different communities participate in these programmes.

Yogakshema Sabha: Chengannur has a unit or upasabha of the Keralawide Yogakshema Sabha with its head office at Thrissur. It was formed by combining the Nampoothiri Federation and Nampoothiri Samaja, the two most important of the Nampoothiri Organisations that came up in the 1960’s and 1970’s after a time gap since the dissolution of the pre-independence Nampoothiri Yogakshema Sabha in 1945.

The organization works for the welfare of the Brahmins who have found themselves in a new situation today in the changed social milieu. There is a feeling among them that they are going down the ladder. The sabha has multifarious activities in promoting the enthusiasm, capabilities and discipline
of Brahminical life. It also would like to secure for the Bhramins a share in the political power. It also brings out several publications. At present there are 119 Madhams as members of the Chengannur Yogakshema Sabha. It can be seen that even though this is the number of Madhams who are members of the Chengannur upasabha, it is far removed from what is projected of ancient times by the saying ‘Akathu Moovayiram, Purathu Moovayiram’. It speaks of the social transformation that the took place in Chengannur over the years.

CULTURAL CHENGANNUR

The social life of a people is made rich and colourful through art of various forms. In the matter of cultural life the Historical Region of Chengannur has had its rich traditions and attainments. A glimpse of these are attempted in the following sections. Some of the art forms are common to Kerala while some are ‘local in nature’.

Patayani : ‘Patayani’ forms one of the art forms which can be characterized as ‘local’ so far as the Historical Region of Chengannur is concerned. It is a traditional performing worship oriented art form in which all the Hindus of a locality participate en masse irrespective of caste differences, and enacted in several of the deitised ‘Kavus' now located in the Alleppey and Pathanamthitta districts.55 In earlier times patayani was performed in many more Kavus than now. For example it was prevalent in Mannar (in Chengannur Taluk) earlier but not now. However, the ritual has not only survived but even gained vigour and momentum in some of the Kavus in the south eastern parts of the Historical

Regions of Chengannur. In the recent decades Patayani has attracted wider attention of art lovers. One of the contributing factors to this was the poetry of Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan borne of his native. The efforts of Kadammanitta Vasudevan Pilla who has contributed much in the vigorous revival and attention Patayani received in recent times. Patayani is a ritualistic art form. It is a combination of many primeval doctrines, worship forms and rituals.

The legend behind Patayani is connected with the murder of Daruka. It depicts the furious goddess Kali commencing to the presence of Lord Shiva at the end of a prolonged and serious fight with Daruka when Lord Shiva and the host of devils try to calm her by presenting different characters and comic scenes.

Patayani is conducted from Kumbha Bharani to Aswathy of Minam in Vadeserrikav. In Mundenkavu Devi temple Atavi Thullal is a ritual conducted as a part of Patayani. This is done during any day of Kolam Thullal. In Vadasserikavu instead of Atavi, the call for hunting (Nayattuvili) alone is done. The effect of forest is created by fixing three or four branches of Elanji tree in the arena of Patayani. In this one of the actors wears a mask, made of ‘pala’ (the broad and thick base of the leaf of the areca tree) and depicting the face of a pig or a tiger, and then walks two or three times around the tree branches loudly imitating the respective animal cries. With this, the call for hunting ends. The songs of call for hunting of Sastha are rendered here also.

During ‘Patayani’ Kolamthullal is a hilarious experience. The performance lasts into the late hours of night and the artists with the Thopram
dance in a trance (uranju thullal) to the rhythm of music enriched by traditional orchestration of ‘Thappu’, (Kettle Drum), clasping and Patayani songs.

A recollection by of the centenarian of Alaprath Narayana Pilla of a Kolam Thullal artist of Patayani who participated regularly even at his old age in the Patayani at Vadasseri Kavu Bhagavathy Kshetram at Mudenkavu reveals that in earlier times the Kolam Thullal artists had to take ‘Vrutha’ (renunciation for purification) at least for 10 days and it was binding on them. However, he laments that not only this is not practised today but also that the reverence and divine feelings in the artists have disappeared today. He also regretted the recent tendencies to use modern colour substances whereas in yester years the Kolam was drawn with traditional natural substances of the laterite soil, leaves, charcoal and turmeric.

Shri Narayana Pilla learnt ‘Kollam Thullal’ from Edanad Kesava Pilla Asan who was at the ‘Mudenkavu Patayani Kalari’. In those days the artists underwent traditional ‘massaging’ which imparted the required body flexibility (Meyvazhakkam) needed for many quick and agile movements.

People belonging to different castes have special rights and responsibilities in Patayani. The Kaniyan (Astrologer) who draws the Kolam (figures) and the carpenter who makes the frame for the Kolam, the Thandan who brings the ‘pala’ and tender coconut leaves (kuruthola) for drawing the Kolam, the pathiyan who brings the oil, the Mannan who brings the cloth for the torch and frames and the Paraya who prepares the skin of buffalos for the drum are all inevitable and rightful components of Patayani.
There is an effort in Patayani to promote and establish the rights and power of various castes and to strengthen their relation with society in general. The dance form with a ‘kolam’ to please the goddess and thereby get rid of evil is very common in various rituals of Kerala. The ‘kolam thullal’ of South Kerala and Theyyam Thira of North Kerala are chief among such rituals. In fact, kolam thullal is a ritual conducted by members of Kaniyan community to frighten away the influence of evil spirits in houses of South Kerala. Ganapathi, Chathan, Marutha, Madan, Kalan, Bhairavi, Mangdam and Horse are the chief depictions (kolangal) in Patayani.

The proto astraloid ethnic people who lived in South India before the advent of Dravidians were ardent ‘naga’ worshippers (snake worshippers). This makes it clear why the worship of snake in Patayani was deep rooted. Patayani is also used by the village people who throng in the Kavu to present before the Devi their woes of the preceding year. In the Kavu they sing out these ‘woes’ and dance forward in large number and unison. The whole exercise has come to be known as ‘Kavutheendal’. The songs rendered are known as Patayanippattu.

Kalamezhuthu56: In Kalamezhuthu powder pictures of the deity worshipped are drawn on the floor with powders of five different hues. It is usually set by men who have undergone special training. Kalamezhuthu is a means of propitiating the gods. It forms part of the Tottampattu conducted in Patayani in Kavus and Kalikettu in Kali temples where the picture of Devi is drawn. Pictures of Lord Ayyappa are drawn in folkdances like Ayyappan theeyattu and

those of Nagaraa and Naga yakshi in Sarppamthullal. Each of these rituals is monopolized by people of different castes. The powders for all the five colours of black, white, yellow, red and green used to be taken from natural substances like burnt chaff for black, rice for white, brick for red, leaves of Kumkumam or Vaka for green and turmeric for yellow. All the designs of Kalamezhuthu are three dimensional. The eyes, nose and breasts of the figures stand little raised from the floor. The five colour combination and proportionate structures give the impression of superhuman gods. Kalamezhuthu is one of the proud attainments of folk tradition of Kerala.

**Velakali and Kutirakettu** : The Velakali is a mock fight played on occasions of festivals in the temples. The mock fight in Velakali is believed by some to be a representation of the battle of Kurukshetra between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The play commences with a flourish of trumpets and kettle drums, corresponding to a call at arms. In a few minutes each house sends forth its men, well armed and equipped, to the field. Clad in a long and narrow cloth tied tight around the waist reaching up to the knee so as to leave the legs free, and wearing a matching headgear of red cloth tied into an elongated knot on the right side and adorned with silver lace, the Velakalikkaran presents a spectacular sight. He wears a string of golden beads on the neck and a tie on each hand round the biceps. Caste marks in sandal paste are worn on the forehead, breast and arms, and the eyes brightened with black dye. Equipped with a shield held in the left hand, and a blunt sword on the right, the fight

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57 Kerala District Gazetteer, p.150.
begins. At the call of the trumpet, the players gather round the flag. A number of pennons, large and small and of various shades and designs, some silvery and some golden, recalling the colours of the various corps in former times are unfurled. The band, which consists of Kombu (horn), Kurumkuzhal (clarion), Thappu (kettledrum) and Maddalam (drum native to Kerala), begins to sound the mustering tune, and its dissonant din awakens the drooping spirits of these warriors. As they assemble and form themselves into line, the march is sounded. The youngsters form the front, and the elders bring up the rear, with the flag bearers forming the rearmost line. This mock army is accompanied by dummies of animals such as birds and oxen used in olden times for military purposes. Those borne on shoulders come last. In this array the army marches from its place of encampment to the battle field. There it takes its stand. The advancing force performs the tactics of a combined attack marching in full column against the enemy. The symbolic fight lasts for an hour, during which time the players prance like spirited steeds and jump and dance about and around the Pandava dummies, the Pandavas being the victors. At the end of the offensive the Kauravas retreat in a stampede up the temple steps. The players also give exhibitions of single combats. Two of the young warriors step to the front and to the tune of music perform feats with the sword and shield and show their skill in fencing. They then retire and fall into line. Another pair takes the field and goes through similar exercises.
Kuthirakettu: Kuthirakettu or Kettukazhcha is an impressive festivity associated with temple Utsavams in certain parts of the Allepey district, particularly in Mavelikara, Chengannur and Kuttanad Taluks.58 A feature of the Kettukazhcha is that people from different Karas adjoining the temple bring huge ‘rathams’ or (wheeled structures) varying from 25 to 150 feet in height. The smaller ones among these ‘rathams’ are called ‘theru’ and the bigger ones ‘Kuthira’. These are usually made of bamboos or coconut trunks and decorated with white cloth and coloured silks. The theru has several storeys which give it the appearance of a huge temple. The images or pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses are kept inside it. The smaller structures are carried by the people on their shoulders while the bigger ones are drawn by the people on four wheels. All the Hindus of the locality co-operate in making the rathas and in taking them in procession to the main shrine. The different ‘therus’ coming from the different Karas assemble on the four sides of the temple compound and then go around the temple in pradakshinam. The Kettukazhcha festival described above is alleged to bear traces of Buddhist influences. It is said that there is a very close resemblance between it and the Buddhist festival which Fahein the Chinese traveller of the 5th century A.D., witnessed in the city of Pataliputra.

Vallam Kali: There are several locations on River Pampa where boat meets are annually conducted regularly. The local name of this is Vallamkali. The Historical Region of Chengannur has at three places the staging of this unique regatta which involves the masses of the entire villages around and even from

58 Kerala District Gazetteer, p.150.
distant places. They attract tourists both from other Indian states and from abroad. The three localities in which the Vallamkali takes place are Aranmula, Erappuzha Kadavil and Mannar. The regatta at Aranmula is associated with the Partha Sarathy temple where the Chundan Vallangal (snake boats) of the locality are known as ‘Palliyodangal’, a sanctified name indeed, as they are associated with the temple. Every village in and around Aranmula has a snake boat as a common property of the village and the managing of the boat regatta is done by the villagers themselves.

The regatta takes place every year. In early times there was no race between the boats at Aranmula. Traditionally and even today the snake boat meet at Aranmula has the emphasis on the procession of all the boats rowing in unison to the rhythm of the ‘vanchipattu’ (boat song).

**Kathakali** : Chengannur having been a renowned temple town from very early times had a rich tradition of temple art of Kathakali. Some of the Kathakali stalwarts of Kerala belonged to Chengannur. Of them Guru Chengannur Raman Pilla is the most famous. A description of him is given subsequently. Kathakali is an internationally renowned dance drama of Kerala. It is a unique feature of Kathakali that in it the actors do not speak, but only act dialogic sections called ‘padams’ through appropriate ‘mudras’ (symbols) and facial expressions as recital takes place from behind. The make-up of the actors in Kathakali has its own significance in each case. The most important Kathakali characters from the point of view of the make-up are Pacha, Kathi, Thati and Minukku. The chief characteristic of the Pacha (green) make-up is the predominance of the
green paint which symbolizes the moral excellence of the characters. Those who possess satvaguna or divine qualities like the devas and the mythological heroes like Indra, Rugmangada, Nala, Pandavas, Krishna, Kubera etc. come under this group. Dignified, graceful and artistic movements are associated with these characters. The characters falling under the Kathi (knife) type symbolize evil qualities or demons like Ravana, Sisupala, Kamsa etc. The predominant quality in them is rajoguna. Hence they are painted with fiery red patches, savage knobs and unturned and fiery moustaches. The characters which come under the Thathi (beard) group are the red beard, the white beard and the black beard according as the beard worn is red, white or black. This type represents vicious, voluptuous and vile characters like Dussasana, Bakasura etc. The Minukku or polished group of characters represents gentleness, restraint and innate spiritual qualities. The costumes and ornaments of this group are unostentatious. The bulging skirts, the big overcoats and the huge headgears of the characters of the other groups are conspicuously absent in the case of Minukku characters. Female characters (except rakshasis), Brahmins, rishis and servants or menials fall in this group.

**Literature** : The literary tradition of a locality consists mainly in written literature, folk songs and songs rendered during performing arts including the folk dances. Already mention was made of Vanchippattu, Patayanippattu etc. while presenting the different traditional performing and ritualistic arts.

The Historical Region of Chengannur has also some written literature to its credit. Sakthi Bhadra,'the author of Acharyachudamani belonged to
Chengannur. Nammalvar who wrote devotional songs also belong to Chengannur. The literary tradition has been dominated by poetry for long, as was the case everywhere else. The region had its recognized early spell of influence of written literature in vernacular from the works of the nearby Niranam poets who imitated the Bhakthi movement in Malayalam literature. Today the Kannassa Smaraka High school in Alamthuruthy is named after Kannassa Panikkar. Much of the poetry written by less known people in different localities in Chengannur followed the Bhakthi tradition even to the relatively recent times.

However, it was for a set of poets from the Historical Region of Chengannur to deviate from the Bhakti tradition and embrace ‘Sringara’ in their poetry. These were the Venmony Poets, who carved their place in the history of Malayalam literature as the authors of the Venmony Prasthanam.

Coming to relatively more recent times comprising the pre-independence and post-independence periods we find that poetry has been still the mainstay of the literary scene of Chengannur region. In the post-independence period an author who acquired some fame in fiction was Babu Chengannur, the novelist. Dr. K.M.George the celebrated critique, essayist, and linguistic expert and teacher in Malayalam hailed from Edayaranmula. In the present times Girish Puliyoor has acquired some name as a poet.

Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panikkar and Puthenkavu Mathen Tharakan and Edayaranmula K.M.Varghese were all poets of Chengannur of yester years. Of these the names of Mooloor is related to the efforts of emancipation of the lower castes. Mooloor came to the Malayalam literary stage in the pre-
independence period caste domination existed on the Malayalam literary scene of those days. (A description of Mooloor is incorporated in this chapter subsequently.)

**A Thekkan Pattu:** One of the Thekkan Pattukal (Southern ballads) known as *Chengannur Kunjathi* is a heroic epic of the ‘Parayas’, a caste which later in the hierarchical caste system that developed in Kerala under the Brahmanical supremacy became a low caste. These songs about *Chengannur Kunjathi* are the heroic anthems circulated among the ‘Parayas’ of Central Travancore. Songs about twenty one Atimar and Eighteen Kalarikar were sung around. Chengannur Kunjathi or Chengannurati was one among these Atimar. Chengannurati was a victorious warrior who fought and defeated the twentyone masters in the eighteen kalaris and destroyed the eighteen forts like Karadiyam Kotta, Athirumpuzha Kotta, Muvika Kotta and was able to attract and win, with his physical charm and strength, many beautiful ladies like Palavam Pennu and Kunnuvam Pennu. He was of such brave exploits that he could be compared with the famous Thacholi Othenan, the epic hero of Vadakkan Pattukal (northern ballads). Chengannurati destroyed Ulavantha Kotta, defeated Ulavanthurati and killed Uluvanthi Pennu and her lover Maltialathi. In short in the songs Chengannur Kunjathi has no limitation. Chengannurati was a brave paraya and killed the dacoits who were holding sway over Kerala and destroyed

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60 Mariamma John (1919- 2008) popularly known as Mariamma Chetathi who rose from the ranks of the toiling people has authored a book ‘Manikkam Pennu’ which is a collection of folk songs native to Central Travancore. This collection contains the ballads on Chengannur Kunjathi.
their forts and towers. The period of Kunjathi is not known. However, it is generally agreed that at some stage ‘Parayas’ were a notable caste in Kerala and had developed certain abilities in literature and warfare. It is not without base that Kunjan Nambiar the celebrated poet in Malayalam of the 18th century mentions ‘Para vidya’ and ‘Para bhasha’. At a time when royal authority was questioned and local administrators were ruling such brave warriors came up all over Kerala. Among the parayas also there were some such heroes. Later epic anthems developed about them. Details about their martial training, ability to go into quick disguise, and worship of ‘Chathan’ are areas to be studied into. So also the circumstances which led to the curious system of ‘Parappedi’ (and Mannappedi) in which, even in the heydays of the caste hierarchy marked with the evil practices of untouchability and unseeability, if a girl of the upper caste happened to be outside the house at stipulated odd hours (mostly from evening to morning) could be taken away by any member of the low castes. Anyway hundreds of songs of this genre help us to understand certain historical details. These songs were bequeathed orally in the language of the Parayas who belonged to the common mass of people. As such the language is very simple. Here and there certain linguistic forms used in that particular community can be found. Very often we cannot find a strict order regarding chanting and lines. What happens in many lines is just ‘finishing off’.

An idea of the poetical narration in these songs can be obtained from an excerpt from the first song. It refers to the birth, childhood and education of Chengannur Kunjathi. In one instance, Karia Panikkan of Kariyam Kotta and Eria Panikkan of Eriavam Kotta (gurus of Kalari) fought disguised as birds.
When Eria Panikkan pecked Kariya Panikkan, the latter fell down. He fell down at the foot of a large jack tree where Chengannur Kunjathi was idly playing. The seven year old Kunjathi applied medicine on the wound and nursed the bird. When the wound healed Kariya Panikkan regained his original form and taught Kunjathi ‘Pathinettu Adavukalum Porukalum’ (eighteen techniques of defence and attack in a fight). These songs help to a great extent in revealing the culture of the locality and the social position enjoyed by the Parayas of Central Travancore in earlier times.

An account of the lives and contributions of some of the eminent persons of Chengannur who are not covered already and on whom information was available is given in the following pages.

**Guru Chengannur Raman Pilla (1886 – 1918)** : was a talented master teacher in the Kathakali world. He was a guru not only in Kathakali but also in all other aspects of life. He got himself properly trained in the art that he pursued with the purity and discipline of an Rishi. He was able to conduct his first public performance at the early age of 14. The unending actor’s life thereafter was brisk until the age of 95 when he died. This great actor, Raman Pilla, was born in Pandanadu, about 5kms west of Chengannur on 26 January 1886. He started his training in Kathakali very early in life following the Gurukula education method. Thakazhi Kesava Panikkar, Ampalapuzha Kunju Krishna Panikkar and Mathur Kunju Pilla Panikkar were his gurus. In 1905, he performed a role from the beginning till the very end. He joined and worked in various karayogas for

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six years. His association with Mahakavi Vallathol was a turning point in his life. In 1926, he became the Kathakali actor of the palace. Pacha, Kathi, Thadi, Kari, Minuk are the five veshas of Kathakali. Guru was able to perform any of these very efficiently. Kathi vesha was his speciality. Kathi vesha generally represents villains like Duryodhan and Ravana. The grandeur, nobility and respectability of his kathi veshas were remarkable. In addition, he had a few other rare capabilities like the simplicity in performing the Mudras, beauty, clarity and form, natural movement of the body, beauty of the final display and the ability to use discretion. He got prizes from the Central and Kerala Sangitha Nataka Academy, in addition to various other certificates and prizes.62 The late Haripad Rama Krishna Pilla, Madavoor Vasudevan Pilla, Chennithala Chellappan Pilla and Mankompu Siva Sanakara Pilla are disciples of Raman Pilla Asan. His natural style of acting was handed over to his disciples also. This great artist passed away on 11 November, 1980.

**Pothen Joseph:** Pothen Joseph was born on 13 March 1892 in a very rich family in Chengannur. The family was noted for its rich contribution to the public life as well. Pothen Joseph was an eminent journalist of India. His column ‘Over a Cup of Tea’, was widely read and is still remembered for its style and assiduity.63 Barrister George Joseph, the freedom fighter, was his elder brother. Dr. P. M. Joseph who made unforgettable contributions to the Indian sports field was his younger brother.

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63 *Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, p.58.
Barrister George Joseph was a leader on par with Motilal Nehru, Annie Besant, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru during the freedom struggle. He was an idealist, who considered the right of the untouchables for temple worship as a matter of human liberty. Hence, naturally his elder brother became Pothen’s master and guide. After elementary education in Kerala, Pothen took his degree from Presidency College, Madras, and graduated in law from Bombay. He started life practising as a lawyer. Later he accepted teaching as a vocation. He taught chemistry in Trinity College, Sri Lanka and Metcy School in Secondarabad. His style of study was constant reading and continuous assessment. He started working as a journalist in Hyderabad Bulletin published from Secondrabad in 1916. Then he became a fullfledged writer. Later, when a vacancy arose in Bombay Chronicle with B. G. Horneman as editor, he accepted the post and worked under the noble training of Horneman. He was intoxicated by journalism. The famous journal ‘Young India’, run by Mahatma Gandhi was then published from Bombay. Barrister George Joseph became its editor. As the non co-operation movement gathered strength, Gandhi and his friends tried to strengthen the agitation through Young India. Pothen found time to support his elder brother in the publication of Young India. But he never entered politics. He was out and out a moderate. He became gradually more and more famous through his association with the two papers. He was very intimate with Gandhiji. Even when Mahadeva Desai was working in Young India, Gandhiji entrusted Pothen to write the editorial. An advice that Gandhiji gave

64 Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, P.58.
when he committed a small mistake was ever remembered by him: “Never experiment anything before examining it and being convinced about it”. The impact of the style of writing of Pothen to invigorate the Home Rule movement and the non-co-operation agitation through the pages of Young India and the protest against the Jalianwalabagh massacre culminated in the expulsion of Horneman, the owner of Bombay Chronicle making it difficult for Pothen to continue with the chronicle. Pothen was then invited to the newspaper ‘Capital’ a daily published from Calcutta giving importance to economic matters. Thus he got the owner of being the first Indian to be an editor in a newspaper owned by ‘Pathevette’, a foreigner, in 1920. After four years, Pothen came back to Bombay Chronicle. He started writing ‘Over a Cup of Tea’ which made him an immortal voice of India. His pen evoked the sharpness of a sword to inculcate in the minds of his readers an intense urge for independence and a fervour for agitation. When Hindustan Times started Pothen became its editor. The team that worked with him then included some of the great journalistic geniuses --- Chaman Lal, Durga Da and Idathatta Sankar. Sankar converted very many ideas of Pothen into pungent customs. Pothen left the newspaper in 1936. Later he joined the Indian Express. After independence, he worked with Deccan Herald till 1958. He spent his last days in Bangalore. He was hit by a passing car while on a morning walk in 1962 and spent his last years immobile till he died on November 2, 1972.

**Dr. E. P. Madhava Bhattathiri**, world renowned scientist of Biochemistry and a teacher at various internationally reputed universities, is a very gentle, pious
and traditional humanist.\textsuperscript{65} This more or less unknown genius was born and is now living in Mayattukara, near Kallissery. He was born on October 22, 1927 at Edavoor Madham, Chengannur, and passed all the higher degrees in Biochemistry. Though he had to face many difficulties while young, they helped him to aim high and score great achievements. After graduation and teaching for a short period, he passed M.Sc. and Ph.D. from Nagpur University. He was associated with the University of Texas, University of Suzechvan, Canada, Royal Society of Science London, Institute of Chemistry, Malaysia and Institute of Biology, U.K. He worked as a professor and Chemical pathology consultant initially in India and then in various countries of Africa. He was able to formulate many authoritative principles in the cholesterol formation research of the human body. He has published about 30 such papers, which are internationally acknowledged.

\textbf{Padmasri P. M. Joseph} who made pioneering contributions to the Indian Physical Education field was the younger brother of Barrister George Joseph, the famous freedom fighter and Pothen Joseph the outstanding journalist.\textsuperscript{66} Born on 23 June 1904, he had his high school education at Mathura, intermediate in Calcutta. and B.Sc. degree from Punjab University. He earned his diploma in Physical Education from YMCA College, Chennai. He had his higher education in Springfield College, Chennai. He got his master’s degree in 1932 and came back to India. He started his official life as lecturer in YMCA College of

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Banker’s Forum Souvenir,1999}, p.49.

Physical Education. He became the Principal of the Government Institute of Physical Education, Mumbai. During 1938-1947 he came back to Chennai and during 1947-1949 once again he went back to Mumbai. During 1949-1957, he worked as the Member Secretary of the committee appointed by the Central Government to reorganize the physical education of the country. He was the Secretary of Maharashtra Government Board of Physical Education. He was the architect of the outstanding document on physical education in India namely National Plan on Physical Education and Recreation. Lakshmi Bai School of Physical Education at Patiala was the outcome of the pioneering activities of Dr. Joseph. It was organised with the aim of having a national institution for physical education. He was the founder Principal of the Institution. In 1967, he retired from the post, came back to his native place in Chengannur and settled down there. The government of India sent Dr. Joseph to Russia in 1956 to study about the physical education in that country. He was in the leadership of the YMCA of Chengannur from 1971 to 1997. He was in the forefront in building the YMCA Auditorium in Chengannur. This sports lover and organizer from Chengannur was honoured by the Central government by awarding him Padmasri. He was honoured by the Lakshmi Bai National Institute of Physical Education by awarding him doctorate in 1998.

**Puthenkavu Mathen Tharakan (1903 to1993)**: Prof. Mathen Tharakan was a genius who secured recognition for Puthenkavu his native place in the cultural map of Kerala. This eminent teacher, poet and lyricist was born on 5

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September 1903 in Pethenkavu. After passing Vidwan (BOL) and M.A. he served as a school teacher for some time. Later he became a lecturer in St. John’s College Palayamcottta in Tamil Nadu. In 1952, he joined Catholicate College at Pathanamthitta as Professor and retired as its Principal. After retirement, he served as UGC professor for some time. He was a member of the Kerala Sahitya Academy from 1960-1964. He was a remarkable lyricist and journalist in his earlier days. During the independence struggle, he was the editor of the newspaper, Bhaje Bharatham, published by M. Mathunni from Chengannur. Mathen Tharakan was the first song composer in Malayalam. The publication of the epic, Viswa Deepam, made him famous. Sankethanangal, Pradhama Pralayam, Herrodhavu, October 31 (Elegy written in the context of the assassination of Indira Gandhi), Vittilum Cheevedum are his works. A big anthology entitled Pethenkavu Mathen Tharakan was also published. Dr. K. M. Tharakan, literary critic, English Professor and former President of Kerala Sahitya Academy and Dr. K. M. Joseph himself a novelist in addition to being a Professor of Medicine, are his sons. The government UP School Pethenkavu was named after him recently.

Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panikkar : Mooloor came on the Malayalam literary scene at a time when there was caste based cultural domination, marginalization and even total suppression. In the oppressive caste system that prevailed the lower castes had to live within its rigidities suffering such inhuman treatments like untouchability and unseeability and deprivations of all kinds. It became highly essential to eradicate such ugly customs. In circumstances of regressive
practices in society great men arise to resist them. The misery suffered by the low caste people, including Ezhavas, was severe. Employment opportunities other than the traditional one was totally absent. The only alternative opening for employment during those days was to become the poorly remembered indigenous doctors or astrologers after learning some Sanskrit or Malayalam. The Ezhavas got a chance to learn Amarakosa and Ashtangahridayam as a result of their embracing Buddhism. It is a gift of history that the Ezhavas got a chance to improve their way of dressing, conversational skills, cooking and making the home fashionable. Sree Narayana Guru, Dr. Palpu, T. K. Madhavan, C. V. Kunju Raman, Kumaranasan and several like them attracted the attention of the people all over Kerala by their outstanding scholarship, poetic quality and social awareness and activities. One such great was the popular poet, Moolor S. Padmanabha Panikkar.

Mooloor was born at Edanadu in Chenganur in 1869. As a boy, Padmanabha Panikkar was denied admission in the local school because he was from a low caste. So his father, Edanadu Mooloor Sankaran Vaidyan himself taught him. He got higher education in Sanskrit from Alapurath Raman Pilla of Malakkara in Aranmula. He learned poetics, dramatics, grammar, and Ashtangahridayam from his great master.

His love for poetry and ability to write poetry was evident even in his childhood. Kerala Varma Valia Koithampuran confirred on him the tittle “Sarasakavi”. The publication of his Kavi Ramayanam was actually a revolutionary reaction to the action by Kodugalloor Kunji Kuttan Thampuran who refused to include some of the eminent low caste poets in his work
Kavibharatham, a book of literary history. Mooloor Padmanabha Panikkar responded by writing Kavi Ramayanam in which all such poets were properly acknowledged. As a result many of his successors like Kumaranasan, Pallath Raman and K. P. Karuppan got the doors of poetry opened and got recognition. He toured the whole of Central Travancore with his Kathakali troop. This was in addition to composing poetry and teaching Sanskrit. He was very active in social and religious activities. His presence was an inspiration not only to the low caste but even to the progressive upper caste. He even had initiated Harijan upliftment movement. Even before the establishment of the SNDP yogam in ME 1078. Mooloor had started his activities against the caste system and establishing organizations for it. Ezhava gatherings were organized in many places. As a result of his efforts many buildings came up for the use of these activities. What he started as an Ezhava samajam in ME 1079 later developed as the Ananda Bhootteswarm temple of Mezhuveli.\textsuperscript{68} The famous Padmanabhodheyam High School and training school were founded by him. His contributions to the community include SNDP branches in several places like Edayaranmula, Karappuram and Kuttanad. Anandasramam in Chenganasseri, Syanasekharam in Kalluppara, Nagampadam temple in Kottayam etc. proclaim the organizational ability of Mooloor Panikkar. Wherever he walked, he gave leadership to establish whole institutions that are beneficial to the whole society. He did so by earning the co-operation of all people irrespective of caste, creed or religion. His polite and cultured language always enabled him to plead with

and convince all authorities and rulers. The freedom for the low caste people to move freely beside the lanes of Aranmula and Chengannur temples was gained with the help of such a style of his functioning. Very many roads were opened under his leadership. His leadership was a great blessing for the SNDP yogam. He was closely associated with Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaranasam. Extravagant and unnecessary customs like talikettu, thirandukuli and pulikudi were eradicated as a result of the effective campaign of Mooloor. He was a member of the Travacore legislature during 1914 – 1929.

Mooloor was encouraged by Malayala Manorama Daily. Kerala Kaumudi also contributed to his social recognition. He himself published a magazine called Prabuddha Simhalan from Mezhuveli. Ulloor S. Padmanabha Iyyar has qualified his speeches in the Praja Sabha as calm, lovable and at the same time pungent and heart rending.\(^{69}\) He died in 1106 after a very useful and eventful life.

**T.K. Joseph:** T.K. Joseph, a versatile scholar, was born in 1884 in a prominent family of Chengannur.\(^{70}\) He had his education from the high school at Chengannur, C.M.S.college Kottayam, Maharajas College, University College, Thiruvanathapuram and St Joseph’s college Thirissnappally. He had started his official career as teacher and had worked in various schools in Haripad, North Parur and Thiruvanathapuram as teacher as well as head master. He retired from service as superintendent of publications from Travancore University. Later he became a member of the editorial board of the journal of

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Indian History published by Travancore University. He took part in the formation of the celebrated Kerala Society in 1927 and was its section secretary for History, Archaeology and Numismatics. He was actual editor of the journal and he gave valuable footnotes to enrich the articles. He died on May 9th 1963. By practice and contributions he has been recognized as a historian.