The social condition of South Travancore before independence presented a gloomy picture. The people suffered for want of political freedom and free social movements. Caste barriers were numerous among the Hindus who were guided by customs, conventions and superstitions.¹ The society was caste ridden where the high castes dominated the low castes. This Caste difference was responsible for social and economic problems in South Travancore.²

In South Travancore social evils like slavery, untouchability, and unseeability prevailed in the society. Some of the low castes like the pulayas—Pulayas and parayas—Parayas were treated as slaves. The low caste women were not allowed to wear upper clothes. Even services in Hindu temples and using of public wells and roads were denied to them.³ The Hindu society was divided into two main sections—the high castes and the low castes. The Tamil Brahmins, the Malayala Brahmins better known as Nambuthiris, the Kshatriyas, the Nair—Nayars and the Tamil Vellalas were classed as high castes whereas the Tiayas or Ilavar, the Nadars, the

Pulayas, the Parayas and some other low castes were classed as low castes.\textsuperscript{4} The rigidity of the caste system was too intense that there were a large number of people who were untouchables and unseeables in that society.\textsuperscript{5}

**Brahmins**

The term Brahmin is derived from Brahma the Creator from whose mouth the Brahmins were said to have sprung and hence their caste name. They were also termed Dvijas and Bhumi-devas meaning the twice-born and the lords of the earth respectively.\textsuperscript{6} The Brahmins were divided into two major classes namely the Nampoori Nambuthiri and the Potti, the former representing what is known as the true Malabar Brahmin and the latter Brahmins of Tulu extraction who had taken to Malabar customs and manners.\textsuperscript{7}

The Brahmins considered themselves at the top and pretended asserted to be superior to all other communities. They devoted themselves exclusively to religion and later became great patrons of learning and fine arts.\textsuperscript{8} Brahmins alone had the authority to interpret the sacred law which was the basis of all the other laws of the land and to pronounce

\textsuperscript{7} *Kerala Society Papers*, Volume II, Series 9, Trivandrum, November 1931, Pp.186.
Law was administered in the most discriminating manner. They followed rigid caste observances and occupied a position in society as God-compellers. Almost every temple of importance had a synod of wardens who were all Brahmans. Their wants in life were specially met both by the society and the state. Their persons were holy, their movements ‘procession’, and their meal, ‘nectar’. They regarded themselves holy persons and felt that their movements on roads was procession. They were also divided into subcastes. Well-versed in Sanskrit, the Vedas and the Sastras, they used to be virtual dictators in regard to all religious practices and rites of the Hindus as well as the Hindu temples.

The kings of Travancore regarded it their sacred duty to please the Brahmans and to rule the country in accordance with the advice of the Brahmin scholars. The kings spent large sums of money for the support and comfort of the Brahmans. There were state run, free inns for feeding Brahmans called as oottupurahs and entertainment

---

at the expense of the state. During 1860 the Government of Travancore spent three lakhs of rupees annually for maintaining these oottuperahs. Thus the Brahmin community enjoyed all powers and privileges in the society.

Nairs

Next to the Brahmins, the Nairs were the most powerful and influential community in South Travancore. They formed one of the prominent communities. Nairs, once a martial race, had served in the militia of the land for centuries before the British rule. The word ‘Nayar’ is said to be a corrupted form of the word ‘Nayakar’ which means protector. They were not a caste but a community. The Nairs were considered Sudras by Brahmins, but their social status was higher than that of the Sudras of many other parts of India.

In 1901 census 116 sub-castes were brought under Nayar. In the census of 1931, two sub-castes of Chakkala and Maran were given in brackets and generally the name ‘Nayar’ was given importance. There

---

18 File No. 192., *pp.* 1, General Section.
21 Kerala Society Papers, *op.cit.*, *Pp.* 188.
were eighteen sects among them. The Nayars were the principal owners of land and they possessed slaves. Further they occupied most of the offices of the Government.

Since the system of standing armies disappeared the feudal military organisation called ‘Nair Militia’ came into existence. The Nair Brigade and Bodyguard existed in Travancore and the British Army Clothing Department supplied clothing for them. During 1881 over Rs. 27,700 was spent for their clothing. The Nayar Brigade Act of 1904 proved the existence of a Nair Army in the Travancore state forces. Even though the Nair Army were Sudras in the social hierarchy, they were granted a privileged status by the Brahmins and the Brahmins exploited the Nayars.

The Nairs were prohibited from learning Sanskrit so that all the learned professions came to be monopolised by the Brahmins. The Namputiri Brahmins could marry Nayar women. Under certain circumstances they also interdined with the Nayars. As the Nair Nayars were attached to the land, they got a kind of primacy in

---

23 Kerala Society Papers, Vol. II, Series 9, Trivandrum, 1932, Pp. 188.
24 Agur, C.M., Church History of Travancore, New Delhi, 1990, Pp. 418.
society. Moreover they were the principal slave-owners of the country.\textsuperscript{30} The majority of them had land holdings of their own, and a considerable number were chieftains owning large estates.\textsuperscript{31} A large standing army with many NayarsNairs was maintained.\textsuperscript{32} They numerically dominated the Government–government service. The avarna–lower caste Hindus were expected to accept the ritual superiority of the NayarsNairs.\textsuperscript{33} There However, there was a great paucity of NairNayarsNairs on the benches of the Higher Courts.\textsuperscript{34}

The NayarsNairs followed the Marumakkathayam marumakkathayammatriarchal system of inheritance known as marumakkathayam.\textsuperscript{35} The Travancore Krishnavake Marumakkathayam Act of 1940 clearly states about the Marumakkathayam–marumakkathayam system followed by the NayarsNairs.\textsuperscript{36} “Marumakkathayam Marumakkathayam means the system of inheritance in which descent is traced in the female line.\textsuperscript{37} The Cochin NairNayarNair Act (1937-38) made the wives and children of a husband or father the legal heirs to the property and sounded the death knell it was the first step in the abolition of

\textsuperscript{30} Samuel Mateer, Native Life in Travancore, op.cit., \textsuperscript{PP}302.
\textsuperscript{31} Emily Gilchrist Hatch, op.cit., \textsuperscript{PP} 23.
\textsuperscript{32} Subramamanya Aiyar, N., Census of India 1901, Volume Vol. XXVI, Travancore part I Report, 1903, \textsuperscript{PP} 326.
\textsuperscript{33} Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of NayarNair Dominance Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, Trivandrum, 1976, \textsuperscript{PP} 268.
\textsuperscript{34} Travancore Administration Report of 1868-1869, Trivandrum, 1970, \textsuperscript{PP} 15.
\textsuperscript{35} File No. 192, [Confidential] \textsuperscript{PP} 1, Political Department.
\textsuperscript{36} The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore, Vol. XII, Trivandrum, 1943, \textsuperscript{PP} 841.
\textsuperscript{37} File No. 41/42 (General) dated 27–2 February 1942, Legislative Department.
Marumakkathayam, With the passage of the Hindu Succession Act, which came into force in 1956, Hindu men and women in all parts of the country were given equal right to inherit property and monogamy had also become compulsory for all Hindus. The Act applied to erstwhile Marumakkathayam communities of South Travancore as well.  

Educated Nairs were increasingly admitted to the public services since the Malayali Memorial. The ‘Malayali Memorial’ or The ‘Travancore Memorial’ was signed by over 10,000 citizens and submitted to the Maharaja Sri Mulam Thirunal. Through this Memorial the citizens of Travancore requested the king to give representation in the Government and inclusion in Government services. As a result of their efforts through this Memorial educated Nairs were increasingly admitted to the public services.

When the Constitutional Reforms of 1932 was introduced the rift between these communities and the Nairs were widened. So long as the franchise was for electing members to the Sri Mulam Thirunal Assembly and Sri Chithra Thirunal Council was based on property qualification, the Nairs would continue to have majority in

---

40 Sreedhara Menon, A., op. cit., p. 92.
the legislature, for they constituted the largest number of land tax payers in
the state.\textsuperscript{39} The NairNayarsNairs of NanchiNad had formed the National
Council of Pidakakars who exercised more authority over the southern
districts than the Government itself. This National Council of Southern
NairNayarsNairs met once a year at Suchindram in December, at the time of
the Car Festival.\textsuperscript{40,41} The council consisted of representatives of all the
important villages and deliberated on the deeper matters concerning the
privileges of their caste and religion.\textsuperscript{41} There were instances in which their
council inflicted even capital punishment. They were a terror to the people
and even the Rajah feared the Council.

The NairNayarsNairs realised that the unity and solidarity of the
organisations of the Christians supplied their community with additional
strength. They therefore tried to adopt the means followed by the Christians
in building up organisations and for attaining economic prosperity. As a
result, of this the NairNayarsNairs built up their respective organisation
namely the NairNayarNair Service Society.\textsuperscript{42} Through this society they
worked for the development of the community. Since they held high posts
in the Government services their position in society was higher when
compared with lower classes.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., Pp. 16.
\textsuperscript{40} Yesudas, R.N., \textit{A Peoples Revolt in Travancore}, op.cit., Pp. 16.
\textsuperscript{41} Yesudas, R.N., op.cit., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
Nadars

Nadars form one of the major communities in South Travancore. The people of this community had been remarkably successful in agriculture and business.\textsuperscript{43} The Nadars formed the largest single Tamil group and settled predominantly in the Vilavancode, Kalkulam and Agastheeswaram Agasthiswaram taluks.\textsuperscript{44}

Formerly the Nadars were known as SCannars, a name the community disliked. The Nadars were called Nadalvars in inscriptions, which show that they were once great land landlords. They described themselves in documents as ‘Valamkai Uyarkonta Iravikula Kshadtriyar’ meaning Kshatriyas of Solar race belonging to the right hand faction. They followed makkathayam patriarchal law of inheritance or makkathayam. A large section of the community embraced Christianity. According to the census of 1931 the total Nadar population Hindu and Christian together stood at 4,02,555.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Gopalakrishnan,M., Kanyakumari District Gazetteer, \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 117.
Besides toddy drawing from palmyra palm many of them were agriculturists or landowners and were also engaged in trade. The rulers imposed poll tax on them to meet military expenditure and were pressurized to render uliyam services to the Government. Many civil disabilities were also imposed on them. On account of untouchability, they were refused entrance to temples and courts. They were not allowed to use public roads and wells, to wear sandals, jewels, golden ornament or fine cloth, to build larger and more convenient houses, to carry water jugs on the hip, to sit on cots or to have entry to the places of worship.

The number of Hindu Nadars decreased considerably as a result of conversion to Christianity. Missionary work among the Nadar class was remarkably successful. Besides the assistance given by the missionaries they formed their own associations by which they worked for their own development. A new association was formed by the Nadars of Neyyatinkara and registered in 1895 under the title of Keraleeya Nadar Samajam.

The most important advance in education among the Hindu Nadars came with the founding of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam in 1910. From its inception education became one of its primary concerns. Among the early

---

49 Ibid.
objects of the Sangam was that of providing financial aid to needy students. In 1921 the first loan scholarship was awarded. The secretary of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam forwarded to the Government on 11 March 1921 a memorial of the Sangam praying that the community should be known in the census and other Government records by its proper name of Nadar Kshatriyas and that the caste occupation of the community should be entered as agriculture and trade.

G.T Boag, Superintendent of Census operations, Madras, accepted the delegation from the Sangam and agreed to instruct all census enumerators to accept Nadar Kshatriya as the community’s name. Seeking legal recognition of Boag’s assurance the Sangam reiterated its plea in a memorandum to the Governor of Madras.

On 8 April 1921, a Government order was issued, informing the petitioners “that the procedure followed at the recent census was to leave every one to return to his caste name as he chose”. The order further indicated the Government’s decision “to discontinue the tabulation of the

---

53 Ibid.
54 File No. A 713, (General Section), 1921. Directorate of Archives, Trivandrum.
56 To His Excellency the Governor of Fort St. George in Council, the Humble Memorial Presented by the Nadar Mahajana Sangam, Madurai, 1921.
traditional occupation of the particular castes and to record only the actual occupation by which each person lived”. 57

In compliance with the order, Boag in the Madras Census Report stated that the Government had decided to accept the claim of the Nadars that their traditional occupation was not toddy-drawing but they were by tradition and inheritance lords of the soil and that toddy-drawing was the occupation only of a comparatively few degenerate members of the caste. 58

Following the Government’s order with regard to the census, the Council of the Sangam resolved “to request the Government to adopt the term ‘Nadar Ksatriya’ in place of ‘Shanars’ for use in all Government records”. 59 In July a Government order was issued to the effect that, “the term ‘Nadar’ should in future be adopted in place of ‘Shanar’ in all official documents”. 60 Nadars, once one of the most economically depressed communities, became one of the most economically and politically successful communities in South Travancore. 61

The Vellalas

---

57 Government of Madras Law (General Department, G. O. No. 56, dated 8 April 1921.
59 Ibid.
60 Government of Madras, Law (General Department, G.O.No.78, dated 7 July 1921).
The Vellalas were the greatest farmer caste found in South Travancore. They were an amalgam and retained the combined characteristics of pondy Pondy Vellalas and Malabar Nair Nayars. The taluks of Thovalai and Agastiswaram Agasthiswaram which constituted the region of Nanjichilnad were their chief habitat of Vellalas. The Travancore Vellalas are said to be immigrants from Tirunelvelly and Madurai as the Cochin Vellalas were from Coimbatore and Salem.\(^{62}\)

The word Vellalar is derived from vellanmai (Vellam vellam - water, anmai - management) meaning cultivation, tillage.\(^{63}\) According to the Census Report of 1881 the number of Vellalas stood at 41,109 and were found in all the taluks of South Travancore. The highest number was 10,659 found in the taluk of Agasthiswaram; 8,998 in Thovalay Thovalai; (3,702 in Shencotta) and 1670 in Eraniel.\(^{64}\) The Nanjichilnad Vellalas were patronised by the kings and were given the chieftainship of villages. One of the important principles they adopted was the marumakkathayam rule of inheritance. However, the patrilineal patriarchy rule of inheritance later came into existence.\(^{65}\)

---


\(^{64}\) Nagamaiya, V., *Report on the Census of Travancore* 17 February 1881 A.D. – 7 Mausy 1056 M.E. Along with the Imperial Census of India, Trivandrum 1884, pp. 205.

They absorbed and assimilated some of the customs of the Nairs. The men, for instance, began to wear the tuft of hair in front, while the women took to white clothes, like Nair women. These differentiated the men on the other side, who wore tuft on the back and the women who wore only colour clothes while their husbands were alive.\textsuperscript{66} They spoke Tamil and used the Tamil script for writing, reading and learning. Some of them spoke Malayalam also.\textsuperscript{67} Agriculture was their chief occupation though they often proved to be good government servants, accountants and tradesmen.\textsuperscript{68} Landless people in the rural areas worked as agricultural and plantation labourers and their wages were paid in cash.\textsuperscript{69}

\textbf{Ezhavas}

\textsuperscript{66} Ramanatha Aiyar, S., \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 68.
\textsuperscript{67} Singh, K.S., \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 1643.
\textsuperscript{69} Singh, K.S., \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 1644.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, Pp. 1646.
The Ezhavas of Travancore were of mixed lineage. They had a high spirit of reform and revolution. A large number of them were engaged in cultivation and the tapping of coconut trees. The Ezhavas were a thrifty, industrious and pushing community who seemed to have made up their mind to win in the race for social, industrial and intellectual advancement. They were to some extent handicapped with social disabilities.

Their traditional occupation was to rear coconut trees and to make toddy and to distil arrack. Many of them were agriculturists and some involved in trade. There were also boatmen and weavers. Their women were as much earning members of the family as their men. Their women were dexterous in the preparation of the coir fibre and the manufacture of the coir ropes. They had taken to the study of Sanskrit and a good number of Sanskrit scholars adorned the caste. Among them there were teachers, astrologers, and doctors who went by the names of Asans, Jyolsians and Vydyans. There were officers and poets among them. Ezhavas were employed by some of the Travancore kings as soldiers.

Ezhavas were represented in all the Departments except the Devaswom Department in the state. During the year 1945 their economic position was quite sound and appreciably far superior to that of the other

---

75 Ibid.
backward communities such as the Parayas, Pulayas and Kuravas.\textsuperscript{76} The Ezha\textsuperscript{2}vas organised a registered association called Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sabha of over thousand members with the object of working for the religious, social, educational and industrial advancement of the caste.\textsuperscript{77}

The right to enter into Hindu temples for worship was the longstanding demand of the Ezha\textsuperscript{2}vas and the right to equality was also insisted on by them. The Temple Entry Proclamation Endowment scholarships were distributed among the Ezhava students.\textsuperscript{78}

**Pariahs**

The Pariahs formed one of the aboriginal tribe, ancient inhabitants of South Travancore. They were found in all parts of South Travancore.\textsuperscript{79} They were found in large numbers in Thovalai, Agasthswaram and Eraniel taluks. Dr. Caldwell derives the word pariah from parai or drum as the caste furnished the drummers especially at funerals. When state criminals were taken to the gallows for execution in ancient days, the Pariah used to beat the drum.\textsuperscript{80} They were also called to act as drummers at marriages, funerals and village festivals. Besides this, they practiced weaving of grass mats and other menial works such as cobblerly.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{76} Confidential File No. 114/45, dated 6-1 January 1945, Confidential Department.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 446.

\textsuperscript{78} Confidential File No. 114/45, dated 6-1 January 1945, Confidential Department.

\textsuperscript{79} Velu Pillai, T.K., op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 597.

\textsuperscript{80} Nagam Aiya, V., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 404.

\textsuperscript{81} Krishna Iyer, L.A., Travancore Tribes and Castes, Trivandrum, 1941, p. 83.
The Parayas of Thovalai, Agasthiswaram and Kalkulam were known as Sambavar. They formed the backbone of agriculture in NanjilnadNanchilnad. Their language was Tamil.\textsuperscript{82} There were also weavers, cobblers and weavers of grass mats among them.\textsuperscript{83} They lived beyond the ordinary village limits of the higher castes and had separate wells and tanks for their exclusive use. They lived in poverty and ignorance. Since the Parayas were treated as untouchables many of them were converted to Christianity. The large number of conversions of this caste was due to the missionaries of London Missionary Society, the Lutheran Mission and the Salvation Army.\textsuperscript{84}

As a result of the labours of the Sambavar Elevation Committee set up by Government in 1923, a large number of wells were dug and several roads to Sambavar hamlets were constructed in Thovalai, Agarteesvaram, Agasthiswaram and Kalkulam taluks. They also formed their own association namely, The Travancore Sambavar Mahajana Samajam. This Samajam held a meeting on 3\textsuperscript{rd} July\textsuperscript{3}, 1925 at Trivandum. The resolutions passed at the meeting were informed to the Dewan Maurice and the Chief Secretary to the Government. Construction of approach roads, wells, fees concession and scholarships for Sambavar students, appointments in Government services and three acres of puduval or poramboke

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., Pp. 88.  
\textsuperscript{83} Krishna Iyer, L.A., \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 84.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., Pp. 82-83.
lands per Sambavar family in Edanad and NanjilnadNanchilnad were
demands in the resolutions passed.  

A special meeting was organised by this Samajam on 27 July 1947 at Vadasery, Nagercoil under the presidency of A.S. Ramakrishnan. The meeting authorised Messrs. A.S. Ramakrishna, President of Sambavar Mahajana Sangham and V.M. Jesudhas, Editor “Then Thilakam”, Nagercoil to wait on His Excellency the Dewan and to submit represent about the needs and grievances of the Sambavar community.

Pulayas

The Pulayas occupied a very low rank in the social scale. They were considered as a polluting tribe; even other polluting castes and tribes were supposed to be polluted by them. They stood at a distance of ninety feet from Brahmins and sixty four feet from the Nayars Nairs. A Pulaya could not view the Paraya on an equal footing but the latter thought that he was superior to the Pulaya.

---

85 P.W.D. Dis File No.1155/26, dated 28 August 1926.
86 D. Dis. 501/47/5 dated, 10 April 1947, General Department.
Though slavery was abolished in 1855, the Pulayas were still attached to the land. They were paid in kind.\cite{Subramaniya Aiyar} They were satisfied with two and a half measures of paddy doled out to them as daily wages. They took part in every kind of agricultural works like fencing, ploughing, manuring, sowing, weeding, transplanting, reaping, and pumping out water etc. They caught fish by means of basket trap.\cite{Krishna Iyer} Ayyankali, a native of Venganur in Neyyatinkara worked for the economic emancipation of the Pulayas.\cite{Ibid.} The Christian missionaries also worked for the welfare of the Pulayas.

**Other Communities**

The Vannans were washermen. The name Vannan is, Mr. H. A. Stuart writes, “derived from Vannam, beauty”.\cite{Edgar Thurston} Having to purify all the filthy linen of the villagers, they were naturally regarded as a low unclean class of Sudras, and were always poor. In social standing the Vannans were placed next below the barbers. They were fish-eaters and drank liquor. The dead were burned or buried.\cite{Ibid.}

The Kudumi Saliyars were also known as the Kudumba Saliyar in local areas. Literally, the word Kudumi means ‘tuft’ and Saliyar means

---

\cite{Subramaniya Aiyar, Census of India- 1901, Volume Vol. XXVI, 1903, Pp.64.}
\cite{Krishna Iyer, L.A., op.cit., Pp.194.}
\cite{Ibid., Pp.194.}
\cite{Edgar Thurston, C.I.E., op.cit., Pp.315.}
\cite{Ibid., Pp.316.}
‘weavers’ while the word Kudumba means family.\textsuperscript{94} Kudumi Saliyar lived in Vadasery near Nagercoil town in South Travancore. They were also found in Agasthiswaram and Kalkulam taluks. Some of them had taken to agriculture and trade also. They were generally makkathayis.\textsuperscript{95} They conversed in Tamil among themselves and with others. They used Saliyar as their community name for official purposes.\textsuperscript{96} Weaving was the traditional craft of the Kudumi Saliyar. They were experts in weaving cotton dhotis, towels, saris and lungis. The community has an oral tradition.\textsuperscript{97}

Fishermen community lived in the coastal areas of South Travancore. Fishing was their main occupation. There were two subcastes among them namely Paravar and Mukkuvar. The term ‘Mukkuvan’ is believed to be a corruption of ‘Mukkuvar’ meaning a possessor of Muktham or pearl, and indicates that Mukkuvans were originally engaged in pearl fishing. They were found along the shores of the sea and backwaters. Marriage of girls took place before or after puberty and divorce was allowed. They followed a mixed system of makkathayam and marumakkathayam.\textsuperscript{98}

Pallans were found in South Travancore and in the High Range and were supposed to have come from the Tamil districts of the Madras

\textsuperscript{94} Singh, K.S., \textit{op.cit.}, \textsuperscript{Pp.} 1282.
\textsuperscript{95} Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Census of India 1931}, \textit{op.cit.}, \textsuperscript{Pp.} 377.
\textsuperscript{96} Singh, K.S., \textit{op.cit.}, \textsuperscript{Pp.} 1283.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Ibid}, \textsuperscript{Pp.} 1285.
\textsuperscript{98} Kunjan Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, \textsuperscript{Pp.} 384.
Presidency. They were mainly agricultural labourers, but some were also weavers, especially of a coarse kind of cloth. They were followed patriarchal system makkathayis. Panan, a small community in Travancore, consisted of Tamil and Malayali sections. They were tailors by occupation and were found chiefly in Kottar. They trace their descent from the Yalpanars (singers) whose original home was Yalpana (Jaffna).  

The Kuravars belonged to a race which bears resemblance to the Veddars or hill-men. They were divided into several groups some of which were the Kunta Kurava, the Pandi Kurava and the Kakka Kurava. The Kurta kurava, the most important among the class resembled the Nayars in several respects. They followed the Marumakkathayam system of inheritance. They were found in certain parts of South Travancore. They buried their dead and were considered extremely low in the social scale. Primary education had not made any progress among them. In those days barely four in a thousand could read and write.

Kanis are a class of hill tribes living in the mountains of South Travancore. The forest dwellers called Kanis or Kanickars, meaning land proprietors were found in Nedumangad in Vilavancode Taluk, Travancore.

---

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
The forests which they inhabited formed a long chain of wooden hills. These were intersected by numerous water courses, the most notable of which are the Paraliyar, the Kodhayar, the Vamanapuram and the Kallada rivers. The Kanis were all a set of quiet, simple and inoffensive folks who carried on migratory cultivation and in certain seasons of the year lived mainly by hunting and upon natural forest produce. The hills of South Travancore had evergreen forests yielding plenty of fruits and tubes and streamlets with abundance of fish which were conducive for the livelihood of the tribals.

Kanis lived in separate villages. When it was necessary to call the leaders of the several villages together in a Council, a messenger carried a certain knot of creeper fibres to a village and this knot was passed on from village to village until all the members gathered. This tribe went periodically every few years to see the Maharaja. They bore gifts of jungle produce, notably the wild bamboo banana, hill paddy seed and bamboo joints filled with honey. The Maharajas always received them
kindly accepting the offerings and gave them in return gifts of clothing, tobacco and salt.\textsuperscript{109}

Kanis used some weapons for agriculture and hunting. The digging stick was used to collect wild roots and tubers. It was made of hard wood and provided with a sharp point.\textsuperscript{110} Kanis made fire by means of a hand-drill and also by the “flint and steel method” which they called “chikku mukki”.\textsuperscript{111}

They lived in unison with nature, by cultivating crops, collecting forest produce, hunting small birds and animals and gathering food in the wild. They consumed fruits, tubers, nuts, greens, and seeds gathered from the wild. Rice was their primary staple food. They cultivated tapioca, sweet potato, plantains, and tubers for their food. They consumed all kinds of fresh water fishes in hill streams, rivers, lakes and ponds. They ate turtles, snails and crabs available in the wild.\textsuperscript{112}

\textbf{Social Evils}


\textsuperscript{110} Travancore Information and Listener, March 1949, Pp. 29.

\textsuperscript{111} Gopalakrishnan. M., op.cit., Pp. 121.

\textsuperscript{112} The New Indian Express dated, 25 February, 2005.
In South Travancore social evils like untouchability and unseeability prevailed in the Society. Due to the efforts of the missionaries and social organizations social evils were abolished to a certain extent.

Untouchability

Untouchability was one of the serious and complex problems of the social system. Untouchability was practised among the people of South Travancore as in other parts of Travancore. As the Brahmins claimed superiority over the other inhabitants they pretended to be demi gods on earth. If a Brahmin touched a Sudra he could enter his house only after taking bath. If he touched a Pulayan, he had to take his bath at once and change the Brahmanical thread. If a Nayar Nair was polluted by a Pulayan touch, he had to take bath to purify himself.

Untouchability was practised even among the oppressed classes. If an Ezhava was touched by a Harijan Dalit, the former had to take bath. Thus the low castes suffered a lot and their lives were miserable. To add to the cup of misery the low castes were treated as unapproachables. Caste rules imposed restriction on the low castes to approach the high castes.

---

114 Yesu Dhas, Peoples Revolt in Travancore, op.cit., p.32.
115 Ibid.
They had to keep a stipulated distance from the high castes. The treatment the untouchables received at the hands of the caste Hindus from time immemorial made them live in perpetual fear and poverty.

**Unseeability**

Unseeability was yet another evil that existed in the society. The high castes believed that the high castes should not see the low castes when they were expected to be especially pure. The cruelties committed by the upper class were such that the lower castes feared like chickens at the sight of the kite. When nobles came out in the public roads an attendant of theirs preceded them shouting ‘Po’ ‘Po’ which meant ‘go away’.

The low castes were prevented from conducting marriage processions and living in tiled houses and the high castes took away the fruits and vegetables cultivated by the low castes. The low castes were compelled to supply wood to the roofing of the Government buildings.

---

116 Mateer gives 36 paces as the distance a Shanan must keep from a Brahmin, and 96 paces as the distance for a Pulayan from a *Nayar*. A Shanan must keep a distance of 12 paces and a Pulayan 66 paces. (Samnel Mateer, *op.cit.*, Pp.30.)

117 According to Wilson a *Nayar* must not come within 3 feet of a Nambudiri Brahmin an Illavan or Shanan within 24 paces and a Pulayan or other untouchable within 36 paces.

118 The Purada Vannan was considered to be the unseeable caste. They had to work between midnight and day break and were forbidden to come out during date time. (Hutton, J.H., *Caste in India*, Cambridge, 1946, Pp. 42.)


Distance pollution or thendal existed in all public roads, public wells, satrams, and schools etc.\(^\text{121}\)

Even in 1936 the Free inns meant for pilgrims called as Satrams satraoms at Thovalai, Bhuthapandi, Eraniel, Padmanabhapuram, Nedumanged, Thirupathisaram, Suchindram, Cape Comorin, Thiruvattar in South Travancore which were under the Maramath Department were not thrown open to people of all classes and creeds.\(^\text{122}\) Not only this, but also the non-caste Hindus were not allowed inside schools or to go near temples. The men were allowed to wear their dhotis only up to their knees. Women were not allowed to take even drinking water from their wells. They Low castes were prohibited to use umbrellas and chappals in the common streets.\(^\text{123}\)

Even after the Temple Entry Proclamation, Ezhava converts were not allowed to enter prohibited roads and that news was published in newspapers. They were not allowed to enter satrams also.\(^\text{124}\) In practice roads, wells, schools and satrams satraoms already opened to other

---

\(^{121}\) Confidential Section, File No: 328/1936—(Confidential Section) Directorate of Archives, Trivandrum.

\(^{122}\) Confidential Section, File No: 1365/1936, p. 53. (Confidential Section) Directorate of Archives, Trivandrum. Page 53.


\(^{124}\) File No: 1365/1936 (Confidential Section), Letter from Private Secretary to His Highness Maharaja of Travancore dated 16 May 1936.
The people of other religions were not opened to Hindu depressed classes.  

Politically also the low castes were suppressed. The Nair-Nayar-Nairs continued to have majority in the legislature by virtue of their birth and land tax that they paid to the Government. As the ruling class belonged to their community, they obtained appointments in the Government services. This irritated the low castes and they made frequent complaints and demanded representation in proportion to their numerical strength, but this did not bear fruit.

Thus the social condition of South Travancore was far from satisfactory. The long sufferings of the people due to oppression were ready to receive any creed that taught freedom and found ways and means to free them from the clutches of the high castes. The efforts of the Christian missionaries and the European officers who were at the helm of affairs at Travancore led to social changes in South Travancore. The Government also had taken steps for the social liberation of the people.

Social reform movements

125 Ibid., Copy of telegram dated 18 May 1936 from the Private Secretary to His Highness the Maharaja.
126 Ramakrishnan Nair, R., Constitutional Experiments in Kerala, Trivandrum, 1964, Pp. 16.
127 Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nair-Nair Dominance Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, New Delhi, Pp. 269.
In South Travancore social evils like slavery, untouchability and unseeability prevailed in the society. The people of the low castes were oppressed and suppressed by the high castes. Some of the low castes like the Pulayas and Parayas were treated as slaves. Due to the steps taken by the missionaries and the co-operation of the British officials, the Government of Travancore passed some rules and regulations for the abolition of slavery, the right of women to wear upper cloth and opening temples for all classes of people.

**Abolition of slavery**

Slavery was officially recognised in Travancore so also in South Travancore. The government, the temples, churches and the rich high caste landlords owned slaves. Slavery in Travancore became hereditary unlike in other parts of India where it existed. Once born to a slave family one remained a slave all through life passing down this ignominy to his or her posterity. The masters considered the slaves as their property and their position was less than that of animals.

The missionaries drew the attention of the public as well as the authorities to this social evil. The memorandum which they submitted in 1847 was the first of its kind, in which lamentable plight of the slaves was

---

comprehensively portrayed. Marthandavarma_Uttaram_Uthram_Thirunal Marthandavarma—(1847-1860) issued a proclamation in 1853 for the abolition of slavery in Travancore. Despite the proclamation, dealing with slaves continued. In order to make the matters clear the Government arranged many discussions.130

The Government appointed a committee of officials and non-officials with Dewan Bahadur A. Govinda Pillai, a judge of the High Court, as its President. The Committee visited various parts of the state, examined a large number of witnesses and submitted a report recommending reform in the law. Hence by the Royal Proclamation of 24 June 1855 slavery was abolished.131

The emancipation did not introduce any economic change because agricultural lands were the monopoly of the high castes. First the slaves owned by the government were made free, and then gradually private slavery gave way to the stringent rules passed as to the treatment of the slaves.132 The slaves had to depend on their masters for their livelihood. Many of them found it extremely difficult to lead a free life. Even in 1883 it was reported that “though nominally allowed to possess property, they possessed none”.133

131 Shungra Warrier’s Letter to the President, 14 August 1855.
133 Somarajan, C.N., Sivadasan, S., Civic Rights Movement in Travancore, Kollam, 1995,
The missionaries tried to impart education to the slave children. Mrs. Mault and her successors taught little slave girls to make lace, and by their earnings to purchase their freedom.\footnote{Hacker, I.H., \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 43.} The enrolment of these slave children to the schools had a very interesting beginning. The school master of Ponnari close to the Manalicaud Church had admitted a slave boy in the school. When Mead the Superintending Missionary of Neyyoor District went through the monthly attendance list he noticed this new name. He made enquiries and found out that the name belonged to a slave boy.\footnote{Ibid.}

Mead announced that every teacher would be given one fanam (a silver coin equivalent to 1/7 of a Travancore rupee) in addition to his monthly salary for every slave boy he brought to school and 1½ fanams for every slave girl. Within a year more than 1,000 slave children were collected into the school in the Neyyoor District.\footnote{Joy Gnana Dason, \textit{op.cit.}, Pp. 77.} Mead visited these schools, watched with excitement their progress and enhanced the salary of the catechists who took the trouble to bring such children to school.\footnote{Ibid.}

Thus slavery was abolished in South Travancore due to the efforts of the missionaries. After their emancipation also through education their
living conditions were improved and in course of time slavery completely vanished from the society.

Upper Cloth Movement

The Shanars presently known as Nadars of South Travancore had played a very significant role in developing social awareness among Travancoreans in general.\(^\text{138}\) The most problematic issue was the question of Shanar women being prevented from using upper cloth against their culture. Before the advent of protestant missionaries in South Travancore, women of the lower castes were prohibited from not in the habit of covering their bosoms when they appeared before men as a symbol of respect to those of higher status.\(^\text{139}\) However the Nadars who are of Tamil origin were not used to that custom. When the upper castes tried to force them to adopt to the culture of Travancore, they protested. The protestant missionaries took up the issue and requested the Government to eradicate this social evil.

It had become a people's movement. There were three phases in the “Upper Cloth Riots” namely the First Upper Cloth Riot (1822), the Second Upper Cloth Riot (1828-29) and the Third Upper Cloth Riot (1858-1859).\(^\text{140}\)

\(^{139}\) C.B. Morison's remarks on the objections raised by Mead, Political Consultations Sl. No. 193.
\(^{140}\) Immanuel, I., op.cit., Pp. 306.
The revolts of 1822 and 1828 sowed the seeds of the revolt of 1858-59 which was the last phase of the struggle. In the 1850’s social tension between the Shanars and Nayar-Nairs further increased, partly in consequence of the growing adoption of the upper cloth by resistance of the Shanar women to fall in line with the expectation of the upper castes. In spite of the prohibition of Shanar women wearing upper cloth in public the number of women wearing it went on increasing.

Though the proclamation of 1829 had permitted them to wear a sort of jacket or Kuppayan, the Sudras the Nairs wanted to see the Shanar women depart from their culture and walking in on the streets with uncovered breasts. They were compelled to supply coconut leaves as fodder for elephants and writing cadjans for the use of Government. The officers also sent the Desakavalkar to their abodes and molested them in various ways. That aroused much of the people’s opposition.

141 Dick Kooiman, op.cit., p.151.
144 Ibid.
Soon violence broke out and affected a wider area and Nagercoil was in the thick of the trouble. The Shanar men, especially Christians among them were beaten, imprisoned or forced to take refuge in neighbouring Tirunelveli. Their houses were plundered and destroyed, churches and schools burnt and books torn to pieces. The mode of procedure to obtain justice was nothing less than a studied bambooying of the complainant and tantamount to a shielding of the matter altogether.

Hence Baylis, the missionary at Neyyoor, wrote to the Resident about the contemptuous manner in which the Shanar women were treated and ever assaulted by the Sudras. But the Resident suspected the missionaries of attempting to upset the political arrangement as visualized in the proclamation, claiming privileges not warranted by law and usage.

In one mission district, 400 or 500 jackets were made by the girls in the boarding school, sold to the people at the cost of the material and even given free of cost to the very poor. In many places instead of ‘loose jackets’

---

146 Robert L. Hardgrave, Dick Kooiman, Jr., op. cit., p. 152.
147 Ibid., op. cit., p. 151.
149 English Records, Letter to General Cullen dated 8 March, 1859.
150 Letter from W. Cullen to Chief Secretary, Fort. St. George, dated Courtalam, August 24, 1853, Political Consultations, Sl. No. 527, Po. 563.
women began to wear vests and to dress in colour clothes. The Hindu Nadar women followed the example of the Christian women.\textsuperscript{151}

English newspapers in Madras took the matter up. Travancore manners and customs were dragged into the fierce light of publicity, and something had to be done. Cases were brought forward by the missionaries when Christians were actually beaten to death under the orders of minor officials, and all appeals for justice were refused or delayed.\textsuperscript{152} In 1858 the Queen of England made an equivocal declaration touching –no party, but trying to appease both, “…… that none be in anywise favored, none molested or disquieted …..” This created more tension in the country encouraging the caste Hindus to take more vicious steps against the Nadars.\textsuperscript{153}

Dewan Madhav Rao visited the tensionbound southern parts. The Nadar representatives were not given a hearing and cases were all one sided. Dewan Madhav Rao declared on 27 December 1858, that the Nadars should abstain from all revolutionary action and must maintain peace—But the onslaught of the Brahma Sudra Alliance continued with the help of the Government officials, under the leadership of Nair Navars and Vellalas. The

\textsuperscript{151} Yesudas, R. N., \emph{op.cit.}, \textit{Pp.} 174.
\textsuperscript{152} Hacker, I. H. Dick Kooiman, \emph{op.cit.}, \textit{Pp.} 48151.
\textsuperscript{153} Immanuel, M., \emph{op.cit.}, \textit{Pp.} 315.
NairNayars had taken the help of some of the Chettis and also brought the Nayaks from the neighbouring country.  

In the beginning of January 1859, a group of about 350 Nadars attacked the bazaar in Kottar, pulled down some shops and took away money and merchandise. The market was instantly closed and the NayarsNairs tried to prevent the chunam–lime burners from selling that articlestacked lime which the Nadars needed to prepare jaggery.

Additional police officers were appointed to keep peace and order. The presence of military and police officials in Nanchilnad created havoc in the minds of the Nadars. By 10 January10, 1859 the revolt spread to almost all parts of South Travancore. A number of caste Hindus, joined together with the assistance of the police, tied up a number of Nadars including Christians in Monday Market near Neyyoor. The captives were presented before the Eranial Tana Naick and false charges were made against them that they had ‘come in crowds’ and stolen articles from the Chettis.

The Sudras and Chettis on the 13 January13, 1859, under the leadership of Tana Naick of Kuzhithurai assembled together near the

---

154 Ibid.
156 English Records, Letter from Rev Frederick Baylis to the Resident dated January, 1859.
Kaliyakavilai market near Parassala, and used the people both men and women of Nadar community. The Government officials played a most important role in attacking the Nadar women.157

On the 14 January 1859 the caste Hindus in large numbers proceeded to Tittuvila and Anditoppu under the leadership of Bhutanadha Pillai, Madavan Pillai, Vallimieri Pillai, Vaidyalingam Pillai and Nilan Pillai of Talakkudy marched against the catechist and school master, broke the doors of the houses of Christians, pulled off the roofs and plundered the furniture and jewels of women.158 A Nadar and his wife were assaulted, his house and twenty seven other houses were burnt down. Seventy nine houses of Roman Catholics at Kottar were also burnt down.159

On 14 January 1859 Madhava Roa, the Dewan reached Padmanabhapuram along with Captain Dally who was put in command of all the troops in the South. The troops of the Nair Nair brigade and the police were sent to all places of disturbance and tranquility was restored.160 When the violence of the caste Hindus became widespread the Nadars did not confine themselves to a bare defense, but they retaliated the outrage on

158 Letter from Rev James Russel to the Resident, Document No. XXIII.
160 Madhava Row's Report to W. Cullen, the Resident, dated Travancore, February 1859, No. 196, Copies of official papers, PP. 8.
During the period between October 1858 and February 1859 nine chapels and three schools and houses of the Christians were destroyed by the caste Hindus.

When the British Government came to know about the riots an order was issued by T. Pycroft, Chief Secretary, dated on 27 January, 1859 instructing General Cullen to be “careful to give no countenance to the idea that the British Government of which he is the representative, recognizes any exclusive distinctions, or the right of any set of men to prevent others from following in all matters of social or domestic life, such course as they may see fit, provided it be not repugnant to public decency and morals.”

When the revolt became widespread, the Resident suspected the proceedings of the Government of Travancore. He wrote to the Dewan when he received several letters from the missionaries relating to the outrages committed by the caste Hindus. “I do not see a single case of assault by either Shanars, Sudras, or Christians nor of the chapel burning—

not withstanding the numerous cases that have occurred.”

---

163 Copies of Official Papers, Order of T. Pycroft, Chief Secretary, dated 27 January, 1859.
164 Letter from the Resident to Dewan of Travancore dated Trivandrum, 10 February 1859, English Records.
The Resident feared, “There must be something very defective, in the police management”. He hoped that the Dewan would be able to afford explanation upon the various specific charges of outrage made by the different missionaries.¹⁶⁵ The missionaries justified themselves by claiming that they encouraged the people only to wear the mode of dress that was permitted by the law and asserting that “they ought to have” “the liberty” of dress.¹⁶⁶ They also attempted to give wide publicity to this revolt in England.¹⁶⁷

The Resident sent regular reports to the Madras Government about the disturbances and the Madras Government ordered the Resident that he might “impress the Raja of Travancore to change the existing rule regarding the dress of women.”¹⁶⁸ The Madras Governor also informed the Secretary of State for India about the happenings and repeated his request of appointing a commission to investigate into the happenings in Travancore.¹⁶⁹

Meanwhile many cases were filed in the local courts. The whole procedure in the lower courts was against the Nadars and “in favour of the

¹⁶⁸ Gladstone, J.W., *op. cit.*, *pp.* 89.
¹⁶⁹ Governor of Madras to the Secretary of State for India, Letter dated 26-3- March 1859, Official Papers. The Governor of Madras had been suggesting of appointing a Commission since 1855.
Nairs and Sudras. ¹⁷⁰ Even in proved cases all the Nai, Navar, Nairs were set free. But the Nadars were severely punished on the allegation that when they tried to raise men and money from Tinnevelly, Tirunelveli where they had relatives, in order to fight against the Nai, Navar, Nairs. ¹⁷¹

On 7 February 1859, the L.M.S. missionaries sent a petition to the Maharaja through the Resident arguing the cause of the Christians. ¹⁷² The missionaries received no immediate reply from the Maharaja. ¹⁷³ The news about the petition to the Maharaja and the silence on his part appeared in the columns of ‘The Madras Time’. ¹⁷⁴ The newspaper report prompted the Madras Government to ask for an explanation from the Resident. ¹⁷⁵ The explanation of the Resident was very evasive.

In 1859 Sir Charles Trevelyan, son-in-law of Macaulay and a friend and relative of Sir Charles Wood was appointed Governor to replace Lord Harris. By this time the disturbances in Travancore had attracted much attention both in England and in India. ¹⁷⁶ Charles Trevelyan, the Governor of Madras decided to intervene in this and recorded in his minutes that, “I have seldom met with a case in which not only truth and justice but every feeling of our common humanity are so entirely on one side. The whole

¹⁷¹ Letter from Cullen to T. Pycroft, dated 18 January 1859.
¹⁷² Petition of the L.M.S. Missionaries, dated 7 February 1859.
¹⁷³ The Missionaries received the reply only in April, 1859.
¹⁷⁶ Minutes by the President, dated 7 May 1859, Official papers, Pp. 43.
civilized world would cry shame upon us if we did not make a firm stand on such an occasion”. The special object of which was to assure to Her Majesty’s Indian subjects liberty of thought and action so long as they did not interfere with the just rights of others.\textsuperscript{177} He ordered the Resident to force the Travancore Government to change the existing rules with regard to the dress of women. He wanted to implement this reform “even if the use of cold steel is necessary”\textsuperscript{178}

The Dewan consulted the matters with the Raja, who was in favour of the abolition of all rules prohibiting the wearing of clothes. The Dewan wrote to the Resident on 17 May\textsuperscript{17} 1859 thus: “His Highness now proposes to abolish all rules prohibiting the covering of Shanar women and to grant them perfect liberty to meet the requirements of decency any way and they deem proper with the simple restriction that they do not imitate the same mode of dress that appertains to the higher castes.”\textsuperscript{179}

This was informed to the Governor of Madras and he said that “we cannot pronounce a final opinion, until we see the working of the new regulation”. On 26 July\textsuperscript{26} 1859 the proclamation was made in Travancore by Maharaja Utram Tirunal which said, “We hereby proclaim that there is no objection ……to Shanar women of all creeds dressing in coarse cloth and tying themselves round with it as the Mukavathigals do, or to their covering

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Dispatch from Right Honorable Sir. C. Wood, dated 24 July 24, 1860.
\textsuperscript{179} Copies of official Papers, Letter from the Dewan to the Resident dated 7 May 1859.
their bosoms in any manner whatever, but not like women of higher castes”.

However, a mere legislation came as a shock to forces who wished to enforce their wishes on a mass of population to depart from their centuries-old culture, could not root out the practice of centuries. In many places the old restrictions prevailed; were not lifted. The Madras Government received many complaints stating that the proclamation had placed them in no better position. The LMS missionaries petitioned to Sir Charles Wood, Secretary of State for India against the weaknesses of this proclamation.

The British authorities continued to express their desire to the Maharaja, with regard to the need of better legislation granting perfect freedom to the lower castes in the matter of dress. This pressure made the Travancore Government issue fresh legislation in 1865 granting the right to use upper cloth to all the lower castes. Though the missionaries could not help the Nadars much during the revolt, they firmly stood by the

---

180 Minute by the Hon. President dated 30 May 1859. Directorate of State Archives Proclamations from 1858-1874 A.D. (Malayalam).
182 Petition to Sir. Charles Wood from all Missionaries of TDC, Correspondence No. 127, 1859, Ms (copy), India odds, Box 16, CWMA.
183 Maltby (Resident) to T. Pycroft, dated 15 February 1860.
Nadars. However, during this period of social conflicts and reform large number of people converted to Christianity.\(^{185}\)

### The Temple Entry Movement

The Ezhavas and other low castes were prohibited from using public roads and other public places.\(^{186}\) In the public roads near temples, palaces, Kavus, and abodes of Brahmins etc. were put up sign boards prohibiting lower castes from entering the area, indicating the uneven justice based on injunctions of caste regulations, imparted by the rulers and their eagerness to perpetuate the caste-race superiority of the Savarnas.\(^{187}\) The lower classes were known as Avarnas or non-caste Hindus. The higher castes were known as Savarnas.\(^{188}\)

When the deities of temples of high caste Hindus were taken out on ceremonial occasions in procession through public roads, the Ezhavas and other polluting castes were not allowed to approach the procession but were kept at some distance so as not to pollute the deity. It was also regulated by local usage and established custom.\(^{189}\)


\(^{186}\) Confidential G.O. dated 30 November 1918 from the Dewan of Cochin to the Resident.


\(^{189}\) Confidential File No: 507/18, Budde No: 6, *Confidential Department*.
The lower classes did not dare to touch even the outer walls of the Brahmin temples and they offered their offerings from a distant place.\footnote{Gladstone, J.W., op.cit., pp.93.} The European, the Christian or the Mohammedan considered himself treated as a social inferior because he was not allowed to go into Hindu temples.\footnote{Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, published on 21 April 1934, Trivandrum, pp.49.} Sign boards were kept prohibiting the entry of non-caste Hindus.\footnote{Singarayan, R., Kumari Mavattathil Nadar Samugam Antrum Intrum (Tamil), Neyyoor, 1984, pp. 18.} 

The disabilities of the Avarnas were first felt by the Ezhavas and the agitation for their removal came from them. The Ezhavas felt these disabilities as humiliating and they were organizing and consolidating themselves with a view to raising their social status. The demand to have temples opened to all Hindus for worship naturally was started by them.\footnote{Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, Trivandrum, 1934, pp. 47.}

In 1919, at the fifteenth session of the Sree Muoolam Popular Assembly, the late K.T. Madhavan, then the editor of 'Desabhimani' a Malayalam weekly, and a prominent member of the Ezhava community brought before the Government a representation for the removal of theendal and for admission into Savarna temples.\footnote{Ibid.}
In 1921 also T.K. Madhavan brought the issue of temple entry to the notice of Travancore Legislative Assembly. On 2 June 1921, T. K. Madhavan again pressed in the Assembly to remove all the prohibitory boards from public roads leading to the temples. In 1923 the Congress session at Kakinada passed a resolution for taking effective steps in this regard. Kunju Panickar and T.K. Madhavan raised the question again in the Assembly. In 1924, the agitators resolved that the prohibited classes should enter the roads round the Vaikom temple and walk along them.

A band of volunteers led by K.P. Kesava Menon walked to the temple precincts, but were served with ban orders by the District Magistrate. In defiance, batches of volunteers staged satyagraha and courted arrest. Caste Hindu organisations like Kerala Hindu Sabha, Nayar Nair Service Society, Yogakshema Sabha and Kshatriya Maha Sabha, the leading social organisations extended their support to the movement. Volunteers from different places took part in the satyagraha. A band of volunteers of Madurai led by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker reached Vaikom, but were

---

197 Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee Published in 21 April 1934, Pp. 48.
198 Damodaran, K., and Narayana Pillai, C., Kerala Thanthriya Samaram (Malayalam) Trivandrum, 1957, Pp. 120.
199 Political Cover File No. 53, 1919.
arrested. Advised by Gandhi, the satyagrahis decided to meet the Regent in person and to submit a memorial.\(^{200}\)

As Gandhiji too showed much interest in this satyagraha, he visited Vaikom temple on 10 March, 1925.\(^{201}\) As a result of the agreement reached between the Government and Gandhiji all roads excepting those on the Eastern side of the temple, were opened to the avarnas with effect from 7 April, 1925.\(^{202}\) Then they continued the satyagraha on the road in the eastern side, but withdrew on the advice of Gandhi on 23 November, 1925.\(^{203}\) The satyagraha lasted for about a year.

**Suchindram Satyagraha**

After the Vaikom Satyagraha similar attempts were made with regard to roads around temples in a few other places.\(^{204}\) In January 1926 a similar Satyagraha campaign was organized at the Suchindram Temple in South Travancore for gaining the right of entry into the roads around it for the Harijans.\(^{205}\) Under Dr. E.-M. Naidu of Kottar an organisation had been formed to take the so called untouchables along the prohibited roads round the Suchindram temple. They informed the Devaswom

---


\(^{203}\) *Ibid*.


Commissioner R. Krishna Pillai that they would exercise their right of passage from 4 p.m on 18 January 1926.\textsuperscript{206}

As informed earlier people began to pour in from the neighbouring villages and by 4 p.m. the roads and thoroughfares of Suchindram were full to overflowing. At about 5.20 p.m. eight volunteers consisting of one Brahmin, three Vellalas, two Ezhavas, one Marava and one Pariah under the leadership of Dr. Naidu advanced towards the precincts of the temple followed by a crowd of sympathizers and sight seers.

When they neared the prohibited limits, they found a large concourse of Savarnas-Brahmins, Vellalas, Chettis seated on the ground in close array across the street determined to oppose the passage of the Avarnas.\textsuperscript{207} Dr. Naidu tried to address the latter but was not allowed to proceed. Evidently he and his sympathizers did not anticipate such a strong and determined opposition by the Savarnas. Seeing that his attempt was futile, he quietly withdrew the volunteers and the crowd melted away before it was dark.\textsuperscript{208}

The "Captain of the Volunteers" was one Gandhidas Muthuswami who was trained at Vaikom. He was a peaceful man capable enough to lead

\textsuperscript{206} File No. 821, Letter from R. Krishna Pillai, Devaswom Commissioner to M.E. Watts Esquire, Dewan of Travancore.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid, File No. 821, Letter from R. Krishna Pillai, Devaswom Commissioner to M.E. Watts Esquire, Dewan of Travancore.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid., Pp. 3-4.
the agitation peacefully.\textsuperscript{209} M.E. Watts Esquire, the Dewan of Travancore had informed the Dewaswom Commissioner R. Krishna Pillai to fall in with the policy in consultation with the local Dewaswom officers.\textsuperscript{210}

This agitation continued for about a month, when it was stopped in response to a communication from C.K. Parameshwaran Pillai who wrote that the police had agreed to open the roads in question. The Satyagraha was stopped, but the roads remained closed as before. There were numerous meetings held all the year round demanding the opening of roads and also of the temples. The moving spirit of the agitation, T.K. Madhavan, died without even seeing all the roads opened to the Avarnas, much less the temples. But he had not laboured in vain.

A Committee including Messrs. M. Subramani Subramanya Pillai and M. Sivathanu Pillai was formed at Nagercoil to conduct Satyagraha at Suchindram again on 27 January, 1926.\textsuperscript{211}

The Satyagrahies were mostly Ezhavas, and Sambavars (both Hindus and Christians) from Karkad. The Nadars were not likely to join. For

\textsuperscript{209} Confidential section. File No. 662, 1926, Confidential Section.
\textsuperscript{210} File No. 821/1926, Letter from Watts Dewan of Travancore to Mr. Krishna Pillai Dewaswom Commissioner, Pp. 5.
\textsuperscript{211} File No.662, Letter from W.H. Pitt to Mr. Watts, dated 26 January, 1926, Pp. 6.
the Sambavars of Karkad the only all weather road out of the village was through Suchindram. That was a legitimate grievance on their part.  

The Karkad villagers consisted of three sections namely 40% Hindus 26% were L. M. Christians and the rest were Salvation Army people.  

On 28 May 1924, Rs. 4910 was sanctioned for Sambava road at Karkad by the Government on 28 May 1924 since they had been demanding the Government for many years.  

M. Subramanya Pillai member of the Travancore legislative Assembly representing AgasthiSwaram taluk expressed his opinion in the Assembly that already a road was there that connected the village of Karkad with the Cape road.

Carts passed through that road and reached the Cape road. When the carts passed through a portion of the road, it was driven by caste Hindus. A European and a lady both missionaries of the Salvation Army while passing

---

along this road were seriously assaulted by the inhabitants of the locality. Christians were not allowed to pass along use that road.\textsuperscript{215}

Sivath–Tanu Pillai M.L.C. proposed in a meeting of Vellalas on Sunday\textsuperscript{21} February\textsuperscript{21}, 1926 to stop the satyagraha\textsuperscript{216} at Suchindram. But it was not stopped. Separate pandals were put up by both the Avarnas and the Savarnas. The pandals put up for the Satyagraha up by the orthodox were barricades on the Vaikom-Vaikom model.\textsuperscript{216}

The Satyagraha continued till the end of February 1926. On 28 February\textsuperscript{28}, 1926 the Satyagraha at Suchindram was suspended.\textsuperscript{217} Thus the Satyagraha continued for about a month and was withdrawn on receiving assurances from the Government.\textsuperscript{218} But the Government evaded the issue on account of the pressure exerted by a few orthodox Hindus.

In October 1927 Gandhiji visited Travancore again and held discussion with Diwan M.E. Watts on the question. He tried to seek a peaceful settlement of the Suchindram agitation, but failed. In consequence the campaign was resumed in 1930. Gandhi Raman Pillai, who led the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., Pp. 677.
\textsuperscript{216} File No. 662, Letter from Mr. Pitts to Mr. Watts, dated 24 February, 1926, P. 13.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid, Letter from Hutton to Mr. Watts, dated 28 February, 1926.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid, Letter from Hutton to Mr. Watts, dated 29 February, Daniel, D., \textit{op. cit.}, P. 25 1926.
\end{footnotesize}
satyagraha, was arrested and the agitators were prevented from entering the streets around the temple.  

On 8 November 1932 Government, bowing to mounting opposition to its policy, appointed a Committee with V.S. Subramonia Iyer, retired Diwan Dewan of Travancore as president, to enquire into and submit a report on this issue. In its report dated 11 January 1934 the Committee recommended measures for the upliftment of the Avarnas educationally, socially and economically.

Thus it was only in January 1934 that the Government saw the strength and point of the agitation and issued the following communiqué on Gandhiji’s visit to Trivandrum: “Government share the view of the committee that distance pollution or theendal must cease and are of opinion that no general public funds should be spent by Government in the maintenance of public tanks, public wells, chatrams, etc., admission to which is denied to any person by reason of his belonging to theendal caste”. They have resolved, therefore, that all public funds shall be thrown open to all classes of people irrespective of the caste to which they belong. Measures to carry out these objects soon are being considered. These measures were actually taken in May 1936.

---

219 Menon P.K.K., op.cit., pp. 298-301.
221 Desai Mahadev, op.cit., pp. 23.
The Committee suggested that 'distance pollution' or theendal should be removed by appropriate legislative measures subject to reservation in the matter of entry into temples and into their adjuncts like temple tanks, roads and wells etc.\footnote{The Hindu, Madras, 21 April 1934, Pp. 7.} The Government accordingly decided to throw open all public roads, public tanks and public wells etc. to all communities.\footnote{Desai Mahadev, \textit{op. cit.,} Pp. 23.} The Kerala Provincial Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, an organisation formed for the upliftment of the depressed classes, organised an all Kerala Temple Entry Conference at Trivandrum on 9th and 10th May 1936.\footnote{The Hindu, Madras, 11 May 1936, Pp. 8.}

On 8\textsuperscript{th} October 1936 C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar was appointed Dewan. On 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 1936 the deputation which consisted of M. Govindan, K. G. Kunjukrishna Pillai, K.P. Nilakanta Pillai, V. Atchuthan and G. Ramachandran waited upon the Dewan and submitted a memorial, signed by 50,522 people of the high castes praying for temple entry for the Harijans.\footnote{Desai Mahadev, \textit{op. cit.,} Pp. 34-40.}

The movement for temple entry registered its crowning victory when Sri Chithirai\textsuperscript{a} Thirunal Balarama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore, issued his famous Temple Entry proclamation on 12\textsuperscript{th} November 1936. The Proclamation which was the first of its kind in India is a historic
document. Gandhiji hailed it as "a miracle of modern times", 'a smriti which is the people's charter of spiritual emancipation' and 'the proclamation is the beginning of the process of purification of Hinduism and in the process both Savarnas and Avarnas have to play their due part'.

The proclamation continued to remark, “profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice, it has throughout the centuries, adapted itself to the needs of changing times should by reason of birth of caste or community be denied the consolidations and solace of Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering and worshipping at the temples controlled by us and our Government”.

In the Temple Entry Proclamation and Rules twenty one provisions were framed and in that every aspect related to temple entry was given in detail.

---

The Temple Entry Proclamation was a real Magna Carta for the Avarnas. It came as a bomb-shell in orthodox Hindu circles but it gave a message of hope and good cheer to the downtrodden Harijans and other backward classes. It brought about a silent and bloodless revolution in the Hindu society.

The Temple Entry Proclamation had far reaching effects on the Hindu society.

The untouchables and the high castes were mixed together in the temple of God worshipping in the same altar that in the eyes of God every man is equal. The unification of the various communities among Hindus in Travancore was the direct and proximate result of this proclamation.

The religious right of the Harijans to worship God in the Temple dedicated to Him in temples was guaranteed by this proclamation. The backward communities got an opportunity to enjoy their economic and political rights also. With the appointment of a Public Service Commissioner in Travancore in 1935 and adoption of a system of communal

---

rotation in the matter of Government appointments, the backward communities got their share of representation in Government Service.

Community Development Programme

The various methods of amelioration for the upliftment of the Harijans were education, grant of waste lands both for house building and for cultivation, appointment of Government service and representation in the various bodies and institutions such as the Sri Mulam Assembly, Sri Chithra State Council, Municipal Councils and Panchayats. With the appointment of a protector of backward communities in 1933 the steps taken were clarified and a definite programme for more effective action pursued.233

In the beginning of 1947 Government took steps for village upliftment programme. The Government opened many centers in various divisions of Travancore. Nattalam a small village in the Vilavancode taluk was selected for implementing the village upliftment programmes comprising public works, public health, sanitation, economic improvement and adult education and propaganda.234

The programme received much response from the villagers who readily agreed to surrender their lands freely and carried out a part of the work of laying the roads. Consequently many roads came into existence in South Travancore that enabled the free social intercourse among the people.

A community development programme was introduced in the Travancore State in 1952 for the development of the rural population. The main objective of the programme was to raise the standard of living and to improve the facilities for economic, social and cultural development. It was a multipurpose programme covering all phases of rural life, but agriculture was given the top priority. Among the fifty-five projects started all over India three were allotted to the Travancore State. Among the three, Neyyatinkara Vilavancode Project was formed for the welfare of the people of Vilavancode taluk of South Travancore.

This project covered an area of 400 sq. miles with a population of about 6 ½ lakhs as per 1951 census. The Travancore Government adopted various measures during 1951 for the amelioration of backward

---

235 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
communities and one such measure was the assignment of lands at concession rates to the landless \textcolor{red}{that} belonged to backward communities.\textsuperscript{238}

According to \textcolor{red}{that} each family of backward communities was entitled to get three acres of land registered in its name. The land so assigned was free of assessment for the first two years. These lands were assessed at half of \textcolor{red}{the} prevailing rates for the next three years. Afterwards the lands thus given were assessed at full rate. This led to the formation of a large number of colonies.\textsuperscript{239} Under this scheme the construction of houses completed in Vilavancode taluk during the year 1952 was Enayam.\textsuperscript{240} Thirty houses were put up at Enayam under the housing scheme during 1955.\textsuperscript{241}

Under the Housing scheme twenty houses were constructed and allotted to the landless and houseless members of the Kasturba Grama Multipurpose Co-operative Society Ltd. No. 3241, Theruk, Agasthiswaram taluk. There was no consideration of caste or creed in allotting houses.\textsuperscript{242}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{238} *Travancore - Cochin Administration Report for the year 1950 -51*, Trivandrum, 1952, pp. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Ibid., pp. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{240} *Proceedings of the Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly*, First Session, 1952, pp. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{241} *Proceedings of the Travancore- Cochin Legislative Assembly*, Second Session - 1955, vol. XIII, no. 7, pp. 317.
\item \textsuperscript{242} *Proceedings of the Travancore - Cochin Legislative Assembly*, Second Session - 1954, 17 July 1954, Saturday, Trivandrum, 1954, p. 198.
\end{itemize}
Thus the social condition of South Travancore before independence was not conducive for the people to live peacefully. The caste system spoiled the society and social evils like slavery, prohibition of women to wear upper cloth and prevention of low castes into the temples and satrams—public inns—existed. Due to the continuous efforts of the missionaries and the co-operation of the various sections of people—organizing agitations—such social evils were eradicated. After independence due to the steps taken by the government and education given by the missionaries there were marked improvements in the social aspects of the people of South Travancore.