CHAPTER - II

UNT TouchABLES IN KERALA
The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the social, religious and economic conditions of untouchables in Kerala. It is extremely difficult to define untouchability. In fact, it implies those disabilities which were imposed upon the scheduled castes by the superior jātīs/castes. In Untouchability Offence Act, 1955, the word untouchability was given this connotation. According to it, "It is an offence to prevent any person on the ground of untouchability (a) from entering any place of public worship which is open to other persons, professing the same religion, (b) from worshipping or offering prayers or performing any religious service in any place of public worship or bathing in or using the waters of any sacred tank, well, spring or water course in the same manner as is permissible to other persons professing the same religion; and (c) from access to or use of shop, hotel, public restaurant, dispensary or educational institution or charitable trust".1

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi have also defined untouchability on the basis of some disabilities. In this way disabilities are a sign of untouchability. According to Dr. D.N. Majumdar,

"The untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities, many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes". 

In brief, untouchables are those castes which are subject to some disabilities in every walk of life; social, religious, economic and political.

There are many racial, religious and social causes of untouchability in India. The major cause is the caste system. The untouchable castes are the most inferior among the numerous castes/jātīs in Hindu community. To the caste system is attached the sense of high and low, which is the fundamental cause of untouchability. Another cause of untouchability is the prevalence of many taboos in the caste system. Just as there are taboos for the higher castes/jātīs, that is intermarriages, eating and mixing with the lower castes/jātīs in the same way, taboos were created, for preventing, touching and even seeing the lower castes which did the dirty work (as a consequence of the feeling of superiority and inferiority). These castes came

to be called the untouchables. In this way untouchability in India is based upon the caste system. Untouchability is the result of the sense superiority and inferiority and social taboos.

In caste and class in India, Ghurya has written that in Poona, during the reign of Marathas, the untouchable castes Mahar and Māṅg were not allowed to enter the gates of towns after three O’clock in the afternoon and before nine O’clock in the morning because the shadows are at their longest at this time and there is the fear of the higher Brahmins being defied of it. In Maharashtra the Mahar caste could spit only in small containers tied around their necks because of the fear that their sputum upon the road might defile some superior Hindus by touching their feet. Often if some Brahmin passed their way the Mahars had to destroy the imprints of their feet with brambles³ and lie down at a distance in order to protect the Brahmin from their shadow.

In Malabar the Shanar had to keep a distance of twenty four feet from the Brahmin, the Tiya a distance of thirty six feet and the Pulayan a distance of more than ninety six feet⁴. It is obvious that the biggest cause of untouchability is the segregation of relations within the castes³.

3. A prickly shrub of the rose family.
4. Ramnath Sharma, op. cit., p. 31.
Untouchables in Kerala, especially in the princely state of Travancore in the dawn of this century was a society which lost its footing in broad terms. Untouchables in this principality were divided into more than twenty two subcastes with no interdining or intermarriages. The social taboos itself was one among several barriers which forbade them from getting united. In the broad spectrum, they had no formal education, no proper leadership, nor did they have anybody to shed tears for their cause. Any way they had no Moses or Messiah to save them from their untold miseries, and from the oppression of the aristocratic savarṇa (upper class) Hindus as well as Syrian Christian (hereditary Christian sect of Kerala) counterparts of the society. Any how the untouchables, once the part of Travancorian slave community, were redeemed/delivered from their age old bondage of slavery by the colonial master’s influence over the ruling elite of the land. In the year 1812 Rani

6. Based on an interview with Mr. K.P. Raman, President of PRDS. PRDS is the socio-religions organisation of the old slave communities (Harijons) of central Travancore, in Kerala. It has some similarity with Satnami Dalits of Chhattisgarh.

7. The Christian communicates approach towards the slaves was somewhat fair to the standards of the day. A Portuguese scholar while discussing about the Synod of Diamper (1599), mentioning the Malabar Christian approach towards slaves, “...... active in their habits and kind towards slaves”. See Malabar Syrian Christians, P. Cheriyan, C.M.S. Press, Kottayam, 1935, p. 50.

8. On December 5, 1812, by a royal decree, slavery was banned in the Princely State of Travancore. P. Shungoonny Menon, History of Travancore from the Earliest, State Institute of Language Trivandrum, 1988 (Tran-Rept) pp. 307 ff.
Gouri Lakshmi Bai, the Crown Princess of the state of Travancore under the influence of Col. Monroe, the British Resident and Diwan of Travancore, abolished slavery from the state through a royal proclamation. A similar effort had been undertaken by the rules of the State of Cochin under the leadership of its able Diwan Nafijappa in the year 1821.

No doubt the untouchables, the aborigines of this land lost their footing due to historical reasons, can be seen in the following pages. The new social formations which emerged out of the political condition ushered in the Chera country out of the historic Hundred Years war, totally changed the social equations. The new social equations which emerged out of the new situations, the emergence of Namboothiries and Vedic Brahmanical Hindu religion was really an unequal combination in the case of the aborigines or untouchables of Kerala, and especially of Travancore. In this social combination, peace loving, Buddhist/Jain followers of the aboriginal communities with virgin mind, posed as weaker side. The universal principle, 

“unequal combinations are always dangerous to the weaker side”.

is applicable here. If so, weaker sects were enslaved by the all powerful Nair-Namboothiri combination in the post Hundred Years War\(^\text{11}\).

The untouchable community, once the rulers of this land, lost their ground and became mere slaves by virtue of the changing equations. Even after the abolition of slavery in Travancore the \textit{avarna} people remained in slave conditions. It is because of the reason that even after the abolition of slavery, they (the untouchables/\textit{avarnas}) remained in the same land of their slave masters. In addition to this the \textit{savarna} Hindu society was not mentally prepared to recognise them as human beings or as their counterparts. The question of recognition remained as a social problem throughout the nineteenth century and after. Secondly, they (slaves) remained in the land of their slave master, without any land of their own and forced to depend on the slave master for their limited wants\(^\text{12}\). Finally, because of the historical reasons

\[\text{11. A. Sreedhara Menon, op. cit., pp. 154-158. & See discussions in Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Kerala Charitrathinte Iruvalady\text{\text{"}} Edukal (Some Unknown Aspects of Kerala History)}, NBS, Kottayam, 1983, pp. 42, 47, 48. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai citing the South Indian Scheduled Castes anti-brahmin feeling as a paradigm to this argument. He takes it as a serious sociological problem and count it as a genetical revenge against the enslavement of the aborigines by Namboothiries, through crooked trick played during the post Hundred Years War period in Kerala History.}\]

\[\text{12. This social situation remained in Kerala so far the enactments of land reforms in the late sixties of this century. The communist / trade union movement much helped these people to break the age old slave /feudal clutches and make them aware of their civil rights. P.K. Gopalakrishnan, \textit{Keralathinte S\text{"}ansk\text{"}rika Charitrath (A Cultural History of Kerala)}, State Institute of Language, Trivandrum, 1991, pp.568-573.}\]
their mind was not delivered from the slave situation which was built through
generations. Centuries of torture, impoverishment, dehumanization, and lack
of collective social effort, and illiteracy, the poor untouchable/avarṇas of
this land remained in defacto slave condition in the early decades of this
century.\(^1\)

In the *Saṅgam* and pre-*Saṅgam* period most of the would be
avarṇa/untouchable factions of Kerala or the Tamilakam enjoyed freedom
and commanded respect.\(^2\) Akkulam and Pulayanarkotta reminds the past
glory of the *Pulaya* (an untouchable sect of Kerala) community.\(^3\) In the

13. Here Church Missionary Society (a missionary organisation
based on London which operated in Travancore during the
British period) making a brief report on the caste equations
of the native state. They pictures horrible experiences of the
slave communities in the state of Travancore. Missionary
Register, London, 1824, January, pp. 34 ff.

was found in the *Theressappally Copperplate* of Aiyyan
Adikal Thiruvadikal (849 AD), Adoor Ramachandran Nair,
*Kerala Charitram* Vol. II, Kerala Historical Society, Cochin,
1986, pp. 17, 20, 22.

15. *Pulayas* are a branch of *Hōlayās* of South India. Once they
enjoyed royal powers. Kota Rani of Nedumangad, *Iykkara
Yesmānan* of Kunnathunadu, etc. were the *Pulaya* rulers of
ancient Kerala. *Pulayas* worshipped their ancestors in the
form of *Chavar* (Souls of the dead). They worshipped
the Dravidan gods such as *Pārakūṭṭy, Kariṅkūṭṭy*, etc. Till the
beginning if this Century they never worshipped Hindu gods.
Among the *Pulayas* there were six sub divisions or *illams*
viz., *Pandǐḷḷiṭṭa Pulaya, Kizhakka Pulaya, Thekkkoppulaya,
Vēḻippulaya, Valḷippulaya and Kanappulaya*. S.K.Vasantan,
History of Kerala*, State Institute of Language, Trivandrum,
post-Saṅgam period the rotten Čhāturvāraṇa system got its root in the soil of Kerala along with the Vedic Brahmancial religion. By which the most affected section in Kerala was the untouchable/avarña community. Even the Nairs and Ezhavas were lesser losers in this social game of Čhāturvarṇam. The Nairs lost their social status and sacrificed their family setup to the Namboothiries through the rotten system of Saṁbandam (a loose form of marriage which formulated by the Namboothiries and dictated over the Nair Community of Kerala). Those communities which objected free sex plans of the Namboothiries became outcastes or untouchables (aiyitha jāties)\(^\text{16}\). In the post Saṅgam and the following years the looser communities were dehumanised with the upper class strategy of aiyitham or social ostracism of non-subjective people\(^\text{17}\). Even after this drastic fall of the untouchable community, in some parts of Kerala (in some remote pockets) they (untouchables) remained as independent community through the centuries. But they never enjoyed any civil rights or privileges which were enjoyed by the other savarna communities of Kerala. At any time, at any place, there was a probability of enslavement by all powerful savarna community. Anyway it was a sword of Damocles which hanged over the free untouchable sections of this land. The last link of such,


\(^{17}\) See the discussions in the Ādiyar Deēpaṁ Monthly (Official publication of PRDS), under the title "Dalita Prastanaṁ Keralaṁ". Paul Chirakkarode, Eraviperoor, 1995, February, p. 5.
would be free untouchable sections which survived in the dawn of this century. For instance. *Kuttical Chōti* of Karukachal near Kottayam, *Chōtirakunnel Parayas* of Kaviyōr, near Pathanamthitta, *Kovōor Palayas* of Mundathanam near Kottayam, and *Chērasśery Parayas* of Kunnamthanam in Pathanamthitta district were free *avarţa*/untouchable representatives of the dark ages of Kerala\(^{18}\). These untouchable free people/landlords never enjoyed any rights as those which were enjoyed by their Namboothiri and Nair counter parts. Any how they were in literary sense, not slaves to others\(^{19}\). The emergence of *Chāturvarṇam* or *jāti* system in medieval Kerala transformed its agrarian set up. Tilling in the soil was regarded as a low rank affair, while sitting lazy was credible\(^{20}\). This conceptual change created a new social paradigm which made lazy Namboothiri and Nair as respectables in the society. Any way the occupational *jāti* formations came to the bottom of the social structure\(^{21}\).

The new Namboothiri discourse of Kerala created a wide gulf in the socio-

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18. The story retold by Mr. V.K. Raman, President, PRDS, during an interview with him. These free *Harijans* moved through roads with sufficient defensive weapons. They were also subject to *ayithaṁ*. The *savarpas* failed to enslave them, because of historical reasons. Also see Velayuchan Panakkasser, *Sancharikalam Charitrakaranmūraṁ*, Vol. II, NBS, Kottayam, 1985, p. 233.

19. Now these four *Harijan janmi* families are extinguished and still remains their memories as a legend in the minds of *Harijans* /untouchables of these region.


economic scenario of the land. However in this new discourse the working agrarian population become "robbers, idiots, fraud, etc." in the eyes of the upper strata/savarnas and were awarded with social and religious disabilities.

Here the author is tracing the shift in the social relations during and after the Sangam period. He explains the pathetic fall of the working classes of Kerala. Hence these working classes, in due course of time, were subject to the exploitation of the upper strata/savarnas designs.

The social tension which culminated through generations attained its perfection only in the twentieth century. The Vedic religious systems which governed the society for more than a thousand years totally uprooted its basic characters. No doubt the society imbibed the new systems which introduced through discursive sites such as temples, rituals, hierarchical caste structure, brahmanical hegemony, and ruling families and consequently the aborigines/untouchables were reduced to the status of slaves. By this

22. New pattern of thinking and way of recognizing truth, forced on the natives can technically be referred to what Michel Foucault called discourse. It is one of the significant concepts in his studies, which evolves across his various works. See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse of Language, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972, pp. 22, 23, 29.

23. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Social and Cultural, op cit., pp. 210 - 21

24. A discourse is a cluster of various discursive operations. It is taking shape through various sites such as religion, ways of life, education, family, etc., which are known as discursive sites/formations.
way physical as well was mental slavery is effected. Now their movements and language were controlled through the social taboos.

"Apart from untouchability, unseeability, atmospheric pollution, and unapproachability also existed in a dreadful form”,

explains Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon while examining the social evils that governed the social relations of the tiny principality of Travancore during the post Saṅgam period. To quote Barbosa,

"They will not touch any one of the low caste nor eat, drink, serve in the house of Nairs”.

For a Nambōothiri the gridlock of pollution was ninety two feet to an untouchable (unskilled agrarian labour) and to a skilled labour like carpenter (tucchan,) gold smith (thaṭṭān), etc. it was thirty two feet. Untouchables were supposed to maintain a fixed distance according to caste superiority, since they were at the bottom of caste hierarchy. The nefarious social disabilities, which were deep rooted in Kerala through Brahmanical hegemony, maintained atmospheric pollution (aiyitham) as its rudimentary.

25 A. Sreedhara Menon, op. cit., p. 268.

26 Duarte Barbos, A Description of The Coast of Africa and Malabar, London, 1866, elsewhere.

A Nambōōthiri who happened to be seen by an untouchable or a slave community member or any avarṇa non slave community member in the prescribed distance limit considered himself as being polluted/theēndi. Each community in the early medieval Kerala society had to keep a fixed distance from the mēḷḷāti/upper caste and it was the unwritten law of the land. When Nair nobles came out in the public roads an attendant of theirs preceded them shouting “Pō, Pō” (getaway, getaway), so that they would not be polluted by a person of low caste/hēṇajāti even by a chance encounter within the prohibited distance/theēṇdappaḍakalam. Failure on the part of the lower castes/hēṇajāties to make way for the Nairs and other upper castes/mēḷḷāties on the public road even led to their being murdered with the connivance of the custodians of law and order of this land28. A most primitive form of social relations existed (in the form of slavery) in Kerala during the early decades of the nineteenth century. These slaves of pre-modern Kerala never enjoyed any civil rights or social justice29. The Kerala slaves especially of Travancore were attached to land only and they were confined to do agricultural and menial works of janmī/landlord. In between slave communities and janmīs, there were a lot of unprivileged or under privileged communities such as Ezhavās, Gaṇakās, Tachans, etc. They were neither bought or sold

28 A. Sreedharan Menon, op. cit., p.268.
29 Missionary Register, 1818, November, p. 458 ff.
but they never enjoyed any civil rights or social justice as such enjoyed by their Hindu counterparts (mēljātīes) in this region. Their socio political status was some what equivalent to the serfs in the European feudal structure. Their women folk were not allowed to wear upper garments or wear ornaments of gold and other valuable metals. When those Nair women folk, including janmi's were approaching a Namboothiri or a noble, they were supposed to remove cloths on the breast part. Albeit, Nair women contented with this system which guarantees them sexual freedom in terms of saṁbandam. But it degenerated the Nair society as well. Later socio-religious movements which were pioneered by Chattambi Swaminikal was an indicator in this regard.

The non-aggressive less privileged or underprivileged groups of pre-modern Kerala were not allowed to wear head gear (turban), not allowed to use umbrellas, not allowed to live in pucca houses, etc. In certain cases these communities were allowed to enjoy these privileges, except the use of upper garments by their women folk, subject to certain conditions and pay-


ments. These social disabilities of the underprivileged serfs were used by the rulers for their revenue improvement\textsuperscript{32}. The historic resistance of Shannar (Chān̄nan) ladies of Travancore for the right of the use of upper garments is still referred to by all students of social reform movements of the Princely State of Travancore. It is popularly known as Shannar revolt (Chān̄nan lāhaṭa) of 1822. The 1680 A.D. Mugal (Mukila) invasion of South Travancore forced the Shannar and similar other communities women folk to wear upper garments while moving through public places. After the defeat of Mugals/Mukilas they were forced to remove their upper garments by the mēlāṭi interest. In the nineteenth century English Missionary discourse made them aware of the need for the upper garments. The Shannar ladies rose to the standard of revolt by breaking the social taboos. But the savarṇas opposed them with tooth and nail. In the streets, the Shān̄nar ladies upper garments were torn off by the mēlāṭhi goondas. Kalkualm, Kottar, Nagarcovil, etc. were the places of Shān̄nar revolt. The Shān̄nars were supported by the LMS missionaries like Rev. Reed and he referred the case to the British authorities in India. But the Government of Travancore with the help of armed forces, suppressed the revolt. Under the Christian Missionary influence,

\textsuperscript{32} Rev. Samuel Mateer, Land of Charity, (1870), rpt, AES, Madras, passim. Rev. Samuel Mateer, Chaplain of East India Company, conducted a brilliant tour throughout Kerala in the 19th century and made a detailed account on the social relations of this land.
the Diwan, Col. Munroe had given permission to the Shannar Christian ladies to wear upper garments without mēlmundū or halfsari\textsuperscript{33}. The bitter resistance and humiliation met by the Shannar ladies from the savarṇas/mēljāties was actually an eye opener to all depressed classes\textsuperscript{34}. In addition to it the notorious and shameful taxes such as Mulakkaram (Tax on breasts), Mulayāṭikkaram (Tax on big breasts) were paradigms of mass exploitation of the weaker section by the custodians of divine law. The shameful social customs and institutions were justified by sovereigns without any shrinking\textsuperscript{35}. No doubt all these were poll taxes levied from avarṇas and the rulers were not far away from the medieval Mohammadan monarchs of Delhi. Anyhow, Kerala society through ages was in an evolutionary stage of progressive social decay.

The emergence of slavery in Kerala is not far away from that of the situations of the rest of India. Here it functioned as an institution of personal bondage supported by administrative, legal, social and religious constraints. It emerged side by side with the caste system. The Brahminical approach towards manual labour and their influence on social formations of Kerala were the main responsible factors for the deterioration of the slave social condition in this geographical projection. Any way it was closely

\textsuperscript{33} V. V. Vasantam, op. cit., p. 169.

\textsuperscript{34} Editorial Board, 125 Years History of Melukavu Chirst Chruch, 1977, passim.

\textsuperscript{35} Rajgopal Vakathanam, op. cit., passim.
associated with caste system and it emerged as the new social formation based on the Brahminical religion\textsuperscript{36}. The slavery system which existed in Kerala was different from the Greek or Roman pattern of slavery\textsuperscript{37}. It was purely an agrestic system, and its character was certainly far away from the features of the bonded agrestic labour\textsuperscript{38}. In the Kerala system, slave masters never considered slave family attachments and were sold in the markets like animals. In the slave transactions of the pre-modern Kerala, husband and wife were sold separately; vice versa their sons also. They could never unite together, until their death. The most brutal character of the Kerala model may be masterminded by the Brahminical discourse\textsuperscript{39}.

The occupational \textit{jāties/castes} such as carpenter/\textit{tachan}, blacksmith/\textit{kollan}, goldsmith/\textit{thattan}, village astrologer/\textit{ganakan} or \textit{kaniyan}, etc. were of a group which was only underprivileged, albeit, and not confined as a slave group. It was because of this reason that they were skilled labour of high order. In the skilled labour scenario of ancient Kerala, there were only loose \textit{jāti} formations (a flexible division based on occupation)\textsuperscript{40}. The new

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} K.K. Kusuman, \textit{Slavery in Travancore}, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1993, passim.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Adoor Ramachandran Nair, \textit{Kerala Charitram}, Vol.II (ed). Kerala History Association, Cochin, 1971, pp. 47-82.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Rev. P. C. Joseph, Poikayil Shri. Kumara Guru Jeevithavoum Dharasnavoum, MCLS, Thiruvalla, 1994, p. 35.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid, pp. 35-68.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Social and Cultural}, op. cit., p. 19 ff.
\end{itemize}
Brahminical discourse of Kerala created the story of *Paryi Petta Panthiru Kula*mi. The legendary story narrates the birth of talented and skilled twelve sons to a Brahmin and Chandala combination. Here mother is *Chandala* and father is Brahmin. This couple abandoned their new born babies on the way side, the only reason was that they were not pure Brahmins. Any way this story shows the emergence of untouchability. But the marriage was justified through the birth of skilled labour force. The time of the story was about 6th to 8th century AD. as a social justification of *jāti* at the grassroot level. But on the other hand the agrarian sector, the most vital and core sector, needs less skilled and healthy people, and they were in plenty. So that the society, in general, considered agrestic field just below to all.

The slave communities were not allowed to lead a decent and comfortable life. The customary laws as well as the *Dharmaśāstras* prohibited them from enjoying their lives like that of others. They were reduced and impoverished to the standard of buffalo or cow in their (slave master’s) cattle shed. Through years of torture and demoralization they lost all their abilities, qualities and confidence. So they underwent mental as well as physical slavery. These slaves had no secured family life. Their marriages were only with the

43. P. K. Balakrishnan, op cit., p. 320.
consent of their masters. They were sold like animals in the slave markets of Kottayam, Changanacherry, Alleppey, Kayamkulam, Quilon, Kaniyapuram, Kovalam etc. In the beginning of the nineteenth century a healthy slave couple were sold at Malabar region of Kerala for 200 to 300 fanams. In 1854 the Pulaya population in Travancore was 98,766 and in Malabar it was 1,87,812. During the closing decades of the nineteenth century the price of slaves was between six to nine rupees. This decline in the price of the slaves showed a declining demand for slaves in the native state of Travancore, thanks to the colonial discourse. Any way a major chunk of slaves hailed from the Pulayas and the Parayas. That is why even the reformers from the underprivileged occupational jāties never relented for their cause.

44. Dr. Francis Buchanan, A Journey From Madras Through Mysore, Canara and Malabar, Vol.II, 1893. rpt, AES, Madras, 1991. pp.360 ff. A Fanam was equal to four Chakkaraṁs (Travancore Currency). Twenty eight Chakkaraṁs was a rupee. Fanam was a legal tender in the Malabar region of Kerala.


Table II-1
Population distribution pattern in the three regions of Kerala in 1891

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Travancore</th>
<th>Cochin</th>
<th>Malabar</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>2558</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>73.18</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>69.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>20.60</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>24.07</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hindu savarna castes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Namboothines</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temple servants (Ambalavasí)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.97</td>
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<td>Nairs</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>18.92</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>14.11</td>
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<td>Vellājas</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.41</td>
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<td><strong>Hindu avarna castes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezhavas</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>22.40</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>23.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artisans and crafts man</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5.95</td>
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<td>Metal worker</td>
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<td>2.23</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Potters</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.41</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Service castes</td>
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<td>Washeroman</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astrologers (Kaṇiyāns)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave castes</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>9.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulayas</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>7.94</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parayas</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paniyar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuravans</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Population numbers are indicated above in thousands.
Source: Census of India, 1891, Madras, Vol. 13, report Madras 1893. Table XVI-A
There were no authentic or legitimate records about the origin of slavery in the state of Kerala, so we have to depend much upon some hypothetical conclusions in this regard. As the researcher have mentioned elsewhere, the agricestic needs and Brahminical approach to manual labour together generated a social compulsion which caused the emergence of the slave mode of production in Kerala. Hence the Vedic Brahminical Hindu religious inflow into this region and its transformation into Brahminical systems caused the vanquishment of its aborigines. The vanquished inhabitants of this region continued its cultural resistance. The non-compliance of the aborigines to Nambōothiri/Brahminical designs caused some social tension. When their designs got momentum in the society, they started the process of ostracism of the resistant groups. Naturally the resistent group came to be a minority, after which they became the first prey to the inhuman slave formation.

Those who violated the social as well as the caste laws were ostracised and forced to join the slave social formation. The smārthavichārāin among the Namboothiris and Pulappēdi Manyappēdi among the Nairs indicate the process of excommunication of their women folk which were the best specimen of social ostracism. The Nambōothiri ladies were usually given


to Christians or Muslims, both were fair communities then. But the Nair ladies were given to lower castes including slaves. By the close of the nineteenth century the slave population was about three lakhs in Kerala. It was because of the said mechanism which was in operation through generations.52

"The dominant feature that underline the Aryanization are the emergence of private property in Kerala, the caste system and Aryan culture."53 The traditional Paraśurāma legendary account justifies the Nambōothiri social formation based on caste and property. The Nambōothiri hegemony and agrarian formation have some historical reasons. The Nambōothiries after eighth century AD were successful in building models such as taboos, dogmas, concept of atmospheric pollution/thēṇḍal, etc. in the social structure of Kerala. Anyhow the emerging need for food grains was the prime question of the day. The hegemonic Nambōothiri society used its weapon against the agrestic population. It was in this period that the great Sankaracharya was born. He prescribed a strict code of untouchability and caste differentiation.54 The pragmatizing of the Sankara codes was undertaken by the Nambōothiri hierarchy which was the noticeable feature of the day.55 The food gathering

Kerala society moved further and emerged as an agrarian formation during the eighth century of the Christian era. The all respectable Nambōothiri social formation with a less effort peeped into the agrarian social formations of Kerala and induced their dogmatism. Through the dogmas they made the task of cultivation as the sole responsibility of a few. The need for cheap labour for agrastic enterprise may be a genuine reason for the birth and maintenance of slave system in this region. No doubt slavery is a stark exploitation of the unorganised.

By the close of the second century AD the primitive communism collapsed in Kerala. After it the following centuries went through the successive social formations of history and finally reached in the rotten Kerala form. The momentum of social change continued in one form or other, so far as the eighth century of the Christian era. The positive growth of this changing society was arrested through the hegemonic Nambōothiri dogmatism.

Any way the static conditions of Kerala society remained up to the close of the nineteenth century. The adamant and static Kerala society even closed its doors to the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century.

56. Adoor Ramachandran Nair, op. cit., p. 50.

57. J. H. Hutton, Caste In India, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1951, pp. 77-85, 123. He quotes examples for his arguments regarding pollution/thēṇdal concepts of the Indian society from the Kerala social framework.
Hence it was an indicator of the true nature of the hegemonic society of Kerala. No doubt the cultural as well as material progress of Kerala from savagery to barbarism was spontaneous and there was no further movement from Barbarism to modernity till the Kerala renaissance of the twentieth century, and this phenomenal nature is a social yardstick to further studies on Kerala. Hence, through centuries Kerala remained as an arrested society governed with dogmas, legends, *aiyitham* unapproachability, etc. The watchword of the Kerala social relations was the stark exploitation based on birth. The major losers in this social game were the helpless unorganised untouchable communities.

Untouchables in Kerala were not savages as elsewhere in India. They moved far away from savagery during the emergence of the Namboothiri social formation in the eighth century AD. Then they were tribal in character. They were governed with reciprocal nature of economic relations. They had their own totems such as betel box, bangle, *thottikadukkan* (a kind of earrings for males), coloured umbrellas, etc. Anyhow as per the standards of the land of the day, they were the prime movers of the social formations of the then Kerala. So far tenth century A.D. the entire society in Kerala followed

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60. P. K. Gopalakrishnan, op. cit., pp. 10, 11.
the system of slash and burn agriculture. They never thought about surplus but only of reciprocal nature of economic formation which existed there\textsuperscript{62}. Their clothing were minimum in use, irrespective of class variations. The men and women never used upper garments, in short they were semi nude\textsuperscript{63}. The geographical position and climatic conditions of Kerala may be the reason for the absence of lavish use of clothings. We can't take it as a yardstick of the native cultural prosperity. Albeit, there was no economic prosperity so there was no surplus wealth for appropriation. This is evident from the pattern of houses which were occupied by the natives. All houses of this region were in uniform pattern and made of mud and bamboo mat\textsuperscript{64}.

In Kerala, there were about 68 untouchable/avarīna tribes, among only Pulayas and Parayas were subjected to slavery. Pulayas were earlier confined to pularis or agricultural lands. In short they were the earlier cultivators as well as scholars of this land\textsuperscript{65}. The Nambōthiries regarded manual labour as inferior, nondignified and those who worked in this field were enslaved because of food production, a vital agent of survival. Above all, it is believed

\textsuperscript{62} A. Sreedharamenon, op.cit., pp.138 ff.


\textsuperscript{64} Rev. Samuel Mateer, \textit{Land of Charity}, 1870, rpt., AES, Madras, pp. 50, 55.

that, those communities who were noncompliant to Nambōothisies sexual
designs were subjected to slavery in Kerala.

The word 'Pulaya' is derived from the word 'Pulava'. The syntax
'Pulava' has a meaning, 'scholar' also. The Pulayas during the Saṅgam
period were scholars of this land. Hence they objected the Namboothiri's
malicious designs. Anyway the caste system in Kerala was different from
that of the rest of India. It was complete and a cruel one. That is why once
Swami Vivekananda commented Kerala as a "mental asylum". No doubt
the rulers of Kerala were dāṣyās/ servants to the Brahminical discourse.
So, the cruel form of caste hierarchy came into existence in Kerala.

The aborigines of this land were reduced and ridiculed by the in-
coming Namboothiri bands through religious degradation of them. It was
another specimen of impoverishing them mentally and spiritually. The gods
of the aborigine castes/jātīs were reduced and transformed into demons
and the destruction of their places of worship or transformation of it into
Brahminical institutions, was another upper caste strategy that operated here
for centuries. Therefore many Buddhist/Jain places of worship were transmuted

66. P. K. Balakrishnan, op. cit., p. 56.
69. Mihel Foucault, op. cit.
as Hindu places of worship in the tenth and twelfth century of the Christian era, these were identified by scholars. Some of them are Sabarimala, Vejinallur, Kodungalloor, Çertellai, Kollam, Kottarakara, Takazhi (Karumādikuṭṭan), etc. The remaining Buddhist/Jain places of worship were pictured as abode of demons. In addition to it they depicted their forms of worships and rituals as primitive and barbarous. Buddha was also renamed as Cauan by cunning and shrewd Nambōothiri nexus. The decline of the non-Brahminical Oriental religions paved the way for a new form of worship by the low castes/untouchables of Kerala which were parallel to the Namboothiri mode. Hence the gods of untouchable castes become Čāttan, Kaḷi, Arukola, Mādan, etc. The original tribal system of Kerala was far away from the Vedic Chaturvarnīam and was both horizontal and compartmental, which was greatly influenced by the caste system that was brought to this land by the Vedic champions. Hence the binary caste system which was introduced in Kerala by the incoming cultural groups forced its aborigines to legitimate the Brahmin/Nambōothiri as a social formation. At the same time the aborigines contained the concept of hereditary nature of profession as a system.

71. A. Aiyappan, Personality of Kerala, Kerala University Publications, Trivandrum, 1982, Passim.
Pulappēdi Maṇṇappēdi was a social anachāram which governed the mēḻjāties/upper castes of Kerala in the seventeenth century. By a royal decree of 1696, it was banned, thanks to Kottayam KeralaVarma and Umayamma Rani. Those ladies of upper castes accused of adultery were handed over to the lower castes, and this was the usual custom operated in the pre-modern society of this land. The social anachāram like Pulappēdi Maṇṇappēdi was a corollary to it. This social anachāram chiefly operated in the matrilinel Nair society as a weapon against all powerful Nair ladies by their male counterparts or Kāraṇavars (senior most man in the family) in the house. With the knowledge and consent of the Kāraṇavar the slaves or other lowest sections in the caste hierarchy were allowed to make claims by polluting or throwing stones over a particular woman who was an eyesore to the Kāraṇavar. It may be a victimization of high order. On the other hand those Namboothiri ladies who lost chastity were sent away with wealthy communities like Christain/Muslim communities after smārthavichāram (a summary trial by a set of senior Namboothiries of the society).

Even after the abolition of slavery in the princely state of Tranvancore, the condition of the slave communities was pathetic and deplorable. They

73. It means bad custom or irregularity having social sanction.
remained in the same land of the old slave master. Above all they never commanded the social acceptance and recognition. Even the other serf communities above them were not ready to recognize them, as it was because of various structural problems which existed in the socio-religious framework of Kerala. The state of Travancore seems to have been a citadel of Buddhist faith even in the closing decades of the ninth century A.D., not withstanding the fact that the relevance of Buddhism was on the declining condition elsewhere in South India 76. It was because of the onslaughts of Vedic religion and prolonged Chēra Chōla war, that Vedic institutions peeped into the political, judicial and social structure of Kerala. It began to control the society through its ugly tool of Vargāshrama. They were able to deconstruct the Kerala society on the basis of the Aryan Chāturvarṇa system. While caste system was in operation the basic groups or functional groups were kicked to the bottom of the social hierarchy 77. The occupational/functional groups of Kerala were pooled in to a dozen categories based on the quality and quantity of their skill 78. Dhobi, weaver, carpenter, gold smith, black smith, barbers of various orders, gaṇakars, etc. were the basic and general stratification of the functional groups in the pre-modern Kerala. According to the quality and essentiality of the skilled labour force, the caste hierarchy of Kerala awarded

some social status to the respective sects. But the least respected were the farming population. The farming population in this land were unpaid or underpaid slave communities. Therefore their living conditions were deplorable, hence the social segments above them were not ready to give due recognition to them. All sections above them, inflicted mental and physical agony over these groups.

With the honest efforts of the rulers, the slave trading and slave markets of Kerala closed in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Albeit, the condition of the slave communities remained the same as it was. Even their cultivated products were taken away by the henchmen of the janmies/slide master. So basically these poor human beings were subjected to the age old rotten social structure. They remained in the same old conditions even after the progressive reforms of the government. Reforms were not

79. Ibid.
80. Ibid, passim.
81. See the poem of Changampuzha, “Vazhokula” (Bunch of Plantain). In this poem, poet explains the hardest realities which were experienced by a Pulaya even in the early decades of the twentieth century A.D. The henchmen of janmi or the old slave master was taking forcefully a bunch of ripe plantain, which was cultivated, and was the poor hand to mouth wage earnings, landless agricultural labourer and his family members in the yards of their hut. The Pulaya cultivator was a general paradigm to the contemporary social justice of the early decades of the twentieth century Kerala. Collections of Changampuzha’s works, NBS, Kottayam, 1976.
82. Velaydhan Panikkassery, Kerala Charitrathinte, op. cit., p. 97 & Missionary Register, 1851, March, (A report of
operated well over the rails of pragmatism. It was because of the pressure exerted from various Christian missionary groups, which operated in various parts of Kerala at that time, that the conditions of slave communities caught some attention of the government and native philanthropists. Above all the missionary enterprises laboured for the improvement of the social, economic, and religious conditions of the slave communities of this land. With the efforts of the new pressure groups (missionaries as well as the philanthropists) the kings of Kerala issued subsequent proclamations to improve the conditions of the slave community in 1853, 1854, 1855 and 1869. It intended to wipe out the very trace of slavery from this land.

Albeit, the pre-modern criminal administration of the princely state of Travancore was not based on equality before law. It was governed with Vyavahāramālīka, traditional laws based on caste equations. In addition

Rev. George Mathen of Mallappally regarding to the oppressive measures discharged by the mēlāittes over the poor agristic labour force of Travancore.

83. Velayudhan Panikkassery, Kerala Charitrathinte, op. cit., pp. 100 ff, & Nirmala Aravind quotes, "He is a pulaya, an untouchable". Nirmala Aravind, A Video a Fridge and a Bride (novel), Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 1995, p. 248, The novelist try to picture the social status of the untouchable communities even after their conversion to Christian religion. The successive proclamations of the kings of Travancore made the observance of slavery as criminal offence before the law of the land.

to *Vyavahāramālīka*, the laws of the land were customs and precedents. In this judicial structure Nambōothiri hegemony was very predominant, and the Nambōothiries were regarded as the custodians of law. The all powerful priestly class, the Namboothiries, interpreted the *Dharma Sāstrās* according to their whims and fancies. For instance, to a Brahmin/Nambōothiri criminal, there was no capital punishment or torture but only simple penalty of shaving his head. The trial of the criminal cases was on a primitive mode, popularly known as trial by ordeals. Water, poison, oil, fire, and weighing were the most popular forms of ordeals which existed in the pre-modern Kerala. Each of the above different forms of ordeal procedure was confined to the communities/*jātīs* respectively of their caste/jāti status. For a Nambōothiri/Brahmin criminal it was weighing, to a Kṣatriya it was fire, to a lower caste it was poison. The weighing ordeal was a sarcastic judicial mockery. In this procedure the accused was weighed on a balance and thereafter again weighed him along with a written charge sheet on a palmyra leaf/paper and if any weight difference was found, he was treated as a convict and subjected to a soft punishment of high order. On the other hand an accused low caste/heṃnajāti was served with a small amount of very strong poison (12.9mg) mixed in 32 parts of ghee. If there was no reaction in the consumed person,

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86. P.K. Balakrishnan, op. cit, p.130.
he (accused) was not guilty. Anyhow these poor people with no legitimate social or religious (political was not essential) support were the real sufferers in the judicial framework of pre-modern Kerala. A code of regulation, which was framed on the British Indian model was issued in 1835 by the King Swáti Thirunal of the State of Travancore which replaced the old traditional system of trial by ordeal. But relentless society and judicial framework of Travancore was reluctant to discharge equal justice to all.

For minor crimes committed by the lower classes the punishment was in the form of donation to Nambōothiries/temples and the penal donations were either cows or valuables. Anyway the judicial framework of pre-modern Kerala was not based on the rule of law. The upper castes regarded this rotten judicial administration as a source of income and a licence to their vagary. No doubt it was stark exploitation under the mask of religious sanctions and Dharmaśāstras, which was interpreted by the ruling elite according to their ends.

Anyway the administration of justice was not based on equality before law concept but based on the customary social equations of the day.

89. Missionary Register, 1837, November, op.cit., pp. 144 ff.
The *Tara Kōttaiṁs* which existed among Nairs operated here as a judicial body of *Nāduvāzhis* before the emergence of Marthanda Varma. These *Kōttaiṁs* selected disputes through a primitive process of *aṅkaiṁ*/blood feuds*. Nevertheless the causes of the downtrodden did’t come under the purview of the *aṅkaiṁ*. But this system was kicked out by the centralised despotism, which brought in Travancore by Marthanda Varma. Quotes Gordon Childe:-

“state organisations based on residence instead of kinship, abolished blood feuds between clans mitigated the violence of other internal conflicts and probably reduced the frequency of wars”90.

Later forceful incorporation of *Nādu* in to the state of Travancore, the king Marthanda Varma, reduced the judicial functions of the *Kōttaiṁs* but it remained as the custodians of social taboos. Anyhow it differed from the *Girāmāṁis* of Tamil Nadu92.

Yet another social institution which evolved through the Namboothiri discourse, was the *dēvadāsi (kudikkāri)* system in Kerala. It was a system by which upper caste, talented (in music and dance) girls were dedicated to

90. P.K. Balakrishnan, op. cit., p. 131.
temples as the slaves or *adikal* of the gods\(^{93}\). In the early days these *dēvadāsies* played a very predominant part in the promotion of temple arts such as dance in various forms and music of high order\(^{94}\). In the ninth century A.D. Kulasekara Alwar sent his daughter to the *dēvadāsi* profession. It was the usual custom that these *dēvadāsies* remain as chronic spinsters throughout their lives. By about twelfth/thirteenth century this system was degenerated to the status of prostitution and it continued until the early twentieth century\(^{95}\). By a royal proclamation of 1925 regent Rani Setu Lakshmi Bai, the system was abolished and made it illegal in the State of Travancore\(^{96}\).

The degenerated institution of *dēvadāsi* was an indicator/yard stick to measure the depth of social degeneration which happened in the far south of India. Anyhow, in the case of Kerala these social degeneration was associated with Namboothiri social formation. No doubt, a group of upper caste which got social hegemony in this land, uprooted all its balance and used them for


\(^{94}\) Kerala State Gazetteer, op. cit., p. 271.

\(^{95}\) The Degeneracy in the position of the *dēvadāsies* seems to be a development, probably, subsequent to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. These *dēvadāsies* were popularly known since the pre-modern times as *Tevadichi, Koottachchi*, etc., which are synonyms of the Malayalam word 'immoral lady'. Veera Kerala Varma (1125 A.D) married a *dēvadāsi* and she become the queen consort. Eravi Kerala Varma of Odanadu also married a *dēvadāsi*. Chinna Devi of Krishna Deva Raja of Vijayanagaram was a *dēvadāsi*. All these instances had shown the process of progressive decay of the holy profession of *dēvadāsi* order. See State Gazetteer, op.cit., p. 272.

\(^{96}\) A. Sredhramenon, op. cit., p. 334.
their sexual passions97. The emergence of dēvadāsi and slave mode of production was parallel and was the outcome of the new social, religious and political change brought to this land through the Aryanization of Kerala. Hence the moral degeneration of the dēvadāsi system was the net outcome of the hegemonial ascendancy of the Nambūthiris in the society, and in the management of temples and temple properties of Kerala98. The dēvadāsies had the prerogative to receive the rulers of Travancore, and to keep them company till they left that area99.

Untouchability and unseeability was the core of the Kerala social stratification. The later social developments prove that it cannot be even removed by force of law. It can only be wiped out and purified when the savarṇa Hindus realize that it is a crime against God and man and would ashamed of it100. The caste system which operated in Kerala through centuries was a closed class system. To quote Lundberg,

"A caste is a social category whose members are assigned a permanent status within a given social hierarchy and whose contacts are restricted accordingly"101.

So in the occupation based caste system, each caste had to perform certain occupations which determines its social positions and status. In a society like pre-modern Kerala where there was scarce economic opportunities, it was difficult to change one’s occupation.102.

In a society like Kerala, caste and taboos were controlling each and every aspect of life, some social awakening is essential. But even serf-communities, which were untouchables to Nambōothiri-Nair combination, hunted poor slave communities of this land. To quote Gandhiji,

“Innumerable cruelties inflicted upon Harijans by the caste Hindus and Christians and inhuman practice of hunting them out of their abodes, especially in Central and North Travancore, not only by touchables but also by untouchables like Ezhavas”103.

Elsewhere mentioned in this text, the poor untouchables (Harijans), most of whom were slaves, lacked a Messiah of their own to lead them. Apart from it, the socio-economic structure of this land was governed with a chain of intermediaries. Tilling the soil was the sole responsibility of the slave communities but the fruit was fully enjoyed by the savargāṣ. Even in independent India

the agricultural labour force mainly comprised of the untouchable (Harijans) or erstwhile slave communities. The approach to the task of agricultural work is still the same as far as the savarṇas of Kerala is concerned. In short, in between the cultivator and land owner a line of parasites operated well.104

“At the top of the hierarchy were the Nambūṭhiri Brahmins, who were non-cultivating land owners. The big Nair castes were non-cultivating lessees of Nambūṭhiri land in twelve years kāṇam (leases). The agricultural labourers, both tied and free, came from the lower castes like Cheruman, and Pulayan and from the Pāṇan tribes. agricultural labourers came from the Harijans”105.

Education is a great civilizing agency which disciplines human outlook complete106. But for the functional caste society like Kerala, education was restricted, and rotten texts like Smritis changed the outlook of the custodians of law. Hence a functional education complimented the educational scenario of Kerala in the pre-colonial period. Here functional education


105. Ibid.

means the education which fulfills the caste/jāti requirements only. In the case of occupational groups, they had no educational but only informal and practical wisdom in their concerned field only. The shifting of the racial and tribal groups into a caste hierarchy was so complex that it created a cluster of endogamous sub-divisions. More than a hundred such sub-divisions were in existence even among Nairs of Kerala. Each sub-divisions based on regions, occupations, etc., prohibits even intermarriages\(^{107}\). Such deeprooted caste system vertically and horizontally influenced its pattern of epistemological transfusion.

The monopolization of epistemological terrain by Nambōthiries and their influence on royal families of the land much influenced structural conditioning of Kerala. These Nambōthiries were successful in building unequal and vertical economic structures in Kerala which resulted in the moral degeneration of the society\(^{108}\). By which education in general lost its divine mission of civilizing the masses\(^{109}\). Above all the members of the royal families of Kerala were given education in Smritis by the Nambōthiries and it helped them to substantiate and breed caste predominance and Smriti laws with more strength and effect. Thus the non-Brahmin royal families

became the subjects of Brahminical discourse\textsuperscript{110} and became more Brahmin than the Kṣatriyas/Nairs of high order in Kerala\textsuperscript{111}.

The slave/Harijan communities altogether constitute about ten percent of the Kerala population. Pulayas, Parayas, Maṇḍāns (Vanṇāns), Vēṭās, etc. communities forms the main chunk of the slave categories of this region. Even today most of them constitute the agricultural labour force of Kerala\textsuperscript{112}. Hence they were not in a position to enjoy the educational rights which enjoyed by the other non-agrestic groups of pre-modern Kerala. In the pre-colonial period a system of education which flourished in Kerala only fulfilled the upper castes requirements. In short what can be approximated to education, both formal and non-formal, in the context of pre-modern society of Kerala represents the social process of transmission of professional knowledge confined to jāti functional group requirements. Each jāti with defined hereditary occupation and social obligations seems to have had the traditional mode of transferring knowledge in their hereditary social practices to the young generation\textsuperscript{113}. In the case of artisan, craftsman jāties the professional education in the concerned trades had acquired in any institutional from by being confined to households.

\textsuperscript{110} Michel Foucault, op.cit, pp.22, 23, 29.  
\textsuperscript{111} State Gazetteer, op.cit, p.281.  
\textsuperscript{113} C. I. Issac, Printing Press in Colonial Travancore- Aspects of Subjectification, M.G.University, Kottayam, pp. 73, 74.
In the case of the land holding social formations, certain common centres attached to traditional instructors seems to have existed for training their younger generation in tarkāṁ, jotiṣam, vyakarāṇam, ayurvedam, etc.\textsuperscript{114}

Followers of Jainism and Buddhism must have started educational centres probably called palli just as their places of prayer/worship (the institution palli and pallīkōḍādam is derived from this tradition). The enmass conversion of Jain and Buddhist communities to Christianity and Islam, due to Brahmin/Nambōōthiri onslaught, cause the monopolization of these institutions by the new religious groups. Hence the word to school and church in Kerala became Pallīkōḍādam and Pallī respectively. However, there exists any empirical traces of such centres of Kerala. But in the case of Brahmins/ Namboothiries an institution called Vēdapāṭasāla has been functioning as a site of learning attached to temples. The sālais imparted Vedic instructions as well as training in martial arts to Nambōōthiries\textsuperscript{115}. There is no ground to make a generalization in the nature of formal education in contemporary Kerala on the basis of inscriptive details about the sālais which were educational sites of Brahmin/Nambōōthiri jāti exclusiveness\textsuperscript{116}.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Studies in, op. cit, pp.267 ff. He discusses Sālais in the context of the history of education in Kerala assuming them as prototype of school.

\textsuperscript{116} For details about the role of the sālais as sites of martial training, See M. G. S. Narayanan, Kāndalilor Sālai, Aspects of Aryanization, Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1976, pp.21 ff.
During the later period an institution called Kalari seems to have become common for training the mēḻjāṭṭi/upper caste youth in martial arts. The eḻuttupāḷlis generally of the non Brahmin jāṭīs, obviously excluding the jāṭīs of primary producers/agrestic work force seems to have discharged the function of inclucating what was considered to be basic knowledge in contemporary societies117. The agrestic slave force have deprived of any formal education based on institution as mentioned earlier. Their younger generation got training through the empirical terrain of janmies farmlands about the agricultural operations. With no rights and privileges they were forced to acquire knowledge of farming for the welfare of their masters/janmies118. Education was yet another site which created a steel frame of the society and ostracised a majority while making caste complexities. To quote A. L. Basham,

"Early Tamil literature gives no evidence caste but the growth of Aryan influence and the development of a more complex and political and economic structure produced a system in some ways more rigid than that of North. By the Chola period an important feature of South

117. C.I. Issac, op.cit., p.75.
Indian caste structure had appeared, and this has survived to the present day\textsuperscript{119}.

The new social order which created slavery and inequalities was complimented by the education pattern that operated through centuries\textsuperscript{120}.

"An individual of a low cast, howsoever Sanskritised in his norms, cannot attain or improve his status in the caste hierarchy........ If one wants to climb up the social ladder he cannot continue his low occupations"\textsuperscript{121}.

Anyhow for a low caste, his caste status was a social bondage, and there existed no expiation for this natural born sin.

A paradigm shift was taken place in the educational pattern of Kerala during the colonial discourse\textsuperscript{122}. It was because of the introduction of new western genres through their mode of diffusion of knowledge or education system. During the colonial period the traditional non-Brahmin, non-slave institution known as \textit{Kudippallik\ddot{o}\ddot{od}am} got absorbed into the institutional structure of colonial school/education\textsuperscript{123}. Thus it began function as pre-

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{119} A.L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India, Rupa and Co., New Delhi, 1995, p. 151.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Ghanshyam Shash, op. cit., p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid, pp. 2, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Michel Foucault, op. cit.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} P.K. Michael Tharakan, "Socio Economic Factors in Educational Development", Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay, 10 November, 1984, p. 1914. He reveals the nature of the educational set up in premodern Travancore. "The primary schools have
elementary training centre of colonial popular education. But it failed to absorb the slave communities and *aiyitha jātīs* into the framework of education. The new system deliberately excluded them because it used the traditional framework in the operational field. It was an important disability of the new system. According to Y.B. Damle,

"The disprivileges of the lower castes, which were mostly of ritual nature, were thus compounded with all kinds of secular disprivileges vis-a-vis education, jobs, careers, standard of living, and so on. This state of affairs tended to become permanent because of the lack of modern education among the lower castes and consequent immobility pertaining to the socio-economic dimensions. More over, due to the adoption of western values and patterns, along with education and secular jobs by the higher castes, a new model became available for the lower castes to emulate" ²⁴.

The ritualistic nature of living, social immobility, and lack of education forced the untouchables/*aiyitha jātīs* to remain in utter backwardness during the entire colonial period²⁵.

their origins traced to the very early Buddhist and Jain influence in Kerala".


²⁵. Ibid, pp.48, 49.
The segmental division of the Kerala society into castes and sub-castes stood in the way of progress as a stumbling stone and it stunned the cultural development of Kerala. In this arrested society, the functional group’s social status and role was largely determined according to the Brahminical/Nambūthiri predilections. In a highly stratified society, every social function had an identical character. Kerala as highly stratified society, even the right of temple worship was confined to a dominant minority/savarnas. It was a socio-religious strategy of keeping superior identity to a dominant minority through the terrain of faith and religion. The spiritual requirements of the avarṇas including slave communities were fulfilled through Kāvus of particular jāties (Kāvu is a grove of trees where some minor goddess were consecrated and worshipped.)

But in the colonial period some avarṇa temples were consecrated by prime movers like Narayana Guru, Omal of Mailāduṁpāra, etc. Īmal, a Pulaya by caste, contemporary of Narayana Guru, consecrated a Siva temple in Mailāduṁpāra, near Kuriyannōr in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. After the death of Īmal the pōōjas of this temple has been under the auspices of a Pulaya tantrī/priest. As a prime mover in the socio-religious revolution of Kerala, Īmal paved the path of future socio-religious revolutions of Kerala.


128. I personally visited the temple and interviewed the chief priest (poojari) of the temple Mr.Kochukunju, (65 years), a nephew.
headed by Ayyan Kāli, Pundit Karuppan, Kumara Guru, etc. So far the Īmal's revolutionary enterprise of breaking the socio-religious taboo of Kerala - the exclusive right of Nambōōthiri/Brahmins to consecrate idols for worship - most of the slaves/untouchables professed the religion of their masters in a polluted form. The Christian Missionaries of Kerala used religious halo in the case of slave emancipation project of Kerala. Thus the Missionary activities in the regions of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar sowed the seeds of disruption in the traditional social order and economic system based on slavery. It generated a rupture in the socio-religious scenario of the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This paradigm shift much helped in the emergence of new Messianas with in the periphery of slave/untouchable social formations.

Missionaries were able to create feelings among the masses such as the need for new education, honourable treatment of women and sympathy to downtrodden sections of the society. This further got native support. Thus the new born middle class which was an outcome of commercialization of

of Sri Īmal, and examined the morphological aspects of the temple. Now its management is under the Kerala Pulaya Mahāsabha. Its inception is not known well, but now it is more than a hundred years old. Even though its management is under the Pulaya Mahāsabha, its annual festival (ultsavam) is conducted by crossection of the society irrespective of caste limitations.


130. Diocesan Gazette, Kottayam, July, 1881, p.49.
land, agriculture, and spread of popular education gave importance to education and social reforms. The outcome was the consolidation of the educated/enlightened into the organizations like S.N.D.P, Sādhujanaparipālana Saṅgam, P.R.D.S, N.S.S, etc. These movements internalised and popularized the spirit of Protestant ethics. The new middle class ethics based on Christian Protestant principles got wide acceptance among the new socio-economic formations of Kerala. This situation urged the natives to react against the immediate enemy instead of the distant chief enemy. In fact, the popular movements of the early twentieth century Kerala were directed against the immediate local oppressors/savargās rather than the establishment protected by the colonial master, and so were often not consciously or subjectively anti-imperialistic.

“It was also felt that the segmental division of the society into castes stood in the way of the development of nationalism and, particularly, the participation in the national movement by the deprived and disprivileged sections.”

These disprivileged sections concentrated into their own problems instead of national questions. The result was the agitation for agrarian working class

133. Ibid, p. 84.
and downtrodden social formations which were directed against the *janmies nāduvāzhies.*

Through Missionary discourse, progressive ideas such as freedom, equality, democracy, individualism, etc. were acquired recognition in the society. The age old social stratification with its vulgar face lost its ground in the changing situation. The extreme form of closed class system which operated through centuries began to show fragility in the early days of the twentieth century. Nevertheless the missionary as well as unorganised secular individual efforts remained as a safety valve to the social tensions of the depressed classes of Kerala.

The Nambōōthiries socio-religious hegemony was mainfested in all the spheres of cultural life including dialects, behaviour, costumes, naming practice and so on. Nambōōthiries of Kerala from the early centuries of the Christian era followed a dialect of their own, that differed from other native dialects. Likewise Nādārs, Nairs and slave communities and tribes had followed their own dialects. Early transactional language of Kerala was a dialect of Tamil and by the tenth and eleventh century onwards the elite Nambōōthiries began to study Tamil language which helped the process of

135. Michel Foucault, op. cit.
the emergence of Malayalam as the transactional language. The birth of *Maṇipravājāh* (mixed language literature) style in Kerala was the outcome of the changing social outlook of the Nambōōthiries. Since from the earliest to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of the Christian era the transactional language of its inhabitants, Nambōōthiries and others, has had some major dialectical variations. Without much change this dialectical variations continued until the spread of colonial education. In south Kerala (Trivandrum and old Capecomerin districts of Princely State of Travancore) the Nairs and the Nādārs used different dialects of Malayalam prior to the arrival of Missionary enterprises.

The Malayalam common nouns such as *ṁjan* (I), *avan* (He), *nēē* (You), etc. were not universally used in all stratas of Kerala even in the colonial period. In short such words never enter into the dialects of the non-Nambōōthirie’s social formations of Kerala. Instead of *ṁjan* (I) a Nair forced to use *adiyan* (server) while talking with a Nambōōthiri. Similarly a polluted caste could use only ‘polluted’ names and ‘polluted’ slangs (crude).


One and the same name and word happened to be differently rendered according to the jāti status at various levels of the social hierarchy. For instance, the name Swāti had in the lower order of the caste hierarchy its corrupt form Chōti was permitted. Similarly Sēēha into Chiruta, Gōpālan into Cōvālan, and Krishṇan into Kīṭṭan was the usual customary names permitted to the lower orders of the caste structure. Again, even in the twentieth century also, a name has its own derivations on the basis of the caste status. For instance, the word Raman to a Nambōōthiri is Raman Nambōōthiri, to a Nair it is Ramannair, to an Ezhava it is Ramachōvan, to Pulayan it is Ramapulayan, and so on. The name Bhaskaran to a lower caste is Pākkaran, likewise the name Sankaran to a lower caste is Chankaran even today also. The extent of social ostracism to lower castes/jāties could be seen in all walks of the social affairs. The low castes were forbidden to eat, dress, behave, move like the meljāties (superior castes) in the society.

As per the census report of 1901, in Kerala there were about sixty eight pollutable communities which later included in the list of Scheduled Castes. Among this major portion is covered by Pulayas, Cherumars, Vēttivas, and Pānārs. The remaining sections were meagre in numbers and

141. This based on an interview with 98 years old Nair named Vasudevan, Karukachal village of Kottayam district of Kerala state.

142. Ramachandran Nair, op. cit., p. 17.
confined only to certain small regions of Kerala. All these sixty eight castes can broadly be grouped by the anthropologists into Negritos, Proto-Austroloids and Mediterraneans\textsuperscript{143}. All these castes are of same stock but only occupational and regional differences created walls between them. The social separation was spontaneous among them and it much helped the upper class/caste strategy of social ostracism\textsuperscript{144}. Among Pulayas fragmentation based on Illaṁ or houses such as Kannayillaṁ, Karippiţiyillaṁ, Kariyillaṁ, Kappiyillaṁ, Konchivyillaṁ, Taccanilaṁ, Paruthiyillaṁ, Puliyillaṁ, Vāyanillaṁ, Vellyillaṁ, etc. prevailed with no inter marriages\textsuperscript{145}.

As elsewhere in India, Brahminical mode of worship began to deteriorate day by day since its very inception in Kerala from the eighth century onwards, and degraded forms of worship grew up with varieties of Tantric worship which was shown a visible progressive decline in all social relations of Kerala\textsuperscript{146}. Due to this progressive decline the society began to show archaic symptoms. Education and economic progress was not at the


\textsuperscript{144} Kunnukuzhi. S. Mani, Pulayar Nōtaṇḍukalit, Published by the author, (Kept in Cochin Archives, P-149) Trivandum, 1989, passim.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid. pp. 23-24.

\textsuperscript{146} Jawharlal Nehru, Discovery of India, Meridian Books, London, 1960, pp.215 ff. "Probably this was inevitable result of the growing rigidity and exclusiveness of Indian social structure as represented chiefly by the caste system" - Jawharlal Nehru.
reach of the lower castes/jātis and were always supposed to be submissive to the Nambūṭhirie-Nair hegemony. Anyhow the social condition of Kerala in the early decades of the twentieth century was not satisfactory but was full of stratification based on illogical notions. Kerala and its rulers have had the credit of religious toleration and it welcomed Christianity and Islam but she was reluctant to give equal justice to their Hindu counterparts at any cost.

Kerala as a geographical expression, was incorporated into the Hindu main stream, mainly of historical reason. As a tributary (subject) of Hindu main stream, it bears all the paraphernalias of the rest of the Hindu society elsewhere in India or more. Unfortunately this region closed its doors to the nineteenth century Bhakti Movement/the Renaissance of India. Anyhow to an Indian, religion is an integral part of his spiritual as well as material terrain. Kerala, by about eighth century A.D., was transformed into almost a centre of various religious conglomorations. However religion intents to be the manifestation of the absolute values of truth and goodness, which determines and controls a healthy relation between man and man.

148. Ibid, pp. 35-44.
Paradoxically progressive decay of the Kerala society due to various reasons which explained elsewhere in this thesis, caused inhuman and irrational social stratification. In this stratification, in a way or other almost all sections, except Namboothiries, lost much of their cultural purity as well as societal command and respect\(^{151}\). It was the outcome of various socio-political and structural changes effected through Nambūṭhirī/Brahmanical discourse. Bhakti, being a form of religious devotion is an integral part of the religious framework. Broadly speaking, Bhakti Movement elsewhere in India contained elements which ran counter to caste ideology. The Bhakti/ devotional saints came from all corners of Indian caste hierarchy, including of the untouchable/Harijan sects\(^{152}\). Kerala in the twentieth century is not an exception to this general paradigm. Thus Kerala witnessed a flood of reformers from all walks of the society.

Since the very beginning of the Christian era, Kerala became the nursery of different religions, both Indian and alien. Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity were grown alike and all these religions absorbed the native cultural as well as social structures and values. Hinduism, as a religion operated in the complexly stratified society since eighth century A.D. Hindu

\(^{151}\) A.Sreedharan, Kerala History and Its Makers, S. Viswanathan (P) Ltd., Madras, 1990, pp.219-228.

Brahminical religion tightened its grip over the Kerala society through various site and the society in course of time tuned to be more submissive to Brahminical framework.\textsuperscript{153} The society became more introvert and closed its doors to any progressive movements for about eight hundred years. Each and every individual of the society was under the identification tags of castes, jāti, etc and in most cases (in the case of lower jātis) it was a bondage\textsuperscript{154}.

Being the religion, 'the soul of the soulless world', it has some functional duties in the Kerala scenario. It equally translated solace to both touchables and untouchables. in the case of touchables, they found justification of their atrocities and inhuman dealings with the functional groups under the wrongly interpreted religious tenets. On the other hand the untouchables, deprived of all their civil rights, tormented under the age old socio-religious framework of Kerala, traslated their all sufferings and deprivations into eternal bliss under the shadow of religion. Thus in the Kerala context, religion, whether alien or native, was a protector of interest of the vested groups\textsuperscript{155}.

\textsuperscript{153} C. Achuta Menon, Cochin State Manuel, Government Press, Cochin, 1911, p.131.

\textsuperscript{154} S.C. Dube, Indian Society, National Book Trust, Delhi, 1992, p.46, "An Indian carriers several identification tags.............. But in others one may have to spellout one’s jāti, goitra and kula".

\textsuperscript{155} P.K. Gopalakrishnan, \textit{Jainamataiñ Keralathil}, State Language Institute, Trivandrum, 1974, passim & A. Aiyappan, Social Question In Kerala, op.cit, pp.65, 120, 123, 125.
It was a system which operated through centuries to keep upper class permanently at the top of the social structure and the lower castes statically at the lower edge of the social scale. In this locally/parochially enriched social formation, social stratification is the core factor and which attributed religious disabilities to the functional groups and it continued till the early decades of the twentieth century of the Christian era. In the pre-modern Kerala the functional groups, lowest strata of the social formation, were kept out of the vicinity of the temple worship. Even though most of the untouchables of Kerala were basically non Hindu in lifestyle and followed barbarian forms of worship, they never hated the Hindu forms of worship. So the question of temple entry was only confined to Ezhavas, and similar skilled professional groups such as Karimathar, etc. and it got relevance only in the twentieth century Kerala scenario. The people at the periphery of temple worship counted the right of worship a civil right and it got wide recognition in the elite circles. Albeit, the savarna notions remained as the dominant ideology of the Kerala society since Namboothiri domination and it was a riddle to its later social reformers.

156. Sushila Metha, A study of Rural Sociology In India, S. Chand and Co Ltd., New Delhi, 1980, pp. 61, 62, 63. The author explains the relevance of caste norms in religious practices and cultural pattern.

157. P. P. John, A Digest of Travancore Law Cases, (ME 1090-1095), Subodhini Press, Trivandrum, 1919, p. 432, Case No: 31 TLR 113 at 115, VTLJ 311 at 313. "The right to enter a temple for purpose of worship is a civil right. A person whose right to enter a temple is infringed has a remedy by way of suit".
The Pulaya and Paraya communities have not attained any literary standard to find any judicial remedy to their burning problems. Above all it (temple entry) was not the real problem of the untouchables/slave communities of Kerala but was the question of social equality and civil rights. In 1901 the literacy standard of the agristic slave communities of Travancore was hardly two per thousand\textsuperscript{158}. In the case of Cochin and Malabar it was not much better than that of Travancore. Pulaya population in 1901 was about 206, 503 and Paraya population was 69,974 in the princely state of Travancore\textsuperscript{159}. A negligible minority which hardly literate was not in a position to raise a legal encounter or raise to the standard of revolution to establish their religious and social rights. Thus the legal remedies were proved to be not sufficient modus of deliverance to its people.

**Table II - 2**

General literacy rate of Kerala a comparison with all India level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate of literacy</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Rate of literacy</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>9.83</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td>19.15</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>13.31</td>
<td>22.25</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>19.02</td>
<td>27.88</td>
<td>10.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>15.59</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>21.34</td>
<td>30.89</td>
<td>11.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>24.95</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>40.47</td>
<td>49.79</td>
<td>31.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India - Kerala.


\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, pp.403, 404.
Table II-3
Literacy of Pulaya Community in Cochin (1901)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Literate</th>
<th>% of literacy</th>
<th>No. of literate males</th>
<th>% of male literacy</th>
<th>No. of literate females</th>
<th>% of literate females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pulayas</td>
<td>59840</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins (All communities)</td>
<td>31244</td>
<td>11751</td>
<td>37.61</td>
<td>10349</td>
<td>33.12</td>
<td>1402</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1901, Cochin, Vol. XXI-A, Part II, Table IX, Govt. Press Cochin, 1902

The agricest slave communities of Kerala in generally and particularly the Pulayas and the Parayas maintained their own system of religious practices which operated above all other beliefs widely popular among them. Pulayas worshipped evil spirits, deceased ancestors called Chāvars, Mādan, Aḻjuthambrākkal, Snakes, and Hindu gods. Pulaya, a polluted man in the eyes of upper castes, known in Malabar and Cochin areas of Kerala as Cherumar, maintained a pattern of religious worship, a mixture of Saivism and demon worship. Their galaxy of gods contained Marutha, Kāli, Ponnyadhilāi, etc. Their priests were known as Valluvans, and were hailing from the same stock.

161. V. Nagam Aiya, op.cit, pp. 403, 404. In the Kerala Hindu scenario Nair community has no priesthood. In their temples they appoint Namboothiries as their priests. In the case of Ezhavas they appoint priests in their temples both from their communities as well as from the Namboothiri communities. In the case of Viswakarmās and Untouchable Communities, their priesthood is an exclusive right of their community members.
Parayans, at the lowest edge of the Kerala caste hierarchy suffered too much. The residential areas of these unlucky sections, in the pre-modern Kerala, find their abode far away from the habitats of all other communities and were known among other communities as Parachēris. They ate carrion and beef and drink spirituous liquors\(^\text{162}\). Their marriage system was very simple and it has no spiritual sanctity and in this system divorce is very easy. Returning of Tāli is the only procedure of divorce. The Paraya community was notorious for their witchcraft/magical powers and it helped very much to create a magical illusory shield of protection from the upper caste tortures\(^\text{163}\).

Between the Harijans and mēljāties there were so many serf communities, among them, the prominent were Ezhavas, they were called in different caste name in Kerala and known in South Travancore as Shannars, in Centre Kerala as Chōvans and in North Kerala as Tiyans. They got a good leadership of Narayana Guru in the twentieth century. They also suffered much in the name religion. Anyhow they much benefited under the Colonial Education System\(^\text{164}\). In south Malabar, the mēljāties not permitted the Hindu Tiyans to cremate their corpus\(^\text{165}\). These Ezhavas also tortured and jettisoned the

\(^{162}\) V. Nagam Aiya, op.cit, p. 403.  
\(^{163}\) Kunnukuzhi. S. Mani, op cit, passim, & Peter Rob (Ed), Dilip. M. Memon, op.cit, p.248.  
\(^{164}\) Michael Tharakan, op.cit., Economic and Political Weekly.  
\(^{165}\) G. S. Ghurge, Features of the Caste System, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, p.44.
agrestic slave communities at their capacity. By and large, Narayana Guru’s movement was not sufficient to cater to the historical needs of Harijans of Kerala.

The twentieth century Nair enlightenment much helped the acceleration of the religious reform movements of Kerala. In the Vaikom Satyagraha famous Nairs like K. P. Kesavamenon, Mannathu Padmanabhan, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, K. Kējappan (Kējappaje), etc. took part along with Gandhiji. The age old religious and social disabilities which tasted by the lower classes of Kerala got wide notice through Gandhiji’s interference in the Vaikom Satyagraha. The greatest social reformer of Tamil Nadu, E.V. Ramaswamy Naik also took part in the historic resistance movement. Gandhiji took the Vaikom Satyagraha as an educative force.

“I am sure victory is a certainty if only Satyagrahi’s will retain their patience and their spirit of suffering.”

Gandhiji’s interference in the socio-religious question of Kerala much helped to open the eyes of the rulers as well as elites of Kerala. Immediately after

166. The historic resistance of the lower castes to get legitimacy to their right to worship in temples of Kerala got momentum in the early decades of the twentieth century. Enlightened caste Hindu leaders staged a satyagraha in front of the Vaikom Temple for the restoration of the right to worship. See A. Sreedharamenon, Survey of Kerala History, op. cit, p.357, 384.

167. Ibid.


169. M.K. Gandhi, Young India, 19, March, 1925.
the Travancore temple Entry Proclamation, in 1936 Gandhiji met the Pulaya leader Aiyan Kāli at his residence at Vengannor near Trivandrum and addressed to a Pulaya meeting and spoke on the occasion,

"It depends upon our mental condition whether one gain something or do not gain anything by going to temples. We have to approach these temples in a humble and penitent mood. There are so many houses of God. Of course God resides in every human form, indeed in every practice of his creation, everything that is on this earth".  

Jāti is an important concept in the case of Kerala. The word jāti itself was a foreign/alien word. This word evolved from the Sanskrit word Jan. Jan means birth. For birth the early and commonly spelt word in Kerala is peēar. The religion which propagated by Āryans/Nambōōthiries justified jāti formations of Kerala and they incorporated the Parasurāma incarnation of Maha Viṣṇu for the fulfilment of their vested interest in Kerala.

"Personal qualities or ability have no part whatever in determining the caste of an individual, with lineage

171. William Logan, op. cit., p.112.
being the only criterion. The system is supposed to be justified and explained by custom and religion”\textsuperscript{173}.

Anyhow the caste/jāti became concrete concept, on which Kerala social structure was built. Most of the resistance movements of early twentieth century Kerala primarily was against the religion which brought by the Namboōthiris, which inculcated all anomalies in the social structure of Kerala. Anyhow the socio-religious movements of the twentieth century Kerala were antidotes to these religious paradoxies. As far as the agrestic slaves/untouchables were concerned the Hindu religion was only secondary to their traditional belief. But temple entry or opening of public roads to untouchables/Harijans was only a spiritual as well as mental revitalizer. Above all it constitute a dawn of hope and freedom to the untouchables because they felt the sense of recognition at least before God\textsuperscript{174}.

“For the opening of the roads is not the final, but the first step in the ladder of freedom. Temples in general, public wells, public schools, must be open to the untouchables equally with the caste Hindus............... Once the idea of pollution by the touch of a person by

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{174} S. R. Bakshi, op cit., p 81.
\end{flushright}
reason of his birth is gone the rest is very easy and bound
to follow"175.

Albeit, a flood of reform movements which rallied in the early decades of
the twentieth century changed the course of socio-religious history of Kerala
and prominent among these was the Temple Entry Movement which spear-
headed with the Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924-'25 and the Guruvayoor
Satyagraha of 1931-'32176. The agitation for temple entry translated into
reality with the historic proclamation of Sir. Chitra Tirunnal Bāla Rāma
Varma, the Maha Raja of Travancore on November 12th, 1936177. To quote
Gandhiji,

"The Vaikom Satyagrahis are fighting a battle of no
less consequence than that of Swaraj. They are fighting
against an age long wrong and prejudice. It is supported
by orthodoxy, superstition, custom and authority. There
is only one among the many battles that must be fought
in holy war against irreligion masquerading as religion,
ignorance appearing in the guise of learning. If their

175. M.K. Gandhi about Vaikom Satyagraha of The state
Travancore, Young India, 02-04-1925. Removal of untouchability,
In the case of rest of India pollution currents through touch,
paradoxically in the case of Kerala it was through approach
(atmospheric pollution).


177. Ibid.
battle is to be bloodless they must be patient under the severest trials. They must not quail before a raging fire"178.

The untouchables or agrestic slave community of Kerala in the dawn of this century were bound to ethically grotesque conditions not only to the social scenario but it was extended into the economic scenario too179. The historically preposterous interpretations of Smrīti literature and Dharmaśastrās attributes socio-religious disabilities, as ipso-facto, they could not retain any interest or enthusiasm for their occupation. In such a society where killing of slave was not came under the ipso-jure crime purview, a feeling of social insecurity filled in.

"You may sell or kill him or her", was the main clause of the slave transaction deeds of the day, indicating the depth and extent of insecurity feeling of the slaves180.

The social customs did not permit them to engage in the professions of the hegemonic caste Hindus.

"Pulayas (Pulayans) never posses property of any kind, his freedom could only be productive of starvation, or a

178. M. K. Gandhi on Vaikoīn Sātyāgraha, Young India, 19-02-1925.
179. Ramnath Sharma, Society and Culture in India, Rajhans Prakashan Mandir, Meerut, 1931, p.33.
change of servitude which occurs when he is presented to a temple in compliance with some superstitious vow"^{181}.

Above all the slave masters little adapted to improve the situation of the slaves.

Their conventions, occupations were miserable, dirty, soiled, and beyond our imaginations and their means of earning daily 'bread and butter' were meagre and humble"^{182}. Poverty and famine conditions were the common phenomenon of these deserted human beings.

"Their labour are repaid in grain; three measure"^{183} of paddy to man, two to woman, one to child is their pittance; this is not irregularly given, being reduced to half, on days which they do not work, and withheld entirely on symptoms of refractoriness. ............ they have no idea beyond their occupations, are never guilty of violence to their masters, are said to be obedient, perhaps from sluggish apathy of their character, which renders them unmindful of their lot"^{184}.

181. Ibid.
182. Ramnath Sharma, op. cit., p. 33.
183. One measure in local term is a Nāzhi and it is equivalent to 300 grams.
Their women folk were known under the common noun of Pulakkaḷi and Parakkaḷi. The epithest ‘Kaḷḷi’ in Malayalam denote a meaning “dishonest woman”. Their abode was in dirty slums and were known variously as Parakkuḍi/Pulakkuḍi, Paracherry/Pulacherry, Pula Thara, etc. in which new diseases were frequently visiting and life became miserable. In addition to it they were employed only in the agricultural task which increase their unhygienic living conditions endure for ever.

“They live in hovels situated on the bank of the fields, or nestle on the trees along their borders to watch the crop after the toils of the day, and are discouraged from erecting better accommodation under the idea that if more comfortable they would be less disposed to move as the culture required”185.

There was no provision for medical care to them since the gnostic high caste doctor become defiled by approaching or touching them186. Since Pulayan Parayan was insisted by law to keep a distance of 92 feet away from a Brahmin, it was difficult to get a medical care from high caste doctor. As ipso-facto the basic groups were deprived of all medical care.

In a society where more than 420 castes and subcastes operated as ipso-jure institution, and it decided the destiny of an individual in socio-

185. Ibid, pp.149, 150.
186. Ranmath Sharma, op.cit, pp.33, 34.
religious as well as economic field, much societal pressure was exerted over the Pulayas and Parayas, who were at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, deprived of all their material well being.

"Nowhere in the country has caste got such a tight and fatal grip on society as in Kerala"^{187}. Agrestic slave communities being the traditional proletariat, in the Kerala scenario, is the basic class even today also. As an economically inferior class, through centuries, they lost all their grip over social structure^{188}. The superior economic, political and socio-religious power of the upper caste, gained through the concept/strategy of Dharma and Karma (duty and fate), kept the lower order of the caste equation suppressed on through ages, which defused all morale of the untouchables/agrestic slave communities^{189}.

_Pulayan_, once the inventors of the paddy cultivation and use of rice, reduced to the level of slaves in their own land by the newly emerged caste Hindu masters^{190}. It was so happened, because in the encounter with


188. Tom Bottomore, _The Frankfurt School_, Ellis Horwood Ltd., London, 1984, pp.35, 45, The author quote Karl Marx ".......... the ideas of the ruling class are in every age, the ruling ideas".


190. Kunnukuzhi S. Mani, _op. cit._, p.11.
the newly arrived cultures, a social tension took shape and the aborigines were defeated due to historical reasons\textsuperscript{191}. Anyhow the basic classes in Kerala such as \textit{Pulayan, Parayan} etc born to work for the betterment of the entire social structure, had not benefited the fruits or a share of it for their progenies, and even for them too\textsuperscript{192}. After hours of long and tedious work, from dawn to dusk, he was supposed to wait for his daily bread at the boundaries (\textit{thēēṇḍāppadakalāṁ}) of his master. The daily wages in kind (only as paddy, no other ingredients such as salt, chilly, onion, etc.) he received from the master was not his right but as the mercy of his master\textsuperscript{193}. The economic backwardness, along with socio-religious disabilities drained his self status or self esteem, which reduced the chance of a revolt from among the Harijans so far in the early decades of the twentieth century\textsuperscript{194}.

From the very beginning of this decayed social stratification, the \textit{Pulayas} were under the pressure of the social clutches articulated by the

\textsuperscript{191} D.D. Kosambi, \textit{The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India}

\textsuperscript{192} Kesavan Veluthat, \textit{op.cit}, p. 240, “Thus within the existing social formation the standardization of stratification through the jāti formula became very handy for the upper classes in society for their interest of the maximization of revenue”.


\textsuperscript{194} R. K. Mukerjee, \textit{The Social Structure of Values}, S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1965, p.213., “Man’s normal self-status or self-esteem depends upon the prestige, the stratum or class group accords him on a scale of importance”.

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upper class/jāti strategy. The history is so silent or deaf about the early social resistance of these basic groups for independence and survival. Their well-being was not the responsibility of the society.

"... tenures but little adapted to improve the situation of the slaves".

Anyhow, the disposers of the waste, the producers of the food grains, servants of the society were not permitted to use the milk of the cows by the hegemonic groups of Kerala. But they were permitted to use the milk of the she-buffaloes, because it was considered as inferior animal in the eyes of peer groups.

"They (buffaloes) are consigned to the care of Polayans (Pulayans) who in some instance alone use their milk".

Being a mighty animal it was used only for agricultural works by the owners of the agricultural lands.

The pleasant life leading non labouring classes/sections of Kerala considered the employment of an ostracised/untouchable group permanently, with out any right over the land which they cultivated, as legitimate before

196. Ward and Conner, op.cit, p. 149.
197. Ibid, p. 75.
198. Ibid.
God and government. The caste hierarchy which operated through centuries and their economic stratification strengthened the ritual/jāti stratification and vice versa. The ostracised groups/strata popularly and collectively known under the untouchable/Harijan schedule, deprived of all privileges forced to live under the barbaric/inferior condition. They were not permitted to wear clothes, dress their hairs, use the help of the village washer men, or to use public places such as public roads, public markets, etc. Inflicting mental as well as physical agony to the basic groups and demoralize them, was the part of a general upper class conspiracy which operated throughout India in a way or other.

"Caste system ensured the availability of a stable supply of labour by creating and maintaining a section of population, namely untouchables, that had no access to land and was forced to perform manual labour." The exploitive and demoralizing mechanism was masterminded by the Braminical hegemony which spread its nets all over India since the emergence of the Gupta Empire.


200. Ibid, p. 2

201. Ward and Conner, op. cit, p. 150, "The bark of arreka, often furnishes their whole clothing, which at best never exceeds a bit of cloth sufficient for the purpose of decency: the hair allowed to grow wild, forms in time as immense mass, whose impurities cannot be imagined without shrinking", and Rajagopal Vakathanam, op. cit, p. 5.

Anyhow the jāti paradigm which operated through centuries in Kerala served as an instrument justifying the economic exploitation and impoverishment of the lower castes/jāties. The twentieth century Kerala reformation movement was able to rout the very root of Kerala caste hierarchy. The towering personality of Chāttarāmbi Swāmikal and Narayana Guru along with educated youth has shaken the very foundation of decayed social hierarchical superstructure. But these all movements least touched the burning problems of the untouchables or Harijans of Kerala. The waves, that created by the neo-classical reformist groups of Kerala, only created superficial impulses as far the untouchables/Harijans is concerned. But it helped to open the eyes of weaker sections and it poured the courage to the untouchables/Harijans of Kerala in general and particularly to men like Pandit Karuppan, Pampady John Joseph, Aiyyan Kāli, Kumara Guru, etc. Under the new light of renaissance the labour relations of Kerala had shown some drastic changes in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. In the last century labour relations operated in the line of an unlimited working hours with no cash payment and it was the usual pattern that governed the agrarian scenario. The changing society showed some degree of kindness to the


204. A. Sreedharamenon, Kerala History and its Markers, op.cit, pp. 219-228.

agrestic slave communities. The 1931 census gives us some hints with regard to the above change. As per the census report the working hours of the agrestic labour was reduced/limited to seven to eight and a half hours and labour was remunerated in cash terms. An adult man got eight to twelve Chakrams, and a woman got five to eight and a half Chakrams for a days hardships in the marshy paddy land of the janmi206. It was only a slight improvement form the old condition and not the complete deliverence of the agrestic groups from the age old bondage. No doubt, it was the begining of the end of the age old exploitative structure.

Hence this change not at all improved the socio-economic conditions of the untouchables/Harijans. But it ushered in a new era of hope to the suffering millions207. This shift actually helped the untouchables/Harijans to generate an opportunity to elevate themselves from the age old static condition by resorting to the organizational mechanisms208. No doubt it enhanced their mental courage to withstand social challenges of higher degrees209. To quote J. S. Hutton,

"......... from birth to death with fixed social milieu, from which neither wealth nor poverty, success nor

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206. A rupee was equivalent to twentyeight Chakrams. Chakram was the legal tender of the State of Travancore, and see Census Report of India 1931, Vol.XXVIII, Part 2, pp. 212, 213-230.


208. Y.B. Damle, op.cit., p. 66.

disaster can remove him unless of course he so violates the standards of behaviour laid down by his caste that it spews him forth - temporarily or permanently". 

Along with opening of the socio-religious spheres the meagre economic freedom much helped to usher the spirit of resistance in the case of Kerala untouchables/ Harijans.