Chapter - I

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT BEFORE 1956

The social and economic condition that prevailed in Kanyakumari District was not different from the other parts of Travancore. The system of social life that prevailed in this district was based on caste system. The society in Kanyakumari District was divided into two broad caste groups, the high caste and the low caste, viz. the Savarnas and the Avarnas. The Brahmans, the Nayars and the Vellalas were the Savarnas. The avarnas consisted of the Nadars, the Ezhavas, the Pulayas and the other subcastes such as Fishermen, artisans like Goldsmith, Carpenter and Blacksmith. These communities, though lived together, each community had their own caste rules, customs, conventions and manners. Basing on these their social life was centred round. But this system of society based on caste was unknown to the pre-Aryan society. It is supposed to have been introduced by the Aryan invaders and it began to spread all over India as the process of Sanskritization was extended. According to Aryan idea of society there were only four castes or Varnas namely Brahmans, Kshatriyans, Vysias and the Sudras.¹ But in actual practice in south

India, there were too many castes that affected the social life of the people.

Varna and Jati are the two terms which would explain the institution of caste. Varna literally means ‘colour’ and ‘Jati’ comes from the Sanskrit word ‘jan’ which means ‘birth’.\(^2\) Varna denotes the four castes of the Aryan ideal. At the time of Rig Vedic invasion the four Varnas represented a four-fold division of their society into classes.\(^3\) Jati denotes endogamous groups which were the practical units in the structure of caste outside the four Varnas. There were only four Varnas; but there are thousands of Jatis. The Varna model of caste is seen all over India with its distinctive and immutable hierarchy while the Jati model of caste is regional with variations. According to traditional understanding, those who were outside the Varna system were Avarnas or untouchables.\(^4\)

**Evolution of caste system**

The Varna model of caste system is supposed to have evolved during the Vedic period of Indian History.\(^5\) The Brahmin writers who propounded the structure of society placed them at the top and gave

\(^3\) Hutton, J.H., Castes in India, Cambridge, 1946, pp. 64065.
them the privilege of declaring the study of the other castes, including the Kings.\textsuperscript{6} The Savarna castes were regarded as pure and the Avarna castes as polluting. Each caste is characterized by a number of attributes insignificant to its position in the ritual ranking.\textsuperscript{7} Thus the distinction of purity and pollution set one section of the people above the other section and thus the polluting castes began to be suppressed by the so called pure castes.\textsuperscript{8}

On the basis of distinction, the religious sanction was brought in. It was the general belief that the Brahmins were born from the mouth of the Purusha, the creator, the Kshatriyas from the limbs, the Vaisyas from the waist and the Sudras from the feet. Below this society, and economically tied to it, were a number of excluded castes, whose contact, shadow, or even sight was pollution. They performed impure works and had to live outside the Aryan communities.\textsuperscript{9}

During the pre-Aryan period, social stratifications were not based on birth, but on functions where mobility between functional groups were possible. There was no stigma attached to any other caste. The Brahmins who reached Travancore from the Deccan subjugated

\begin{itemize}
  \item Srinivas, M.N., \textit{Social Change in Modern India}, New Delhi, 1972, p. 5.
  \item Hardgrave, R.L., \textit{The Nadars of Tamilnad}, California, 1969, p. 3.
  \item Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, p. 8.
  \item Kunjan Pillai, E., \textit{op.cit.}, Kottayam, 1979, p. 311.
\end{itemize}
the land during the period between the 8th and 11th centuries A.D., Travancore was fully in the strait jacket of caste system.\textsuperscript{10} Since then, caste has been the dominant factor in the economic and cultural life of Travancore.\textsuperscript{11} In course of time, the distinctions between castes increased. The harmony of the society rested on the disunity within it.

Implementation of the social laws which followed the incursion of the caste system, was exclusively for the comfort of the Savarnas, especially the Brahmins. The rules of pollution made it necessary that the Avarnas should not even approach the Savarnas.\textsuperscript{12}

At the same time there was also a growth of caste segregation among the lower castes. Thus every caste became a strong unit in itself where the upper caste dominated the lower. All the social relationships such as marriages were limited within the caste, and the only exemption granted for the male members of the Brahmin community was the right to have concubinage with any women from

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{10} Kunjan Pillai, E., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{12} (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Nayars were called the caste Hindus or the Savarnas. Ezhavas, Shanars, Kammalars, Mukkuvas, Pulayas and Parayas were called the non-caste Hindus or the Avarnas. Samuel Mateer, The Land Charity, London, 1871, pp. 27-28.
\end{flushleft}
the Savarna castes, mainly the Nayar caste.\textsuperscript{13} However, the Brahmins, the Namboodiris and others formed the Savarnas and the rest of the human beings in all parts of Travancore were Avarnas. Basing on the birth the communal divisions were present not only in South Travancore, the present Kanyakumari District but also other parts of Travancore.

**The Brahmins**

The term ‘Brahmin’ is derived from Brahma the creator God and it is said that from whose mouth the Brahmins have sprung and hence the name.\textsuperscript{14} Five sects of them were found in South India known as pancha Dravidas or pancha Gaudas.\textsuperscript{15} They were Malayala Brahmins, Tamil Brahmins, Canarese Brahmins, Telugu Brahmins and Maharashtra Brahmins. Among these the Malayala Brahmins were regarded as the superior class.

The Namboodiri Brahmins were mostly found in the states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. They formed the “socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar and the traditional land-holders of

\textsuperscript{15} Census of India, 1911, Travancore.
Parasurama"\textsuperscript{16} the legendary founder of Kerala. The Namboodiri was treated with utmost reverence in the society and was considered to be the God on earth.\textsuperscript{17} The author of Keralopathi went to the extent of saying that only through Namboodiri seed good kings, would be born.\textsuperscript{18} The Namboodiris are found in all the taluks of the then Travancore.

Potti is another group of Brahmins. Potti is a Tamil word signifying reverence, and this term is used to designate all Malayalee Brahmins except Nambudiri Brahmins.\textsuperscript{19} There are three classes of Potti Brahmins corresponding to the three periods of their settlements in the country.\textsuperscript{20} Among the Brahmins, next stood the Paradesi Brahmins. They are non-Malayalee Brahmins speaking Tamil, Kanarese, Telugu and Marathi languages. But in the Agastheswaram taluk there are Nambudiri Brahmins, Potti Brahmins and non-Malayalee Brahmins.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{18} Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Studies in Kerala History}, p. 315.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 247-248.
Ampalavasi

Ampalavasi\textsuperscript{21} is the generic name applied to all classes of temple servants of Travancore. There were many sub-divisions in the caste, which were assigned different services in the Hindu temple, such as preparation of garlands, sweeping of the temple floor, fetching firewood, and carrying idols in procession.\textsuperscript{22} As a peculiar caste in Travancore\textsuperscript{23} the Ampalavasis occupied an intermediary position between the Brahmins and Sudras or Nayars. Each Ampalavasi hopes to regain the lost position by serving his term of life in temples.\textsuperscript{24} Unni is the largest sub-division which comprises of four castes – Nampiyassan, Pushpakan, Puppalli and Brahmin.\textsuperscript{25} Their traditional occupation is preparing pushpams or garlands for the temple use.

Nayar

On the non-Brahminical Hindus in Travancore,\textsuperscript{26} the Nayars constituted the largest caste in Travancore.\textsuperscript{27} The first scientific census

\textsuperscript{21} The term literally means ‘a dweller in a temple’.
\textsuperscript{24} They are considered as fallen Brahmins.
\textsuperscript{25} The caste group is also named as ‘push pakans’.
\textsuperscript{26} Census of India, 1911, Travancore, Part I, Report, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{27} Thulaseedharan, K., \textit{Studies in Traditional Kerala Society}, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 34.
of 1875 calculates them about twenty percent.\textsuperscript{28} They are found in all parts of Travancore. In Agastheeswaram taluk they are limited in number. They were numerous in Trivandrum, Neyyattinkara, Mavelikara, Thiruvalla and Quilon. Kerala Mahatmyam and Brahmin tradition say that the Nayar caste was the result of the union between the Namboodiris and Deva Gandharva and Rakshasa women\textsuperscript{29} introduced by parasurama.\textsuperscript{30} They are considered as a mixed race of Aryan and Dravidian. The term ‘Nayar’ was derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Nayaka’ meaning a leader.\textsuperscript{31}

Most of the feudal chiefs in Travancore were Nayars.\textsuperscript{32} They were first mentioned in three copper plates and inscriptions of seventh to ninth century A.D.\textsuperscript{33} and rose to the position of small kings by the mid 13\textsuperscript{th} century. Kublakhan, a Chinese Emperor had trade relation with Travancore through two coastal Nayar Chieftains with strategic

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{28} Robin Jeffrey, \textit{op cit.} p. 14.
\textsuperscript{29} They were considered to be the divine courtisans. Elemkulam Kunjan Pillai, P.N., \textit{Studies in Kerala History}, p. 296.
\textsuperscript{30} Edgar Thurston, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. V, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{32} William Logan, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 265.
\end{footnotes}
ports. The Nayars with other indigenous castes formed a long standing army of the state.

There were four main sub-divisions of Nayars in Travancore. Found in large number, the Illakkars were the highest sub-class of Nayars. The swarupam Nayars were the attendants of the Kshatriya families. Padmangalam and Tamil Padam Sudras are the immigrants from Tamil Country and latter became Nayars. Nayar settlement in Agastheeswaram taluk is not so strong as in the other three taluks of Kanyakumari District.

**The Avarnas**

The Ezhavas were spread throughout the length and breadth of Travancore. In certain parts of Travancore they are called the Chovans even now. Regarding their origin it is said that a Pandya princess Alli and her husband Narasimha, the Raja of carnatic migrated to Ceylon and became the sovereign of Ceylon. Later their successors returned to the motherland and settled in Kerala by name Ezhavas in remembrance.

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34 David, M. Schneider, Kathleen Gough, (ed), op cit., p. 303. The two kingdoms were Kolattiri and Travancore or Venad.


of Ezham or Ceylon. Most of the Ezhavas were tappers and tenders of coconut palm to public offices, temple roads and the houses. They followed the custom of Nayars, their women were prohibited from covering their breasts and wearing certain clothes and ornaments till the second half of the nineteenth century. Keeping cows and metal vessels, and wearing sandals and fine clothes were not allowed to them. In general, they were a people despised by the higher castes. As a slave caste of the Nayars, the Ezhavas inherited the social customs of Nayars. According to 1911 census, the Ezhavas were numbered 456,265 against 592,489 Nayars.

The Nadars

The Nadars originally lived in and around Madurai. They were a group of rich people who lived in peace. In 1630 A.D. Thirumalai Nayakkar came to power. During his period there were rebellion in his country. The king sought the help of the Nadars. But they refused to help him. The enraged Thirumalai ravaged the Nadar settlements. So the Nadars ran in batches for their safety. Those who ran to the northern part of Tamilnad called themselves as Gounders to protect

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37 Census of India, 1901, Travancore, Part I, p. 278.
them from the onslaught. Those who ran to the South, settled in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari Districts mostly in Agastheeswaram taluk, mostly in Rajakkamangalam and places west of Rajakkamangalam. As there was no means for their livelihood, they adopted palmyrah climbing and agriculture.40

The Nadars were found in large numbers in all the four taluks of Kanyakumari district. They occupy a social status equal to the Ezhavas.41 It was the only caste prominently speaking Tamil in Travancore.42 They follow patrilineal system of inheritance but a microscopic section of them in some villages followed the matrilineal system.

In the later centuries, the Nadars of Travancore occupied a social limbo between the Nayars and the out caste groups. They were the highest division of the lowest classes or the lowest of the middle classes.43 A large number of them were converted to Christian faith

40 Encyclopaedia of Agastheeswaram, pp., 9-11.
41 They were also contemptuously called as Shannars.
42 Robin Jeffrey, op cit., p. 22.
mainly for getting social equality with higher classes of the society. After Tirunelveli riots of 1889, they became popular.44

Krishnavakaikkar

The term Krishnavakaikkar literally means ‘belonging to Krishna’.45 The Krishnavakaikkar were mainly confined to Eraniel and Kalkulam, the southern taluks of the state. No Krishnavakaikkar was found in British Malabar and Cochin. This caste mainly follow the matrilineal system of inheritance and succession.46 From the suffixes to their name Ayan and Acchi, they were considered as one of the main pastoral castes of South India.47 They were calculated to 109,429 in number in 1911 census.48

Tradition traces their origin to Ampadi,49 near Madura and from there they migrated to Conjevaram.50 They migrated from there to Travancore and presented an image of Lord Krishna to the reigning

44 The important riots of Tirunelveli and Madura called The antishanar riot. A riot between the shannars and the maravas to treat them as high caste with strong antagonism between the two. G.O. No. 1077 Judicial, July 1899, dated 20.08.1990.
47 Edgar Thurston, op cit., Vol. IV, p. 74.
49 Also called Ayar padi, which was the native of Lord Krishna.
king Udaya Martanda Varma\textsuperscript{51} in the first year of the Malabar Era. The Maharaja asked them to serve in the temple of Krishna within the abode of Sri Padmanabha Swami at Trivandrum. They lived at Vanchiyur near Trivandrum for many years. As most of them follow matrilineal system they observe strictly the birth and death pollution. Thus the daily ceremonies at the temple were constantly interrupted. It was not tolerated by the rulers of Travancore. So the Maharaja asked them to remove their residence from Trivandrum at least by three rivers. As a result they settled in the taluks of Eraniel and Kalkulam.\textsuperscript{52} The Marumakkathayam Krishnavakaikkar speak Malayalam whereas the Makkathayis speak a very corrupt Tamil dialect inter-mixed with Malayalam.

**Nanchilnad Vellala**

Situated in the southernmost part of the country, Nanchilnad comprises of Thovalai and Agastheeswaram taluks of Travancore. Several families from Pandynad\textsuperscript{53} and Coromandal coast migrated to this land, cleared the jungles and settled there. The term ‘Nanchilnad’ means the land surrounded by Nanja lands or country fortified by

\textsuperscript{51} The king was identified as Pallivana Perumal, according to another account.

\textsuperscript{52} Edgar Thurston, *op cit.*, Vol. II, p. 74-75.

\textsuperscript{53} Pandyanad – Tirunelveli and places north of it was called Pandy Nad.
natural barriers. The names of present day villages like Azhagia Pandiapuram, Kulasekharanputhur and Cholapuram indicate the supremacy of the Pandya, Chera and Chola kings over this land.

Tradition traces that the last Kuravan ruler of Nanchilnad insisted upon his marriage with a girl of a Mudaliar family. Indignant at his proposal, the Mudaliar people decided to revenge the Kurava ruler. They pretended to agree to the alliance. They erected a huge granite pandal with mechanism for its sudden collapse at a signal. On the appointed day, Kuravan and his people came and were seated in the Pandal. The pandal collapsed when the signal was given and all Kuravas including their ambitious ruler were killed. The remaining of the granite structure are found even today at the village of Kurathiyara. Nanchilnad is declared the common wealth of the people. Later this tract of land became the bone of contention between Travancore and the Pandyan rulers. In 1116 A.D., Travancore defeated Raja Simha, the Pandyan ruler and annexed Kottar and Nanchilnad.\footnote{Report of the Nanchilnad Marumakkathaya Vellala Committee, 1921, Trivandrum, 1922, p. 4.} After becoming the citizens of Travancore, the people of Nanchilnad accepted the matrilineal system of inheritance. Yet it is not a pure matrilineal system in the real sense but a midway of Tamil and
Malayalam culture. The law of inheritance so far relates to Nankudama (property of the women) and Ukanthudama (property right by love), patrilineal while in all other respects they followed matrilineal system.

**The Parayas**

South of the Vindya mountains, the entire Deccan plateau was occupied by Dravidians. In the extreme south, there were the aborigines, who were called Adi Dravidas, the original settlers of Dravida Nadu. Later they were classified as Parayas, Pulayas and Pallas. The name Adi Dravida implies original and earliest Dravidas (Adi-the very early). They speak Tamil and follow the same customs and manner of other Tamils. They are darker in complexion than the other Tamils because of their long exposure to sun and open-air life. Because of their stunted growth, dark complexion and good stamina they were considered as good slaves and they were kept forever as untouchables by the other communities.

Here in South Travancore the untouchables were considered impure unclean and polluted in both body and mind. They caused pollution to anything by their mere contact, just by touching it. They

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55 Proceeding of the Adi Dravida Mahajana Saba, 1932.
had no right to go near a caste Hindu. They had to bow their heads and stand at a distance prescribed by them.\textsuperscript{57} An untouchable was forbidden to wear a turban or cover his head in the presence of a Brahmin or a caste Hindu even at work in the hot sun.\textsuperscript{58} Even if he took bath many times a day, he could not make himself pure, and was still an untouchable. The depressed classes all over Travancore had suffered perhaps the most barbaric manifestation of man’s inhumanity to man. While in the other parts of the country the condemnation was due to economic or social condition, in Travancore it was because of caste and religion.

The untouchables were spread all over South Travancore. Though the caste Hindus take ‘parayar’ to mean ‘outcaste’, there are other meanings too. Parai in Tamil means a kind of drum and therefore Parayan means a traditional drum beater.\textsuperscript{59} Parayas beat drums during village festivals, marriages and funerals of the high caste people. Parayas were also drum-beaters in the battle fields.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} Yesudhas, R.N., \textit{op.cit.}, p.. 9.
\textsuperscript{58} Samuel Mateer, \textit{Native Life in Travancore}, 1883, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{59} Edgar Thurston, \textit{op.cit}, p. 78.
The Parayas form a huge chunk of the people of South Travancore. Some scholars say that the Parayas are the descendants of the Chera kings who were defeated by the powerful Chola kings. It is also said that the Parayas were the people of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) conquered by the Chola king and taken as prisoners to Chola kingdom where they were kept as slaves. It is also suggested that the Parayas were originally Buddhists who were in the habit of condemning and ridiculing the Brahmins before the latter became powerful. Later the tables were turned against them. When the Brahmins became all-powerful they condemned and ridiculed the Parayas and branded them as untouchables forever.

**Pallans**

The Pallans form the larger community of untouchables in South Travancore. They form a segment of agricultural labourers, and are mostly employed in the cultivation of paddy. The Pallans were engaged themselves in ploughing and agricultural work in those low

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lying areas.\textsuperscript{65} So it is assumed that their caste name originated from the name of the place where they worked. In the Tamil dictionary, Pallans are classified as out-castes. After the defeat of the Pallava dynasty, the remaining Pallavas were taken as prisoners and treated as slaves by the Imperial Cholas. It is probable that the slaves were treated as unclean and untouchable human beings. They were also ill-treated by Vellala landlords.\textsuperscript{66} It is said that the low class Pallavas were called as Pallans. According to Tamil literature, Pallans were an ancient community of Tamil Nadu, and owners of large cultivable lands. Therefore it is obvious that they have been suppressed into slavery by the subsequent invaders who came down to south from the north.

Apart from these communities, there are fishermen in the coastal areas who profess fishing. But they could not be brought under the feudalistic society, because they professed Catholic religion. The priests and the elders of the society protected them. Next to them were the Muslims settlers who were mostly traders. Tradition states that the Muslims came and settled in this part, when Muhilan, a Muslim

\textsuperscript{65} Thurston, E., \textit{op cit.}, p. 473.

\textsuperscript{66} Hanumanthan, \textit{Untouchability}, Madurai, 1979.
invaded Kottar, and settled in the near vicinity of Kottar.\textsuperscript{67} There were other communities too found in different places of Agastheeswaram. The dominance of the superior caste led to the caste hierarchy not only in South Travancore but also the whole of Travancore.

**Caste hierarchy**

The role and influence of caste system was the root cause for all the social evils. The Brahmins, were at the top of the society. They were considered as Jenmis of the land or tenants in Chief. They acted as the advisers of the kings. The Nayars were the feudal lords, who assisted the kings in warfields and in all other areas of the king’s day to day affairs.

Immediately below the Nayars were the Ezhavas or Thiyans or chogans or chovans. They cultivated the gardens and also grew dry crops. Under the direct supervision of the Ezhavas, the paddy fields were cultivated by the slaves. The Nayars who occupied important places in the government forced the Ezhavas to serve them. The Ezhavas as a class were considered low in social estimation. On grounds of pollution they had to remain a distance of thirty six feet

\textsuperscript{67} There is a place called Muhilan Kudiyiruppu situated at the south west of Kottar, now a part of Agastheeswaram. This place is called so after Muhilan.
from a Brahmin and twelve steps from a Nayar. They could not rear cows or enter the bazaar for purposes of trade. They could use only coarse clothes and wear ordinary ornaments. They could not live in tiled houses or use umbrellas or move about in conveyances. No Ezhava could enjoy or own landed property. Thus the condition of the Ezhavas was miserable. Next to the Ezhavas, the Nadars who were also treated as a low caste slave. They were forbidden from wearing a turban on their heads to carry the loads that were thrust upon them by compulsion.

The next in the social hierarchy were the Pulayas, the Parayas and Kuravas. The slaves were doing bonded labour for the Nayars and Syrian Christians. On the abolition of slavery they became domestic servants of their masters. Having been thus exploited for a long time, the Pulayas were below the Ezhava and Nadar. They were known as Cheruman in Travancore. Etymologic pulaya denotes pollution and

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70 Col. Munro to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort St. George, dated 7th March 1818, Nagercoil, Foreign Political Proceedings, Fort William, 17th July 1818, No. 20, p. 66.
Cheruman signifies the soil.\textsuperscript{72} The concept of pollution and low birth was suggested by term. Naturally the children of these unfortunates were obliged to be born into slavery, but their numerical superiority enabled them to secure certain privileges which guaranteed them steady maintenance. Every noble man or wealthy Nayar kept a certain number of them under him, of course their masters were not supposed to provide them their daily bread. But in Malabar they were given fixed wages in cash or in rice for their labour.\textsuperscript{73} As polluted beings they were supposed to construct their huts in swamps and slums where caste Hindus never went.\textsuperscript{74} Being a miserable lot, they called themselves as ‘adiyans’ and were expected to place their hand over the mouth when addressing a high-born person.\textsuperscript{75} Centuries of degradation made them filthy in their habits. They practised polygamy but polyandry was unknown. Intellectually they were at the low level.\textsuperscript{76}

They were not permitted to worship Hindu deities, but they worshipped a Goddess called Baradevatha. They had no temple for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} The Indian Journal of Social Work (Tata Graduate School of School Work), Vol. I. No.4, December, 1950-1941, pp. 393-394.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Jacob Conter Visscher, \textit{Letters from Malabar}, pp. 70-71.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Barbosa, \textit{op cit.}, pp. 142-143.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Christian Mission Intelligencer, April 1883, p. 216.
\end{itemize}
worship but they placed a stone on a mount in the open air and worshipped it as their deity\textsuperscript{77} offered fruits, fowls and liquor. One from their own caste served as the priest. They believed in the power of spirit and offered gifts to please them for earthly benefits. Faith in the supernatural power was very high among them\textsuperscript{78}.

Despised and neglected by their superiors, they became a byword for everything that was impure. Their presence near town and markets was even resented by the members of caste Hindus\textsuperscript{79}. One ironical aspect of their life was that they regarded themselves as superior to the Paraya. In case of pollution of touch by a Paraya, a Pulaya washed himself in atonement\textsuperscript{80}.

The Parayas were at the bottom of the social ladder. They wore leaves and ate the flesh of wild animals. The Parayas used to eat the carcasses of all domestic animals\textsuperscript{81}. Their ordinary profession was cultivation of paddy fields, cleaning of ponds, and tilling the ground using bullocks. Also they engaged themselves in skinning animals, making baskets, bamboo mats, umbrellas and such other menial

\textsuperscript{78} Francis Day, The Land of the Perumals, Madras, 1869, p. 328.
\textsuperscript{80} Francis Buchanan, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. II, p. 492.
\textsuperscript{81} Nagam Aiya, V., \textit{op cit.}, Vol. II, p. 402.
occupations. Their chief deity was Marutai and believed that after death the spirits of the good would become god like while those of the bad become devils. They had temples dedicated to Marutai whose idol was installed in them. They had their priest called velathan parayan. They were at the mercy of their masters by whom they were bought and sold like cattles and were generally treated inhumanly.

Majority of slave populations in South Travancore sprang from the Pulayas and Parayas. They could even be killed by their masters with impunity. Even in the courts of law justice was denied. They could not put up huts near public roads. Also they were not permitted to use sircar ferry boats to cross the rivers in times of flood. In order to avoid pollution they were required to keep away from public places, roads and offices.

In addition to Pulayas and Parayas, Kuravas also represented one of the lowest untouchable groups of Kerala. Once upon a time they were powerful and influential. About the 12th century a tribal chief

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82 Francis Day, *op. cit.*, p 328.,
84 The Madras Church Missionary Record, Vol. XVII, No. 6, June 1850, p. 143.
called Nanjil Kuravan, declared himself the king of Nanjilnad in South Travancore. Later he was overthrown and Nanchilnad was annexed to Travancore. Slowly they lost their independent status and became a group of untouchables. The system of caste hierarchy became an instrument for oppression and consequent disabilities. But there was nobody to fight against these disabilities. This was made possible only after the arrival of Protestant Missions.

Apart from this there was weaving community scattered throughout South Travancore especially in the four taluks of the present Kanyakumari District. One such community was the Kerala Mudalis.

In 1809 a war was fought between the British commander St. Legar and Veluthampi Dalawa, the Diwan of Travancore. In this battle, the Dalawa was defeated and killed. Since then the erstwhile Travancore State’s independent existence was lost. The war caused the migration of many communities. One such community was Kerala Mudali community. Thus the migration of this community had been a continuous process from 1730 onwards.
The Kerala Mudalis

The Kerala Mudalis are weavers who came from the Carnatic. Khan Sahib, the military commander deputed by the Nawab of the Carnatic Muhamad Ali and Colonel Pigot, Governor of Madras had a large army of mercenary soldiers. Amidst them there were soldiers belonging to many communities. The Kallars, the Maravars and Mudalis formed the army of Khan Sahib. Khan Sahib captured places upto Aramboly and began his own administration. He helped the agriculturist and industrial workers, especially the weavers.

The power of the Khan Sahib became so unwieldy that it was impossible even for the governor Pigot to control him. So he sent another commander Monson to control him. On 16th October 1764, Khan Sahib was defeated and hanged. All his mercenary soldiers ran in different directions. The Mudalis migrated beyond the Aramboly lines into the interior regions of the then erstwhile Travancore State. The Mudalis though were soldiers, yet had a wide knowledge of weaving. They were patronized by the Travancore King Ramavarma and his followers.

As they had a fear complex that they might be caught by the Nawab of Arcot they got themselves divided into small groups and began to settle in the remote corners of Kanyakumari District inaccessible to the invaders.

Kanyakumari District formerly familiarly known as Nanjil Nadu has good vegetation with good hill slopes and forest areas. The Mudalis selected remote areas. The following places were inaccessible having only a foot path to reach the destination.

1. Amsi
2. Pootetti
3. Ananchicode
4. Palliyadi
5. Irumpili
6. Melparai
7. Vencode
8. Colachel
9. Kunnancaud
10. Manavalakurichi
11. Nattalam (Vazhathottam) and
12. Kattuvilai (Kottaram).
The Kerala Mudali community occupied these areas and formed themselves into village groups known as Kerala Mudali Village Samudayam. Gradually the Village Samudayams felt the need of a central power. There is another theory regarding the coming of the Kerala Mudalis.

When the Travancore kingdom was ruled from Eraniel and Padmanabhapuram, the royal family arranged for the settlement of weavers, such as Kerala Mudalis, Sengunthar, Saliar, Pattiar, and Saurashtras in the order to produce necessary cloths for their country. The weaving communities supplied required cloths to the State of Travancore.

Another major community that traditionally followed handloom weaving trade was the Mudaliars of Kanyakumari District. People belonging to this community clustered in and around Palliyadi, Amsi, Colachel, Manavalakurichy, Palapallam, Ananchikode, Kannanvilai, Arumanai and many other suburbs. Their ancestral homeland was Kaveriropattinam of the ancient Chola country. They claimed that they belonged to Saiva Chetty community. When they migrated from

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88 Petition of the Kerala Mudali Samuthayam to Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, 26.9.1976, p. 3.
Kaveripoompattinam and settled at Kanyakumari District, they were known as Kaveripattinakar or Kaveriars.\(^{89}\)

In the 1911 Census, the weaving trade based Kerala Mudali community was clubbed with another community namely Kavathy whose original trade was entirely different from handloom weaving. This induced widespread frustration among the members of Kerala Mudali. In order to set right the disgrace of being called as Kavathy, some of them embraced Islam. The remaining Kaveriars in order to differentiate themselves from the Kavathy, changed their caste’s name as ‘Chakravars’. Within a short duration, the Kavathy community also changed their caste’s name as Chakravars. This induced widespread panic among the Chakravars of Kaveripoompattinam origin. They permanently discarded the title Chakravars and in 1921 assumed a new title ‘Kerala Mudali’.\(^{90}\)

In Kanyakumari District, Muslims of Thuckalay, Thittuvilai, Thiruvithamcode, Aloor, Layam and other places adapted handloom weaving as a means of their livelihood. It is interesting to note that in

\(^{89}\) Chakravars from Kaveripoompattinam were then known as Saiva Chetty Vellalars. When one of the Chola kings gave his daughter in marriage to a son of his Chief Minister the Saiva Chetty Vellalars disowned them. Those disowned Saiva Chetty Vellalars later identified themselves as a separate caste called Kaveripattinakar or Kaveriar.

\(^{90}\) Census of India, 1931, Vol. XXVIII, Travancore, Part I, Chapter XII, p. 381.
these Muslim populated areas there exist some streets called ‘Anchuvannam’. The Musalmans from these particular streets alone followed a particular trade of handloom weaving.

The Nadars of Kanyakumari District, both Hindus and Christians adapted handloom weaving as a means of their livelihood. Their involvement in this trade was different from that of the Saliars and the Kerala Mudalies. The above two communities followed a particular trade as a sole means of livelihood. But people belonging to Nadar community considered this trade as a subsidiary occupation and adopted it as a part time work.

Silk weaving also flourished in Kanyakumari District. The Raja of Travancore brought six families of Saurashtra by caste from Devagiri. They were settled at Kottar an ancient trading centre near Nagercoil to produce the required silks for the Royal family. This silk weaving Saurashtras received the Royal patronage and prospered. Their prosperity attracted many families from Devagiri to settle at Kottar. When the Royal patronage was shifted from silk to cotton cloths of fine counts, the silk weavers of Kottar also shifted themselves to the new demand. This facilitated them to gain huge profits. The attractive profits that the Saurashtras gained induced the Saliars,
Pattariyas and even the Muslims to shift over to the weaving of fine counts variety of cotton.\textsuperscript{91}

The traditional weavers and those who followed it as a subsidiary means of livelihood formed a major working force in Kanyakumari District. There were two categories of labourers in this industry. The first category was that the labourers who owned the loom and carried over their weaving trade in their houses alone. They carried it as a cottage industry. Their family members were working in the pre and post weaving operations. When the cooperative movement was introduced, a majority of such weavers organized themselves in forming the Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies. The weavers bought all the raw materials needed for their trade and also sold the products they produced either directly or through the Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies in which they were one among the shareholders.

**Economic condition**

South Travancore is predominantly an agricultural area. The agricultural economy is feudalistic in character. Feudalism prevailed

\footnote{Velupillai, T.K., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 546-547.}
in the history of not only South Travancore, but also in the whole of Travancore.92

Industrial economy of the four taluks of South Travancore, namely, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram are based on small scale especially village and cottage industries. Most of the villagers are engaged either in one industry or the other. The most conspicuous of industries are, the coir industry, palmyrah fibre industry, plantain fibre, aloe fibre, mat weaving, lace and embroidery and pottery.

**The Coir Industry**

The coir industry is one of the cottage industries in which many people are employed. In places like Thamaraikulam, Kanakudy, Rajakkamangalam, Manavalakurichy, Mondaikadu, Colachel and Thengapattanam the coir industries are found. Men, women and children are engaged in this industry. It is congenial for the women to work at this industry.93

The fibre is spun on wheel which is mostly used in these taluks. The coir is twisted, and made into bundles and sold in the markets.

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92 Peter and Ivy Peter, Liberation of an Oppressed Community, Nagercoil, 2009, p. 5.

With this coir, coir mat, fishermen’s ropes are made and sold in the open market. Coir is also exported to the foreign countries and earn income to the nation and the state as a whole. The importance of coir industry to Travancore including the area under study was that out of 351,076 industrial workers as many as 126,427 or 36 percent were employed in this industry alone and that the value of the products of the coir yarn industry contributed substantially to the value of the total export trade of the state annually.  

**Palmyrah Fibre**

Like coconut fibre, palmyrah fibre is also used for manufacture of mat, brush and netting. The prepared palmyrah fibre was subjected to an export duty of 1 percent of a tariff valuation of Rs. 1272 percent is recorded in the excise commissioner office. He abolished the duty from the year 1921. He also said that the abolition of the duty was sanctioned to even dye fibre (prepares fibre). Messers Chesholin Edwards Co., Quilon was the famous company preparing of good fibre from raw fibre.

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95 File 680 of 22 (Development), Letter Roc.No.4595 of 7th July 1921 from Excise Commissioner to Chief Secretary.
The two principal firm dealing with the article have been consulted and they were strongly opposed to the levy of export duty on the article.\textsuperscript{97} The average quantity of prepared fibre export from Travancore annually comes to only 10,588 cuts\textsuperscript{98} company in the year 1917 Travancore Colachel export 1636 weight of fibre worth of Rs. 2,25,685.\textsuperscript{99} The department of industry had worked out new process for bleaching the fibre and also for dyeing it. Brush making has also engaged its attention and experiment performed.\textsuperscript{100}

**Sago Palm**

Sago palm is a kind of palm tree, which is also called as Kudappana or Koondappana. A kind of white starch is prepared out of its nuts and people are used to eat its starch.\textsuperscript{101} Its fibre is strong and valued better than the other palm tree. It also gives toddy like other palm trees. This fibre has been extracted in small quantities by fishermen on account of its tensile strength and utility for making

\textsuperscript{97} File No. 680/22 (Development), p. 41.  
\textsuperscript{99} Travancore Government Gazette, November 1918, p. 1097.  
\textsuperscript{100} Baker, “Palmyrah Industries in Travancore”, Department of Industry 1918, Trivandrum, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{101} Ramaswamy, 82 years Povankodu (Persona Interview), dated 5\textsuperscript{th} January 2011.
fishing lines.\textsuperscript{102} Shencottah Hemp Fibre is very much useful for weaving bags. It is also helpful to manufacture canvas.\textsuperscript{103}

**Plantain Fibre**

The extraction of plantain fibre and the development of plantain industries has also been receiving attention. A small machine was designed and was made locally for manufacturing. Fibre was boiled with coconut oil, ammonium carbonate and sodium carbonate that softened the fibre like silk. This was used for weaving and cloth making.\textsuperscript{104} This kind of plantain is available in the southern part of Travancore. A group of people near Vadassery and Padmanabhapuram were highly involved in this work. They could easily find the market for their plantain in Vadassery. Weaving of plantain fibre cloths was prominent in Vadassery, Thovalai, Padmanabhapuram and Marthandam.\textsuperscript{105}

**Aloe Fibre**

The development of the aloe fibre industry had been the concern of the Department of Industry. There was a great demand for this in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} Baker, S.G., *op.cit.*, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{103} *Ibid.*, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Baker, S.G., *op.cit.*, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{105} PonnuSwamy Asan, Personal Interview, 89 years, dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} March 2011, Vadassery.
\end{itemize}
various places. In a single month over 40,000 yards of twine were sent out. The industry was steadily progressing. Bags and mats are produced from the aloe veira fibre.\(^{106}\)

Colachel and Trivandrum were the famous centres which produces Aloe fibre for fishing nets.\(^{107}\) Aloe fibre rope was stronger than other kinds of ropes such as coir and sago. The fibre was boiled with coconut oil and alkali for three days to make soft texture. This was woven into a good cloth and finally a gunny substitute was obtained. Text ropes have also been made. But it would be rather expensive.\(^{108}\)

The establishment of a caustic soda factory attached to the Punalur Paper Mill is engaging attention of the company. Government agreed to give them salt, duty free for the purpose.\(^{109}\) The Director had worked out the details of the scheme for the establishment of a caustic soda factory in Travancore.\(^{110}\)

\(^{106}\) Baker, S.G., _op.cit._, p. 5.
\(^{107}\) Muthiah, Personal Interview, 76 years, Colachel, dated 14\(^{th}\) February, 1993.
\(^{108}\) Baker, S.G., _op.cit._, p. 5.
\(^{109}\) Ramanatha Iyer, _op.cit._, p. 194.
\(^{110}\) _Ibid._.
Lace and Embroidery

Lace and Embroidery industry owes its origin to the pioneering zeal of the London Missionary Society at Parassala, the southernmost extremity of both the State and the District.¹¹¹ The beginnings of modern lace making are due to Mrs. Mault of the London Missionary Society. She began to teach the work to the poor women and girls of the Mission at Nagercoil in 1821.¹¹² Further revival of the industry was made within the last quarter of a century by the Belgian nuns who opened a convent at Mulagumoodu, a place between Trivandrum and Nagercoil.¹¹³

The Industrial Department was to find outside markets. They had enquiries from Australia and from America for Travancore handmade lace on a commercial scale. The department had been able to get in touch through over bulletins, with big firms who were enquiring for rare things.¹¹⁴

The lace and embroidery industry provided occupation for about 12,000 women and girls and small boys and men. Chronologically,

¹¹¹ Gazetteer of India, Kerala, Trivandrum, 1961, p. 402.
¹¹³ Ibid.
Syrian embroidery was the earliest to find its way in Travancore, having been introduced early in the Christian era by the colony of Syrians who settled in this land. All the other forms of lave and embroidery in Travancore are purely of European origin except a very little gold embroidery after the Muhammadan fashion that is occasionally seen and was mostly imported and can therefore be omitted from this account.

The Pillow Lace was the most extensive of the industries. Its introduction dates back to nearly a century and a half ago. No accurate information was available as to when and by whom it was first taught. It has also deteriorated in design, in stitch and in material, so much so that it was in a class of its own and was known as Quilon Lace. Young nuns trained in the art in all its historical aspects and modern developments and trained to understand the latest taste, fashions and market centres are being frequently recruited from Belgium. The form of their organisation also helps to pressure beautiful quality. “The Infant Jesus Orphanage” containing over 350 quils were all taught lace and embroidery. On marriage a part of the dowry was always a

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complete lace industry goods. Every new pattern was taught at the orphanage under the direct tuition of the sisters. All materials were supplied by the convent and invariably they were of best quality.\textsuperscript{118}

On 18\textsuperscript{th} February 1922, J.C. Chacko who was in charge of the Department of industries in Travancore sent a letter to the Dewan of Travancore and submitted that ever since last January the subject of lace making has been receiving his attention and that he was strongly of the opinion that the Government should do something to spread the art in North and Central Travancore. The private enterprises existed only within the sphere of action of the London Missionary Society and the Mulagumoodu Convent and is confined to the districts south of Quilon.\textsuperscript{119}

The Mulagumoodu Convent had given a great impetus to lace making in all its centres and is proving a strong incentive for improved methods of work. There are branch convents at Cape Comorin, Nagercoil, Asaripallam, Palliyady, Mariapuram and Kulasekharam. The kind of lace made were Torchon, Bruges, Hointon and Dutches.\textsuperscript{120}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{118} Velupillai, T.K., \textit{op.cit.} p. 553.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{119} File 557/22 (Development), Letter No. 2136/92,18 January 1922, Letter from the Director of Industries to the Dewan of Travancore.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{120} Velupillai, T.K., \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. III, p. 553.}
The manufacture of pillow and net laces drawn threads and crochet getting were artistically done in homes and convents.\textsuperscript{121} Darned net laces having long been known as an industry carried on in a desultory fashion as a supplementary occupation by the pillow lace makers of Quilon, Anjengo and Alleppy. The Mulagumoodu Convent made the finer varieties of net laces and was so far the only institution that produces Limerick and Carrickmacross laces.\textsuperscript{122}

**Embroidery**

The embroidery industry was commenced by the London Missionary Society at Nagercoil. Like the lace it is purely a cottage industry. Materials pattern were provided from the head station to which the women returned the finished work. They had four centres for embroidery work at Neyyoor, Marthandam, Parassala and Trivandrum. The Mulagumoodu Convent pursued this industry. Their products were broderice-anglaise richelien and Roman embroidery.\textsuperscript{123} The embroidery work centres at Neyyoor, Marthandam, Parassala, Trivandrum and Attingal were the famous centres for work.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{121} Gazetteer of India, Kerala, Trivandrum, 1961, p. 402.
\textsuperscript{122} Velupillai, T.K., \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. III, pp. 553-554.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 554.
\textsuperscript{124} Madras State Directory, Cochin, 1933, Seventh Year Issue, Pearl Press, Cochin, p. 6.
Pottery

Kaolin and China Clay of a quality practically unparalleled anywhere in the east even including China exist in abundant measure in Travancore. Clay is one of the great assets of this country and it is hoped that the supply of clay for the textile growth all over India will be one of the features of Travancore very shortly. Pottery is made in Aloor, Thirunainarkurichy and Kadukkarai, Aloor and Chunkankadai. This fetches livelihood to the people. During Karthikai Deepam festival their make called ahalvilakku has great market in Kanyakumari District and other places beyond Kanyakumari District.

Thus, the socio-economic life of the people of the area under study is based on communal hierarchy. The village and cottage industries too based on the economic upliftment of the people. The agricultural economy is feudalistic in nature. It was in this circumstance, the handloom workers were working for their betterment of their family life. But, as many of the small scale industries, under the Kerala set up did not help the people to improve their life and hence, they were compelled to struggle for their existence under Travancore set up till 1956.

125 Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar’s speech of Alwaye while laying the Cornerstone of the Bleaching Mills on 5.10.1936.