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Socio-Economic Profile of the Hill Tribes: A Historical Overview

Introduction

The origin of the hill tribes of Kerala is shrouded in the mist and mystery of time. When and how and why certain sections of the Homo sapiens chose to retreat to the shadowy uplands of this most verdant part of India, has not yet been adequately addressed by historians. Who knows whether the primitive inhabitants of the earth refused to abandon their pristine and primordial habitats and ‘get civilized’! Over the aeons the history of human kind has been the story of man’s efforts to get alienated from nature. A tragic irony indeed! But it is a comforting fact that there still are people who cleave to the bosom of Mother Nature. At a time when the problem of ecocide is plaguing this once good earth of ours, the simplicity and the ingenuousness of these people is worthy of study. This is also one of the rationales for the research.

The state of Kerala, the southern most state of the Indian Union, forms only 1.1% of India in land area but its population (in 2001) of 31.8 million accounts for 3.01% of India’s population. There are 48 tribal communities in Kerala of which 35 are Scheduled Tribes. The Scheduled Tribe population of Kerala constitutes 1.14% of the total population and vary widely in their geographical dispersion.

The tribals in Kerala constitute a marginalized section of the society and have been subjected to various types of exploitation for centuries. Their life
was characterized by servitude, unemployment, poverty and squalour. The various tribal communities differ from one another in racial traits, language, social organization, economy, religion, beliefs, customs and manners\(^3\).

“Various tribes of wild, but inoffensive mountaineers, occupy the higher hills and the mountains of Travancore, finding a rather precarious living by migratory agriculture, hunting and the spontaneous products of the forests”\(^4\). They are the hill tribes of Kerala.

2.1 Definition of the Tribes under Study

2.1.1 Etymology

The provenance of tribalist cognomens like the Malai Arayan, the Ulladan and the Urali is explained here.

2.1.1.1 The Malai Arayan

From the 16\(^{th}\) century onwards, the Malai Arayans were known by different names. In 1599, they were known as ‘Malleans\(^5\) (Kings of the hill country). But most of the missionary documents use the name Hill Arrians, to refer to this group of people. This appellation is a missionary coinage\(^6\). The word ‘Malai Arayan’ means monarch of the hills. ‘Arayan’ is a modified form of *Arasan* (King), and their name connotes king of the *Mala* (hill)’\(^7\).

Although Arasan meaning king is a Dravidian word, etymologically it might be cognate with the Greek noun ‘archos’, meaning, ruler. It appears in words like archangel, “archbishop”, “hierarchy”, “monarchy” etc.
2.1.1.2 The Ulladan

Mala Ulladan is a Scheduled tribe and is known by different names such as Katan, Kattalan, Kochuvelan and Nayadi. The name Ulladan is the combination of the words Ull (interior) Nadu (country) and connotes that they are people of the interior. Nagom Aiya said “they are the descendants from a Nambudiri woman who on being proclaimed outcaste said “Ullatana” implying that the offence for which she was ostracized was true.”

2.1.1.3 The Urali

Urali is a combination of the words Ur (land) and Al (people). It denotes that they are people of the land. Contextually it must be interesting to note that thousands of place names in the Dravidian South India end in ‘ur’.

2.2. Physical Features

Based on the physical features of the people, anthropologists classify the tribes belonging to different racial stocks. Physical characteristics help us to identify the tribal people from their appearance.

2.2.1 The Malai Arayan

Samuel Mateer in his ‘Native Life in Travancore’ observed, “the Arayans are for the most part, short in stature and not very long lived. But the feverishness of the climate of the districts they inhabit is enough to account for any physical degeneracy of race. They are as fair as the high caste Hindus, the women frequently beautiful, proving that the aborigines of India were not black from racial peculiarities, but only sometimes black through circumstances.” Anthropologists considered Malai Arayans Proto-Australoids.
2.2.2 The Ulladan

They are short in stature and dark brown in complexion, with short limbs, sturdily built bodies, receding chins and thick lips. Their hair is black and wavy some individuals have curly hair. The forehead slopes back wards, and the brow ridges are prominent\(^\text{13}\). They belong to the Negrito racial stock.

2.2.3 The Urali

They are short, long headed and with medium to broad nasal profile. The face is long and narrow and can be included in the Negrito stock\(^\text{14}\).

2.3 Topography and Habitat of the Tribals

The tribal people of India live in the interior parts of hills and forests. This is one of the reasons for their underdevelopment. ‘Population explosion’ and the resultant deforestation considerably influenced the landscape changes taking place in the tribal habitats. The primordial confluence of tribal culture and the natural order is giving way to the avarice of the people nowadays.

2.3.1 The Malai Arayan

The general feature of the region in which the Malai Arayans live, is that it is highly mountainous comprising the Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki Districts. The Pampa, the Manimala, the Meenachil and the Arakulam rivers water the region. The Malai Arayan’s life was spread over the hinterlands of these rivers and their tributaries\(^\text{15}\). Average rainfall of the region is 180.

Malai Arayan villages were built generally on high ground. The huts had an easterly orientation. They were built of jungle wood posts, bamboos and reeds and thatched with grass. In order to defend themselves against possible attacks by wild elephants, they built Anamadom on trees, (Tree houses) with a bamboo ladder access. They took shelter in them during night and drove off
wild elephants by shouting ‘Ayyappa’. They stored the harvest, chiefly, paddy and tapioca in the Anamadom. Samuel Mateer observed that the Malai Arayans had their own fixed villages. “Many of their houses are good, sustainable substantial erections of wood and stone, built by workmen from the plains”.

2.3.2 The Ulladan

The Ulladans who lived in the interior of forests are known as Mala Ulladan while those who lived in the plains are called Nadu Ulladan. The former is listed as a Scheduled tribe and the latter as a scheduled caste. Mala Ulladan tribe is found in the Kottayam Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts of Kerala. They live in the mountain regions on the southwestern slopes of Anamudi. The climate is the typical Kerala type with heavy southwest monsoon followed by northeast monsoon.

2.3.3 The Urali

The Urali habitat is comprised of the forests of Idukki district. This area receives very high rainfall during the southwest monsoon. Wild animals like the elephant, the tiger, the bison, the wild boar and the deer abound here. A few hamlets are found on the roadsides, but many are 15 to 20 kilometers away. The Urali hut is constructed using country wood and thatched with leaves. In the interior settlements Urali put up ‘tree houses’ known as Erumadams.

2.4 Legends

Old stories handed down from the past are presented to the posterity to project the proud privileges enjoyed by different peoples. This was a practice prevailing among the tribals from time immemorial.
2.4.1 The Malai Arayan

There are many legends about the origin of the Malai Arayans. L.A.K. Iyer narrated one such popular legend. Malai Arayans claim that they are the progeny of Rishi Gautama and Ahalya. Ahalya was transformed into a rock by the curse of Gautama on account of her being found with Indra in a compromising situation. When Ram trod over the rock on his way to Mithila, she was freed of the curse, regained the former form and reunited with Gautama. The Malai Arayans claimed to have born of them after this incident. They now style themselves as *Karinkal Brahmins*. They claim superiority over all other tribes in social status.²⁰

2.4.2 The Ulladan

Ulladans also claim that their mother is a *Nambudiri* woman. Tracing their descent to the *Nambudiris* has indeed been an obsession with many communities including the Syrian Christians of Kerala, although the date as to the ingress of the *Nambudiri’s* to Kerala is still a controversial point.

2.4.3 The Urali

There is a legend that the Uralies were first brought to Kerala by a king of Madura who visited *Nerimangalam* in the *Deviculam* district. Some of the Uralies who were left behind in that *Ur* (land) were asked to *Ali* (rule).²¹

2.5 Social Background

The worth and self respect, which a community commands in the society, is often related to the social milieu. This is one of the prime reasons for adopting social engineering strategies in the present day world.
2.5.1 Social status

In the social hierarchy each individual holds a relative rank with attendant rights, duties and privileges. Social status is a major determinant of people’s motivation to climb up the social ladder.

2.5.1.1 The Malai Arayan

Malai Arayans were never considered outcastes or untouchables. In the 16th century, they were considered to be a respectable caste and were treated as equals of Mohanmadans and Jews. They did not love to be agricultural labourers and never carried any load on the head; the load was either basket-borne or bag-borne. There were no beggars among the Malai Arayans.

At a time when a majority of the caste Hindus and their Christian counterparts dwelled in mud huts, the Malai Arayans enjoyed the comfort of wooden houses. That each Malai Arayan couple had a separate nuptial chamber is also noteworthy.22

2.5.1.2 The Ulladan

They belong to the lowest class of soil slaves. “They are a true jungle tribe of wild and timid savages whose subsistence and life are truly pitiable”23. Almost all groups considered Ulladans as a low and defiling tribe.

2.5.1.3 The Urali

Uralies were leading a life of isolation and therefore their social status cannot be ascertained. But it is true that they were considered as being below the rank of Malai Arayans and above that of the Ulladans. The Pulayans and Parayans were counted below the Uralies in social status.
2.5.2 Social Structure

The discernible framework of the interrelationship of men in a society is an outcome of specific activities and manifold unforeseen consequence of all activities. What follows is a brief note on this.

2.5.2.1 The Malai Arayan

There are no sub tribes, but they are divided into six exogamous illoms (clans): They are, Enna illom, Mundillom, Puthani illom, Korangani illom, Vala illom and Panthirayira illom. In some areas the subdivision comprises five clans viz, Puthani, Mala, Vala, Nellipalli and Modalikad clan membership is traced matrilaterally. Some illoms were considered inferior in social status and this suggests the formation of classes among the tribes.

Malai Arayans have the institution of the Headman, formerly known as Poramban or Kani. Poramban means one who is privileged to sport a cane cap, an honour bestowed by the Poonjar Rajah. Kani is suggestive of the practice of presentation of the Kanikya to the Ambalappuzha Chieftain. The modern Kani does not enjoy the powers, privileges and attentions that he had enjoyed earlier.

2.5.2.2 The Ulladan

The Ulladans were comprised of four exogamous illoms (clans) known after the localities concerned viz, Karanchery illom, Madappilli illom, Kavattu illom and Perakala illom. The clan system has become practically defunct nowadays.

Ulladans had the institution of the Headman known as Mootu Kari. The office of the headman was hereditary and a competent son was always welcome to succeed. The Headman and his wife were respected, obeyed and feared.
2.5.2.3 The Urali

Altogether six clans or Kottoms are prevalent among the Urals. They are Kanakuttom, Periyilakuttom Kodiyankuttom, Enniyakuttom, Vayanarikuttom and Thuriyakuttom, which are exogamous.

The Headman is called Kani or Velan and the office descends from father to son. The Kani is the spokesman of the settlement and is usually comparatively rich and influential. He may punish those who disobey him, receive presents and contributions for performing rituals and a fee for settling disputes.

2.6 Economic Status

The economic status of the ‘status groups’ is a fascinating area of enquiry. The social position of an individual is conditioned by his economic status. Therefore the connection between economic and social situation is one of complementary nature.

2.6.1 Occupation

The ways in which men obtain their livelihood is one determinant of the economic well being of a society. The different callings of the tribes are mentioned below.

2.6.1.1 The Malai Arayans

The Malai Arayans were dependent on shifting cultivation, hunting and food gathering. Now they are settled agriculturists. More land is used for growing cash crops. Besides paddy, ragi and tapioca, they now grow cash crops like pepper, rubber, coconut, coffee, ginger, arecanut and cocoa. We can see Malai Arayans engaging in agriculture, business and white-collar jobs.
nowadays. The staple diet of Malai Arayans was rice and they were basically non-vegetarians fond of alcoholic drinks and meat of the black monkey.

Samuel Mateer wrote about their agriculture thus “The Arayans are some of them rich, being large cultivators of hill slopes which they clear of jungle in the dry season, sowing during the rains, little terraces are cut out on the steep assents to prevent elephants from getting at them, and some protection is obtained by high and strong fences piled up of wood from the trees that have been felled. Every man, however, has to watch with loaded guns during seedtime and harvest. The headman of the village is considered very wealthy, his annual crops yielding him ten or twelve thousand *parahs* of paddy, besides other grains, pulses and roots. They will not often work for hire and are very averse to carry loads”.

2.6.1.2 The Ulladan

“Mala Ulladans are seen engaged in cultivation and as farm labourers. The greater majority were wanderers subsisting by food gathering and hunting. They were good in the manufacture and use of traps, snares and nooses. They ate whatever was available”. “They subsist chiefly on wild yams, arrowroot, and other esculents, which they find in the jungle, and for the grubbing up of which they are generally armed with long pointed staff”.

The community is mainly landless. Traditionally, the Ulladan were foragers. Woodcutting, canoe making, bee keeping, basket making, mat weaving etc were also practiced by them.

2.6.1.3 The Urali

Uralies are considered as one of the least acculturated communities because of their geographical isolation and primitive means of livelihood. Their traditional occupations were food gathering, hunting, fishing and shifting
cultivation. They were experts in fishing with rod and line or by poisoning the waters. They trained dogs to help them in hunting. Uralies collected minor forest produce, which included wax, lacquer, honey, dammar, soap nuts, wild ginger, gooseberry and medicinal plants.

2.6.2 Laws of Inheritance

The direction and content of the succession rules offer obvious advantages to the individuals in a country. Often inherited wealth and possession serve as capital and can act as an agent of progress. The peculiarities with respect to the laws of inheritance among the tribes under study are presented here.

2.6.2.1 The Malai Arayan

The law of inheritance prevalent among the Malai Arayans was different from that of others. In Hindu custom, the property went to the sons of father’s sister (Marumakkathayam), but among the Malai Arayans, it was bequeathed to the children, usually the sons. Baker remarked, “Throughout Malabar, the Hindus do not inherit the property of their fathers, but that of their maternal uncle. But in three Arrian villages only does this custom hold, and there because the Zamindar has compelled them to do so. But still they have outwitted them by making it obligatory on cousins to marry. In all other Arrian settlements, children invariably inherit their father’s property.

2.6.2.2 The Ulladan

The inheritance at present is equigeniture and succession is by the eldest son. Earlier they did not have any property to bequeath and the succession was through one’s sister’s son (Marumakkathayam). When the relation is reasoned it is always through the female side. The authority of the Karanavan (mother’s eldest surviving male consanguine) is now significant only in the ritual observances.
2.6.2.3 The Urali

Among Uralis matrilineal rule of inheritance (*Marumakkathayam*) has changed to patrilineal rule (*Makkathayam*). Now it is the eldest son who inherits all the rights and privileges of the father. Women have no right to inherit property. Sons succeed to the chieftainship and in the absence of sons, nephews.

2.7 Religion

The mystery of life creates an attitude of awe towards God, or the supernatural, in the minds of man. Beliefs affecting basic patterns of individual and group behaviour form the foundations of faith and worship in each society. Different peoples attributed a greater role to religion in shaping their destiny. Thus even today religion is a very vital element in directing human pursuits.

2.7.1 Traditional Religion of the Malai Arayans

The traditional religion practiced by the Malai Arayans can be described as a system of animism or spiritism. Their beliefs were a curious conflation of superstition and supernaturalism. All the activities of the Malai Arayan life and their environment were dependent upon the benevolence or malevolence of spirits. Through worship or propitiation, they tried to control the ill effects of the spirit’s disfavour or to prevent these spirits from taking complete control of their life. K.G. Daniel opined, “The attitude of supernaturalism is one of reverential fear in the presence of certain supernatural powers and beings”.

Fear and protection are the two components that under girded Malai Arayan’, religious practice. Stephanos De Brito, in the 16th century, observed. “They have no idols among them, only they pay their obeisance at their ancestor’s sepulchers”. Baker also noted “… they do not, like Hindus, idolize evil. The objects of their worship are the spirits of their ancestors, or certain local demons, supposed to reside in rocks or peaks, having influence only over
particular villages or families, the religions services rendered to these are intended to deprecate anger rather than to seek benefits; but in no case, is lust to be gratified or wickedness practiced, as pleasing to these deities.”

In every village, there were small thatched fanes (sheds) with a few stones placed upright, where the Malai Arayans lit lamps and offered sacrifices. Most of them were the tombs of their ancestors; a few of them were in the name of Bhagavan, Bhagavati, Kali and Sarpam. Their worship of Hindu Gods, Bhagavan Bhagavati and Kali apart from spirits and natural forces indicates the practice of polytheism in their religious life.

One of the important Gods, whom the Malai Arayans worshipped, was the Sabarimala Sastha or the Ayyappa.

“Although the tribal religion of the Malai Arayans is described as animism by Christian missionaries and Church historians, striking similarities between the Hindu and Malai Arayan faiths exist.”

2.7.2 The Ulladan

Mala Ulladans are animists, totemists and devil worshippers of a unique order. They have many ceremonies for propitiating ‘Aruvelas’ (spirits of ancestors) and for protection against epidemics and wild beasts. Every man and woman was expected to learn the mantras and methods to propitiate demons and spirits and to perform various witchcrafts. They have implicit faith in devil dances, exorcists, talisman, omens and oracles. At present they profess Hinduism. They revere the entire Hindu pantheon. Sastha or Ayyappa, Siva and Bhadrakali are some of their favourite deities. They also worship the spirits of dead ancestors, demons and malevolent deities like ‘Theekutty’ and ‘Chathan’.
They believe that natural calamities, sickness and barrenness are caused due to the malignant influence of these deities\textsuperscript{46}.

*Thalaparamalaswami*, the deity in the temple on the peak of Thalaparamala, is the most worshipped supernatural power among the Ulladans. Before commencing any activity or ritual they worship this deity\textsuperscript{47}. *Kappiri, Theekutty* and *Chathan* are the other gods worshipped by them\textsuperscript{48}.

### 2.7.3 The Urali

The Urali religion may be said to represent a mixture of primitive and traditional beliefs and practices. The major elements of tribal religion such as nature worship, animism, totemism, taboo, magic, sorcery and ancestor worship are blended with crude elements of Hinduism. The Uralies follow the general Hindu type of worship. They hold the forces of nature in awe. They also worship the Sun and the Moon. The Sun is the male god and creator of all souls. The Moon is conceived as the mother god\textsuperscript{49}.

Animals, plants, trees, ponds, hill peaks, rivers, stones are all abodes of spirits; if not propitiated with timely offerings of fruits, beaten rice, milk, toddy etc., they will cause diseases, famines, abortions, unnecessary expenditures and scarcity of water. The spirits are called ‘Mala Deivam’. They have recently adopted Hindu Gods like Ayyappan, Kali etc and folk deities like ‘Madan’ and ‘Maariamma’\textsuperscript{50}.

Kattakkayam placed the spirits worshipped by the Urali under four categories: ‘protective’ spirits who safeguard the Urali during hunting, fishing etc, ‘Bhuta’ ‘pisachu’ etc which cause small pox and abortion and the omnipresent spirits responsible for success or failure or pestilence in every local area and fourthly the ancestral spirits which appear in dreams to the
**Plathy** (medicine man) to communicate their desires through him.\textsuperscript{51} They have firm faith in the supernatural powers of the ‘Plathy’.

### 2.8 Caste Practice in Travancore

During the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Kerala consisted of the kingdoms of Travancore and Cochin, and British Malabar. The present Kottayam and Idukki districts were part of the Travancore kingdom and therefore the caste system that prevailed in Travancore had a direct impact on the hill tribes.

“Caste in India is but one of the innumerable manifestations of the pride, partiality and selfishness everywhere natural to the unsanctified human character”\textsuperscript{52}. In India “the Hindu society is divided into groups, known as castes, with varying degrees of respectability and circles of social intercourse”\textsuperscript{53}.

Ghurye mentioned six outstanding features of Hindu society when it was ruled by the social philosophy of caste. They are:

a) Segmental division of society

b) Hierarchy

c) Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse

d) Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sections

e) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation

f) Restrictions on marriage\textsuperscript{54}.

Thus caste is an elaborate system grounded in Hinduism. It was not merely a social or economic order of the society, but a religious institution. The caste system was rigid and it prevented upward mobility. The 1891 census Report of Travancore endorses this “A Brahmin is born, not made. So is a Sudra… A Brahmin, by neglect to perform his religious ceremonies, and caste
observances, may become an outcaste, but no number of a lower caste can rise to a higher one, as Hindu religion by its peculiar constitution does not allow converts from one form to another of its own faith…”

“Untouchability was the measuring rod by which the social status and the position of the caste was measured by Hindus declaring them as upper castes or lower castes. In course of time various privileges became the birth right of the higher castes and disabilities were piled upon the lower castes”.

Samuel Mateer explained the system of caste thus the term ‘caste,’ be it remembered, is not always synonymous with employment, profession or trade; nor does “high caste” imply the possession of wealth, nor “low caste” always indicate extreme poverty... Amongst the Hindus, caste is placed upon distinctly religious grounds, and is inseparably connected with the doctrines and traditions of Hinduism. Its origin is said to be divine. Its rules and sanctions are divine. It is supposed to exhibit the relative position in regard to holiness and purity, and the measure of salvation already attained by each individual. He who is now a ‘high caste’ man must have performed meritorious acts in a former birth, on account of which he was again born into this higher position; and the degraded “low caste” man is now suffering the punishment of some former misdeeds.

Caste separates the people into many different classes throughout the whole of India. Each caste is supposed to be as distinct from others as are the various species of animals, such as the horse, the ox or the ass. Those who belong to the highest caste enjoy extravagant privileges, and are almost worshipped as gods, while the lowest are regarded as degraded almost below the level of the beasts of the field”.
The caste system placed Brahmins at the top of the society “The Brahmins placed their claims to superiority on a religious basis; and the result has fully justified their shrewd and selfish policy”. The Brahmins considered the indigenous people of Dravidian origin untouchables. Every caste became a strong unit in it, with the upper caste dominating the lower. All the social relationships such as marriage were confined within the caste.

Caste system empowered the Brahmins and other high castes to own land whereas the outcastes and tribes were not allowed to own land. Bonded and forced labour without wages, slavery and brutal taxes left the outcastes and tribes economically oppressed, poor and discriminated against.

Regarding the evil impact of the system of caste, Mateer wrote. “The fearful and aggravated evils of such a system must be obvious. It obstructs all progress even in civilization and arts; sea voyages are impracticable, manufacture in leather and other materials are prohibited, praiseworthy ambition and enterprise are repressed, patriotism is totally annihilated. The separate castes cannot unite even to repel an invader. Hospitality, kindness, observance of the duties of common humanity, is distinguished by the rigid rules of Hindu caste. The whole system is, in every aspect, fraught with evil to high as well as low- is morally degrading to rich as well as poor; and, perhaps, nowhere is caste retained and defended with such tenacity, bigotry and jealousy as in Travancore.”

Though these tribals were not directly involved in the caste system they were victims of the disadvantages of such a discriminatory social order. The affinity between the religion and caste made them suffer from the hierarchical social structure.
2.9 Exploitation of the Tribals

The tribes under study, viz, the Malai Arayans, Ulladans and Uralies were subjected to exploitation and oppression from different quarters. There were minor variations in the degree of exploitation.

Malai Arayans were not in the lowest strata of the social order yet they were exploited by
(a) The ‘Poonjattu Raja’, a high caste Kshatriya King, who claimed to be the political power over them and the owner of the Hill Lands.
(b) The servants of the Raja who were collecting the various taxes by force and illegally.
(c) The Muslim traders who have cheated them through various means and
(d) The Roman Catholic landlords and other high caste people who exploited them through lending money and hiring their farms.

All these forms of exploitations were undergirded by caste superiority and reached its maximum in the 19th century.61

There is an interesting story about the Raja of Poonjar levying taxes from the Malai Arayans. The Poonjattu Raja levied ‘thalakkaram’ (head tax) on males above 14 years age and ‘mulakkaram’ (breast tax) on females above 14 years of age. Once the agent of the Raja went to recover the ‘thalakkaram’. Malai Arayans pleaded their inability to pay the amount but the agent insisted on payment. So the Hill Arrians cut off the head of one of their men and placed it before the agent, saying, “here is your thalakkaram”. Similarly, one breast of a woman was cut off and placed before the agent, saying, “Here is your mulakkaram”. Hearing this, the Raja stopped these taxes and introduced other new taxes.62
The Ulladan community is mainly landless. Their nomadic nature, and their hunting and gathering habit to earn their daily bread etc made them less susceptible to exploitation. In fact exploitation came from many quarters. The high caste people, the traders, moneylenders and forest officials exploited them. They were not in a position to understand the extent of exploitation because of the lack of knowledge regarding the market price and value of their services.

The Uralies were also subjected to exploitation from many sides. Mannans harassed Uralies on a continuing basis. This forced the Uralies to migrate to safer places. The immigrants from the plains who encroached forestlands used Uralies as a shield and ultimately these tribals were thrown out of their original abode. Bonded labour prevailed among the Uralies and the middlemen exacted money from these simple folk. In the market the products sold by the tribesmen fetched only lower price. Often these products were bartered and it ultimately resulted in an unequal exchange. The contractors exploited the Urali laboures by offering lower wages and ‘other’ offers in the form of intoxicants.

2.10 Protestant Missionary Work in Travancore

By the end of the 18th century, Kerala had come under the supremacy of the British. The Protestant Missionaries started their work in Travancore in the 19th Century. Their work had a tremendous impact on the social, educational, religious and economic life of the people of Travancore. This also had a direct and indirect influence on the hill tribes of Kerala.

The work of the Protestant Missionary was mainly concentrated on the Malai Arayan settlements of Travancore. The other tribes included in this study, viz, Ulladan and Urali, were not covered by their mission. It does not
mean that there was no conversion among Urali and Ullada tribes to Christianity. But the conversion in these tribes occurred only in the 20th century and the extent of conversion is quite negligible. The Malai Arayan tribe had accepted Christianity as their religion and there is no exact statistics available regarding their religion-wise strength. The relative share of Christians is greater among Malai Arayans when compared with the Hindus belonging to other castes.

There were three main protestant mission societies, which started work in Kerala.

(a) The London Missionary Society (LMS) which concentrated in South Travancore
(b) The Church Missionary Society (CMS) which worked in Central Travancore and Cochin and
(c) The Basel Mission Society (BMS) in Malabar.

The area covered in the present study was under the control of the CMS and hereafter the missionary work refers to the missionary efforts of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

2.10.1 Church Missionary Society in Travancore

John Munro, the British Resident in Travancore, was the main inspiration behind the commencement of the work of CMS in Travancore in 1816. Thomas Norton; Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker Senior worked as missionaries in Travancore. Bailey, Fenn and Baker, concentrated, at Kottayam and are known as the ‘Kottayam Trio’.

The Catholic missionaries who were the first among the Christian missionaries that came to the land were not able to make extensive educational
efforts. But the Protestant missionaries who came later took keen interest in the spread of education\textsuperscript{63}.

The beginnings of western education in Kerala may be associated with the work of missionaries. It was the protestant missionaries who took the initiative in this regard\textsuperscript{64}.

2.10.1.1 Areas of Mission Work

The Church Missionary Society’ was the product of the evangelical movement in the Church of England. The thrust area of missionary activities was evangelism. But there were some sectors where missionaries wanted reform and change. Thus they initiated some changes in these areas. Those spheres were

- Introduction of new social ideas and trends, inculcating an element of dynamism in a static society. It included efforts to change the caste system, struggle against slavery and untouchability, efforts to enhance employment and medical facilities and actions directed to attain freedom from compulsory labour. The empowerment of women was another area of reform.
- Initiatives to spread literacy and education aiming at dispelling the darkness of ignorance. Dignity of the individual occupied the central theme.
- Change in the system of Sambandha type to one of marriage type in the family life and a switch over to Makkathayam system of inheritance.
- Development of plantations and infrastructure.
- Changes in the value system and the fight against social evils, like, alcoholism superstitions, and addiction.
- Cultural and linguistic changes keeping in view of the possibility of a confluence of the cultures of the East and West\textsuperscript{65}.
2.10.1.2 Baker (Junior) and the Malai Arayans

Henry Baker Junior, known as the ‘Apostle of the Malai Arayans’, started his missionary work in 1845 at Pallam near Kottayam. He never had the intention to start missionary work among the Malai Arayans. But the Malai Arayans themselves took the initiative for conversion and “they persuaded the missionary to come and evangelize them”\textsuperscript{66}. Baker himself describes his first meeting with this hill people.

“I had often heard of a people living in the hills, who were acknowledged to be “very truthful, and chaste”, and were said to be “the Mulla Nairs”, and “as ancient as the hills themselves”. I had put all this down to the usual style of Indian conversation, but during a missionary tour I met three or four fine looking men, different from the races in the plains, both in the contour of their faces and method of wearing their clothes. We had some very interesting conversation, and they stayed the night at the tent. They left early, and I did not expect again to see them, as we were so far from their hills; but, some months after, my little daughter ran into my study at Pallom, to say that “some curious looking men were come” to see me. This was in 1848. There were five men, from as many different hills, begging me to go and open schools among them. They had a Romo-Syrian with them, named Kuppeer Curien, as guide, a man who then, though well acquainted with the truth, did not know its power. This is my introduction to the Arrians”\textsuperscript{67}.

The Malai Arayans repeated their request and deputation many a time. But Baker hesitated to go because:

- He had several congregations to look after
- Inaccessibility of the Malai Arayan settlement
- Spread of jungle fever in the area
- Non-availability of coolies.
• The friends of Baker discouraged him saying that they were seeking a protector, and not Christianity

The sixth delegation came out successful in bringing Baker to the Malai Arayan settlement. Baker describes the incident.

“But the heads of the several villages at last came down and remonstrated on account of my delay. Five times, they said, “have we been to call you, we know nothing right; will you teach us or not? We live like beasts and are buried like dogs. Ought you to neglect us? ‘Cholera and fever’ said another, carried off such and such members of my family, where are they now? They stated that they wanted no pecuniary help as they had plenty of rice. They wished to serve God and not to be oppressed by anyone. They offered to make over their lands as a proof of their sincerity and waited about determined to have me in their hills, so I promised to meet them the next week on the bank of the river, about thirty miles distant. Hence they proposed to guide me to a principal village, and have assemblages of their people” 68.

2.10.1.3 Conversions

In fulfillment of his promise, Henry Baker Jr. arrived in a village called Kombukuthie, near Mundakayam in 1848. That marked the proselytisation of Malai Arayans to Christianity on a large scale. The swathe of uplands from Mundakayam to Melukavu and Kannickal at the North West constitute the area where conversions took place between 1848 and 1878. At present this region falls in the Kottayam and Idukki Districts of Kerala. In 1947 the Church of South India was formed as a conglomeration of several protestant churches, including the Church Missionary Society and the Central Kerala diocese was formed with its head quarters at Kottayam. The number of Christians kept multiplying. Recently in 1983, the Central Kerala diocese was divided and a
separate diocese, namely the East Kerala diocese, was constituted mainly consisting of the Malai Arayan Churches of the diocese.

2.11 Earlier Christian Influences on the Malai Arayans

“Long before the protestant missionaries entered on the tasks of converting the Malayars (Malai Arayans) or Hill tribes to Christianity, the Portuguese had made a successful attempt to bring them into the fold of the Romish Church”. But their endeavours being not sustained, their so called converts too relapsed to their old beliefs”69.

The missionary endeavours aimed at the Malai Arayans were not organized and sustained until the time of the protestant missionary work in the 19th century. Goa Archbishop Dom Menezes took the initiatives to bring missionaries to the hill people. K.P.P. Menon narrates the story thus “In the year 1599, Archbishop Menezes sent out a mission to these Hill men. The mission started on their journey on the 16th of July and reached the foot of the Ghauts in eight days.” With the help of some native Christians the priests met a ‘Malean’ chief. The object of the mission was explained to him “The Malayans, could, however, do nothing without the previous sanction of their Rajas, the chiefs of Tiruvella and Punnat, to whom they were subject. The Cattanars therefore simply planted the cross”70 and returned.

“On the return of the Mission, Menezes approached the Rajas of Tiruvella and Punnat with handsome and valuable presents of precious stones and obtained formal permission for the baptism of the Head of the Malayas and his followers being converted to Christianity”71. The Archbishop deputed some ‘cattanars’ to administer the initiatory rite. “Eight of the chiefs with their families received baptism, the first three of them being heads of district clans”72. They erected a Church dedicated to St. Michael and left. They seem to
have been neglected altogether by the Romanists till the Protestant missionaries took them in hand almost three centuries after.

Summary

The tribes under study claim that they had a glorious past and the peculiarities of their habitat made them vulnerable to social decadence, economic exploitation and lower level of political involvement. Their traditional religious beliefs and practices forced them to remain on the periphery of socio-economic progress and advancement. But the Christian missionaries sought to usher in a new heaven and a new earth for them. Of course, whether they succeeded or not is a moot question.
Endnotes

1 Human Development Report 2005-Government. Of Kerala prepared by Centre for Development Studies Trivandrum-2006 Chapter I p.8

2 Economic Review 2005-Govt. of Kerala-State Planning Board-Trivandrum-Feb.2006 page-409


10 The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Trivandrum-1996 Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes-page 221


13 The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Trivandrum-1996 Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes. page 221

14 The International School of Dravidian Linguistics, Trivandrum-1996 Encyclopedia of Dravidian Tribes page 351

15 Nagom Aiya V. The Travancore State Manuel (3 volumes) Asian Educational Services-New Delhi 1989


17 Samuel Mateer-The Native Life in Travancore W.H Allen &Co London 1883-page 72
A term used by Max Weber to designate some segregated groups, eg. Castes and ethnic groups who are marked off by distinct criteria from other social groups in the society.


A.A.D Luiz- *Encyclopedic Profile of Indian Tribes*. Vol. IV page 1021


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40 Ibid


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45 A.A.D Luiz. Encyclopedic Profile of Indian Tribes Vol. IV p.1022


48 Iyer LAK 1981-The Tribes and Castes of Cochin


50 ibid

51 ibid

52 Samuel Mateer, The Land of Charity. AES Reprint 1991-page.26


54 Ibid pages 2-18

55 Travancore Census Report 1891-Vol I p.614

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Chapter 3

TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT: APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES