Chapter VI

The Subalterns in Medicine: The Ezhavas

Varika Varika Sahajare!
Pathitharilla Manujari!!

Come! Come!! My fellow beings!
None is low among men!!

In the landscape of political struggles of the Indian subcontinent against colonial dominance, the Guruvayoor Satyagraha was an important turning point. By 1936, the term Satyagraha (truth-force) had already acquired a definite meaning in the lexicon of the history of Indian freedom movement. Having been influenced by the ideas of liberty, equality and a sense of brotherhood, the Ezhavas, a numerically preponderant lower caste community in Kerala, gathered on the premises of one of the most important temples of south India to peacefully demand for their rights to enter the place of worship that had been hitherto denied to them, thereby ‘challenging’ the hierarchies of the Hindu religious order.

The widely acclaimed couplet urging fellow beings to join hands on a religious platform and an ideology that all men are equal, was given by one of the most prominent physicians among the Ezhavas, C. Krishnan Vaidyan, who was also a social reformer, political activist and an industrialist. It was not by chance that an indigenous Vaidyan whose profession primarily centred on ways and means of healing the human body played an important role in a movement directed at curing what was


470 C Krishnan Vaidyan was born in 1878. He studied Ayurvedam and Sanskrit from Ananthapurathu Mootha Koil Thampuran. As a devout follower of Sree Narayana Guru, Krishnan Vaidyan started various schools for the uplift of the Ezhavas. Even before his activism in the Guruvayoor Satyagraha he had fought for the rights to temple entry in the Panavalli temple of his native place Who is Who in SNDP, 1956(?), p. 71-72.
believed to be the ills of the society. Sree Narayana Guru, who was the spiritual leader of the Ezhavas and who had the most profound impact on the social history of modern Kerala, was a Sanskrit scholar, a Yogi\textsuperscript{471} and above all an Ayurvedic Vaidyan.

An important question that arises in this context is how did medicine being more than a method of cure gets entangled with the body politic of the society at large. Similarly, how did the acquisition/negation of the dominant traditions by the Ezhavas take place in the arena of indigenous medicine? How was the religious tradition re-interpreted by the community in the light of its relationship with both the dominant traditions of the land as well as under the new notions of science, medicine and rationality as interpreted in its colonial contexts? What was the form of socio-cultural interaction that existed among the different sections of the indigenous society? How was the religious tradition reinterpreted by the community in the light of its relationship with both the dominant traditions of the land as well as under the new notions of science, medicine and rationality as interpreted in its colonial contexts? What was the form of socio-cultural interaction that existed among the different sections of the indigenous society? Did the epistemic bases and the ideological influence transgress the boundaries of caste? Was there a reasonable amount of shared knowledge among different sections of the indigenous society in Travancore overlooking the caste and religious boundaries? This chapter seeks to unravel the close relationship between medicine and society as well as the larger ideologies that underlie it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala.

While Guruvayoor Satyagraha was aimed at acquiring \textit{de-jure} rights for the lower castes in the traditional religious order, in essence, it turned out to be an attempt to challenge the hierarchies of caste by integrating or negating the knowledge systems of the high castes or being willing subjects of erasing the cultural practices of the caste in question in their desire for a higher social position.\textsuperscript{472} By the late 1930s when the lower castes organized themselves to transgress the visual boundaries of religious spaces, the integration or negation of different streams of socio-cultural practices into the life of an Ezhava had already begun to take definite shape.\textsuperscript{473}

\textsuperscript{471} One who practices \textit{Yoga}, a traditional method of acquiring self control through meditation, derived form the \textit{Samhita} text of Patanjali's \textit{Yogacara}


\textsuperscript{473} C. K. Krishnan Panikkar (1869-1933) fought for the right to walk on public roads that were earlier on meant for the exclusive use of the higher castes. Who is Who in SNDP, 1956(?), p. 69.
In the colonial context, for the Ezhavas, medicine, rather than being a mere practice of health care, human body, its ailments and its therapeutic practices became important sites of negotiation with the dominant caste Hindu tradition. Medicine therefore became an important site for the articulation of the desires for caste mobilization and social aspirations.

By the first decades of the twentieth century the various ideological debates that were taking place within the community were acquiring concrete shape. The census of 1931 stated that, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the community was 'content to take things lying down'. Giving a detailed description on the state of affairs it states that,

Taking the Ezhavas first into consideration, we find that changes that might well be described as revolutionary have taken place in their social, socio-religious and religious spheres of life. The first decade of the twentieth Century saw the community in its dormant condition, content to take things lying down and meekly submitting to the old disabilities it was subjected to under the rigours of the Malayali caste system, which had branded it with an unapproachability of 36 degrees (36 feet) distance. There was no leadership, no organisation, no union. But now the Ezhuvans are wide-awake; and, what, is more, they seem to have no idea of going to sleep hereafter. Within the short space of two decades the Ezhuvans have been transformed into a well-organised community with their Samajams or associations successfully working for their social, moral and spiritual uplift and waging war against their social disabilities. At the same time they were setting their own house in order. We have seen from the last chapter how a religious reformation tending towards the purification and elevation of their religious beliefs, rites and forms of worship was effected in the community. The Ezhuvans have virtually abolished touch and distance pollution with reference to the castes below them. They opened many temples for themselves, as they had no access to the temples of the non-polluting castes like the Pulayas who were of old unapproachable Ezhavas.474

We try to argue and prove that the various developments that took place within the community during the last decades of the nineteenth century, manifested into an organized form by the early part of the twentieth century. It was the claims for a superior position in the indigenous society that forced the Ezhavas to embrace knowledge and a 'medical system’, based largely on the classical Sanskrit texts, particularly the Ashtangahridaya. This was even when Puthupally Raghavan, one of the leading members of the Ezhava community and a literary figure, argues that the

Ezhavas had no important place in the Sanskrit traditions of the Brahmans in Kerala. If that is so, the epistemic paradigm on which their cultural and medicinal practices were based on, needs serious interrogation.

As a mode of health care, Ayurvedic medical knowledge—as understood through its modern terminology—is an integral part of Sanskrit knowledge and practice, which is considered to be an exclusive domain of the high caste Brahmans. How does the lower caste, who were excluded from the mainstream life of the indigenous socio-cultural sphere was different and distinct from the Brahmins, pursue their health care practices? If the Ezhavas had a socio-cultural life independent of the Brahmins, and were not part of the Sanskrit tradition, as has been claimed by Raghavan, how should the medical practices of the community under consideration be located within that indigenous medical tradition(s) of the Ezhavas? The chapter seeks to address as to how the socio-reform movement that occurred among the Ezhavas, were attempts to integrate them into the mainstream social life of the Travancore society and transform their therapeutic practices.

As a society desirous of a higher social position they were attempting to overcome their social disabilities by raising claims to the intellectual hegemony of the castes above them in terms of hierarchy. The realization of this objective was articulated through tracing a lineage with Buddhism. Though there exist various versions of the existence of Buddhism in Kerala, substantial evidence has not been discerned to justify this, nor could we trace a connection between the Ezhavas and their Buddhist lineage. The aim of the community was however to formulate an identity

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476 Referring on the sites that bear resemblance to Buddhist relics, Travancore Government records mentions as follows, Two temples in Travancore, at Thiruvilai and Thakali in Sherthalai and Ambalpuzha Taluks respectively, suggest to the antiquarian importance of a particular kind, being probable survivals of Buddhist viharas established not only to propagate the religion of the Gautama, but also to devote whole heartedly to the medical relief of the people ailing with manifold diseases. 'That there were physicians and surgeons in the Buddhist monasteries is amply testified to by the references in the Minhinthala inscriptions; and it is not improbable that Buddhist monks settled in Kerala and practiced the science of medicine' along with their educational and proselytizing activities. There are reasons to believe that there were in Kerala some Buddhist sanyasins who attained a marvelous degree of
within the higher caste tradition to claim that the knowledge and tradition they possessed were also part of the high caste medical knowledge and practices, which was acquired through their connection with Buddhist religion and its knowledge form. Thus the aim was to prove that though they were excluded from the mainstream Hindu religion and its structure, in terms of knowledge, they were also part of the same epistemic bases which had informed the high caste Brahmans.

This claim made by the proponents of the lower caste reform movement to represent their therapeutic practices as Ayurveda, by asserting their interpretation of tradition, culture and society accelerated the process of hegemonization of a Sanskrit based medical practice. This led to the consequent marginalization of the healing techniques hitherto practiced by the community. They were in effect trying to prove that their low position was not due to their intellectual backwardness but one artificially created by the caste Hindus.

In its reality, Ezhava physicians while making alternative claims to indigenous medicine. They, in effect attempted to formulate an identity within the higher caste tradition, claiming that the knowledge and tradition that the community had with regard to medicine, were not outside, but was rather within the stream of the indigenous medical knowledge and practices.

scholarship in medical and other allied sciences, in which Rasa Vaisheshika is a monumental work whose authorship is attributed to Bhandanta Nagajuna, a Buddhist sanyasin of Kerala, who is said to have been educated and trained by Buddhist monks. To those two temples flock even now, people of all sections and religions in Kerala, for treatment of diseases. In the temple of Tiruvilai, lunatics and those whose minds are diseased are treated with success by the juice of a certain herb, which is administered; while at Thakali lepers and those suffering with skin diseases are treated with uniform success by medicated oil prepared in the temple. In view of the fact that a Buddhist relic still exists at Karumadi close by the temple at Thakali which is dedicated to Sasta the Brahminised Buddha, it is conjectured that the Shrine might have been a vihara where “the Buddhist monks carried on a course of medical treatment of which the prescriptions that is preserved in the temple may be considered a relic.” The curious phenomenon is being investigated, but on account of the paucity of documentary evidence, no opinion with a any definiteness can be hazarded. Proceedings of Her Highness the Maharani Regent of Travancore, Archaeological Department, Administration Report, 1104 M.E, 1929, Trivandrum, 1930. p. 14. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

Kooiman argues that this claim to a Buddhist lineage might have been evolved due to the reason that a large number of Ezhavas migrated to Sri Lanka by 1870’s from the southern part of Kerala. The influence of Sri Lankan Buddhism on Ezhavas therefore sounds to be a recent phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. Dick Kooiman, Conversion and Social Equality in India, the London Missionary Society in South India in the 19th Century, Delhi: Manohar, 1989, p. 108.
Healing Techniques and Cultural Practices

Historical evidence proves that the Ezhavas as a social group practiced health care methods for a considerable amount of time. *Hortus Malabaricus*, a multi-volume compilation of medicinal plants by Vaan Rheede, the Dutch Governor of Malabar, in the seventeenth century points out that the identification of plants, their classification and the detailed description of their medicinal value was provided by Itti Achuthan who was a *Chogan* (Ezhava) by caste and belonged to a family of physicians for generations. This points out that at least a section of the Ezhavas had been practicing medicine as early as the sixteenth century. Though, *Malabaricus* does not substantiate the argument put forward by the Ezhavas that they had a medical tradition based on *Ashtangahridaya* or other texts of the dominant social elites, indigenous health care however had been an important occupation for them. In his testimony given in the preface to *Hortus Malabaricus*, Achyutan writes as follows;

I Itti Achyutan, a Malabari doctor, *Chego* (Ezhava) by race, gentile and native of Carapuram or the place called Coladda, who was born of great-grand parents, grand parents and parents who were physicians or doctors, testify that I came to the city of Cochin as per the orders of Governor Henry A. Rheede and through Manual Carnero, interpreter of the Noble Indian Society, told and dictated names, medical powers and properties of plants, trees, herbs and creepers, written and explained in our book and which (plants) I had observed by long experience and practice; that this explanation and dictation went without any doubt, nor would any of the Malabar doctors doubt about the veracity of the things I said, I made these which I wrote by my own hand and signed. 478

Thus in the pre-colonial era, the Ezhava physicians seemed to have had a reasonable amount of knowledge about the biological wealth of the land and their

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478 This extract has been taken from the revised re-edition of Hortus Malabaricus, a 12-volume treatise on the plant wealth of Malabar (Kerala) published during 1678-1693, from Amsterdam. It was compiled by the then Dutch Governor of Malabar at Cochin, Henrik Adriaan Vaan Rheede. Malabaricus enshrines the indigenous knowledge of the hereditary medical practitioners of the Indian State of Kerala. The book contains illustrations of 742 plants belonging to 691 modern species, together with their descriptions and medicinal and other uses. All plants are described and illustrated under their local Malayala names, written in Roman, Malayalam, and Arabic scripts. In most cases their Konkani, Portuguese and Dutch names are also given. The entire text of the book is in Latin. K.S. Manilal (ed.), *Vaan Rheedes' 1678 Hortus Malabaricus: with Annotations and Modern Botanical Nomenclature*, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2003. p. xxxii.
medicinal value. The detailed descriptions of the plants and their medicinal value have been derived out of a long experience of observation, experience and practice signifying the methods of cure in its pre-colonial situations. This was based on a close observation and interpretation of the manner in which diseases were understood and the methods of eliminating it.

Achyuthan in his testimony categorically states that the plant variety and their medicinal values mentioned by him were universal truths accepted by the society at large. This opens up the need to examine the manner in which indigenous medical practices were carried out in the pre-colonial days. In its modern day discourse indigenous medicine was understood as a practice that was based completely on the Sanskrit literature of the past. However, the relationship between medical practices represented through Sanskrit based textual knowledge and its universalized representation seems to be a recent phenomenon. Even in the testimony Achyuthan makes no claim that the knowledge of the plants and its medicinal value that he imparted to the Dutch explorers was based on any of the Sanskrit texts. This underlines the fact that the reorganization of the indigenous medical tradition of Ayurveda as represented through a Sanskrit based textual literature seems to be an entirely modern phenomenon, which was formulated by societies and groups who were desirous of a higher social position in the contemporary society.

Modernization of Tradition under Colonialism

As a community, the Ezhavas with a long tradition of engagement with health care practices came under the influence of various colonial ideologies. New notions of life, society and medicine undermined traditional practices and its ontologies that had formulated the knowledge forms. By the mid-nineteenth century, old notions were challenged by the influx of the new ideas of science, society, medicine, etc. The Ezhavas as a social group in their desire for social prominence negotiated with both the scientific rationality of the west as well as with the traditional knowledge systems of the caste Hindus. The nature of interaction under colonial dominance ensured that as a
social group desirous of increased social mobility, they became willing subjects of negating their own health care practices and ways of living by accepting the dominant standards of the high castes.\textsuperscript{479}

This amounted to the Ezhavas negating their own tradition as unscientific and outside the paradigms of science. They believed that it was these cultural practices that were unscientific in character and were the cause of their social backwardness. In response they emulated the cultural practices of the caste Hindus. In 1861, Velayudha Panikkar started the first Kathakali yoga of the Ezhavas. He also fought for the right of the Ezhava women to wear \textit{Mookukuthu} (nose ring).\textsuperscript{480} Large number of Sanskrit schools was started under the name of Sree Narayana Vilasom Sanskrit School, in different parts of the state. Thus as Jeffrey quotes there was a clearly discernable trend among the Ezhavas to adopt the customs of the Nayars as was evident by their dress and jewellery, the style of their newly built houses and the cremation of their dead. This sanskritization and a growing self-confidence were the main factors behind the formation of the Ezhava caste association, the SNDP.\textsuperscript{481}

Social reformers who emerged in the community forcefully argued and urged their fellow caste men to shed their cultural practices with refined moral codes and social practices. They glorified the idea of reason and individualist rationality along with community mobilization. The new leaders of the community propagated rationality, logic and spirituality based on Sanskrit and classical knowledge.\textsuperscript{482} These

\textsuperscript{479} The census of India points out that the desire for higher social position by those castes, which were hither considered lower in the social scale according to the ritual hierarchy. The census of India became one of the most important sites where the demand for a higher social position was demanded and articulated. The census of 1931, states that, “past experience has shown that the opportunity of the census is generally seized by all but the highest castes to press for a higher recognition of claims for a higher social status and to secure, if possible, a step upwards in the social ladder. If all the claims thus advanced are to be conceded there may perhaps be no caste distinctions, among Hindus (so far as caste names in the Census and Government records are concerned) in the course of a few censuses for all Hindu communities may have to be classed as Brahmans by that time”. Census of India, Travancore, Vol. XXI, Part I, 1931, p. 250.

\textsuperscript{480} Who is Who in SNDP, p. 229.


\textsuperscript{482} In his application for the award of the grant-in-aid Padmanabhan Vaidyan stated that he belonged to a very ancient and respectable family of Ayurvedic physicians in Travancore. He is one of the most
social elites were also the interlocutors between a community desirous of social mobility and the various ideologies that were prominent in the late nineteenth century. Thus there were two major contending views as to how the process of social mobility was to be made possible. While a section argued that conversion to Buddhism would enable them to overcome the disabilities attached to caste, a large section of the community desired for a higher position within the Hindu fold. Thus, even when they were making claims for a dominant Ayurvedic tradition and claimed that therapeutic practices based on Sanskrit reached them through their connection with Buddhism, in reality they were making a negotiation with the dominant knowledge forms of the Hindu religious structure.

While there was a consensus among the Ezhavas regarding the need to reform the socio-cultural and religious practices, there was contending views on the nature of the reform process itself. This was because the Ezhavas were also highly influenced by the Christian missionaries who radically questioned the existing caste system and its accompanying disabilities even when the community under question desired for an identity associated with the dominant ideologies of the caste Hindus. While most members of the community were desirous of staying within the broad Hindu religious structure, a few among them, who were more militant in their approach towards caste and social change, argued for inter-dining and relationship with the lower castes. This group was led by Sahodharan Aiyappan, who demanded inter-dining as a means of social relationship with the castes lower than the Ezhavas. He formed the Sahodhara

eminent and influential members of the Ezhava community in the state and a profound Sanskrit scholar. He has had a very decent, lucrative and efficient medical practice for over thirty years. He is above all a philanthropist and a public man, who is held in high esteem through out the country. He was the member of the SMPA on two occasions and is thoroughly conversant with administrative affairs. The members of his family have been from time immemorial loyal and law-abiding subjects of the sovereign of the state. His career is a record of public service and he has always endeavoured to avert religious and communal misunderstanding and to create harmony among all classes and ranks of her Highness' subjects. Reorganisation of the Ayurveda Department Advisory Board. Vol. II, Bundle. No. 161, File No. 1343/ Dated 30-11-30, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

483 Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance, pp. 144-145.

484 The Sahodhara Sangham, an association formed in recent past advocated inter-dining and intermarriage with the low castes like the Pulayans and, in spite of the strenuous opposition it encountered in the beginning from the orthodox and conservative sections of the community, has achieved its objects to a considerable extent. The restrictions on interdining with lower castes are widely ignored and a few instances of intermarriage have also taken place. In short the Ezhavas are fast
*Sanghom* aimed at the promotion of universal brotherhood among all the religions of the state. *Mithavadi Krishnan* and others favoured conversion to Buddhism. 485 Kumaran Asan, who was the general secretary of the SNDP union, a renowned poet of the early twentieth century Kerala, demanded immediate reform of the Hindu social order. 486 He articulated the concerns of the community through his poems. His *Chandalabhikshuki* is about the story of Buddha’s disciple Ananda’s conversation with a *Chandala* woman (a low caste in north India) and her subsequent conversion to Buddhism. They were of the view that to overcome the social stigmas and disadvantages were to break from the Hindu religious fold. In contrary to this there was another prominent trend that emerged among the *Ezhavas*. Gopalan *Tanthri* (Priest) and others tried to re-convert the Ezhavas who had concerted to Christianity and Buddhism back to Hinduism. 487 Thus among the emerging intellectual elites within the Ezhavas the possibility of conversion became a contentious one.

Though a complete conversion of faith became a remote possibility, Buddhism became an important means for the articulation of the concerns of the Ezhavas. Similarly, Christianity and the precepts of Jesus Christ became important influence on the community. The missionary relationship with the Ezhavas has been testified in the Travancore and Cochin Diocesan records as follows,

Mr. Omaston had several conversions with Nanu Guru [Narayana Guru] who accepted a bible from him. One finds considerable acquaintance with its contents among his young disciples. His manager also whom I sometimes meet quotes our lord’s sayings. There is evidently in the guru’s immediate circle an admiration of Christ and his teaching. The young men in the *asrama* include some earnest spirits. 488

However, the possibility of a religious conversion either to Buddhism or to Christianity failed to gather momentum. As early as the first decade of the twentieth
century, the missionaries regretted that 'for the last twenty years not a single Ezhava was converted to Christianity'.\(^{489}\) Inducing the Ezhavas to give up practices such as demon worship confirmed to their own mission of spreading Christianity. Nonetheless it also introduced other avenues towards sanskritisation. Though Exhavas did not convert to Christianity, there were strong similarities between Sree Narayana Guru’s message and that of the missions.\(^{490}\) The members of the community were thus largely desirous of a social upliftment within the hierarchy of the Hindu fold.

Though the missionaries’ main target was to convert the people of the high caste to Christianity, there was virtually no response from the social elites of Travancore. Having failed in their aim, the missionaries sought to convert people from the Ezhavas, who constituted the middle order of the society, which though in the nineteenth century had a limited amount of success, failed to gather momentum by the end of the nineteenth and virtually no conversion occurred among them during the first half of the twentieth century.

Kooiman sites loose marriage ties and the fear of the loss of property, in the wake of conversion to Christianity as few reasons for the reluctance shown by the Ezhavas towards conversion. He further argues, that this resulted because of the rapid improvement in the economic situation and a sharp demand in coconut products, both coir and copra, in the west.\(^{491}\) Robin Jeffrey states that money brought educational and social ambitions and thus increased respectability within caste society became a more desirable goal than a dubious position between contemptuous Syrians and polluting Pulaya converts.\(^{492}\) However, it was not just a matter of being an outcaste among the ‘contemptuous Syrians and the polluting Pulayas’, the process of integrating the cultural practices within the Hindu religion and faith was a much larger process.

\(^{489}\) Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of the Nayar Dominance*, p. 138.
\(^{492}\) Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of the Nayar Dominance*, p. 142.
Thus the debate on the possible means of overcoming the social backwardness either by the rejection of the existing social order or by integrating the markers of caste remained central to their discourses regarding the strategies of caste mobilization among the Ezhavas. Irrespective of the fact that there was various forms of debate that emerged within the community as to the acceptance or negation of the cultural practices of the community in question, it was quite clear that there was a desire among the Ezhavas to accept the cultural and religious practices of the caste Hindus.

Narayana Guru and Reform

Even when the community was drawing parallels and tracing a lineage with the philosophies and practices of Buddha and that the interest of the community was articulated through forms of intervention that Buddhism had on the social order of caste, the emerging intellectual elite, who were also socio-religious reformers, used the medium of Hindu knowledge system and its forms in ‘reforming’ the community. It was Narayana Guru who struck a balance between the idea of the negation of the dominant ideas and the integration of the cultural practices of the high castes. He realized that even when a section of the leaders among the community were strong critiques of the cultural practices of the high castes, in essence, the criticism was primarily aimed to ensure that tradition be reformed and the lower castes could be integrated into the social hierarchy of castes. The attempt was not to break with religion rather it was to reform Hindu religion and tradition using new modes of rationality. Most analysis of the reforms and social change that occurred among the Ezhavas attributes them to the work and activities of Narayana Guru. The census of India report of 1931 notes that;

The one force behind these changes and reforms was the unique personality of the late Sri Narayana Guru Swami whose teachings and influence galvanised the dormant community into vigorous activity, and whose enlightened leadership, more than anything else, was responsible for these achievements. A self made man, the Guru came to be recognised as the spiritual head of the community in virtue of the solid work he did for its uplift.493

493 Census of Cochin, 1931, V XXI, P.1, pp. 260.
The Ezhavas had few temples of their own and of these, most of the deities worshipped in these temples were ‘evil spirits’ for whom bloody sacrifices of goats and cocks were performed annually.\footnote{494} Sree Narayana built temples and placed mirror as god, through this act he was urging his fellow human beings to worship the god within oneself. His iconoclastic view was evidenced in his consecration of a \textit{nilavilakku}, a huge brass oil lamp instead of an idol in Karamukku Kshetram in Trichur in 1920.\footnote{495} He also consecrated temples with Ezhava priests. Narayana was constantly stressing the ideal that there is only one caste, one religion and one god for human beings.

Though the fundamental desire was to question the fragmentations of caste in the indigenous societies, in its actuality the teaching of the guru ultimately was derived and manifested in the form of the uniformity of ideas and concepts both of the episteme as well as the universalities of knowledge forms. Most commentators argue that this was an assault on Hindu hierarchy. However, the argument that is attempted here is to locate this in the light of an attempt to integrate the cultural practices and positions of the higher castes of Kerala. He was also driving the point that faith had to be interpreted in the light of rationality, in the same way medicine also had to be based on logic and rationality. This enabled him to conclude that the indigenous society as represented through its various forms were but offshoots of a single origin and form of existence. Samuel argues that the temple reforms should be understood in the context of the religious condition of the Ezhavas. Thus claim to tradition was possible only through the integration of the traditional knowledge systems analyzed in the light of rationality, an argument that was vociferously articulated by the colonial authorities in India.\footnote{496}
For Sree Narayana the caste names and titles that signified the ritual position merely conceal the true identity of the human individual. He argued that the term *Ezhavan* was a corrupt name for *Sinhalan* meaning that Ezhavas came from Sri Lanka, and thereby struck a connection with Buddhism of Sri Lanka.⁴⁹⁷ There were certain attempts to place and interpret *Ezhava* history and tradition outside the Hindu fold. The interpretation was based on a new historiography, where a lineage was traced between the Ezhavas and Buddhism. This was to strike similarities between their social situation of being a lower caste community and their reaction to the existing social order, using the philosophies of the Buddha. However there is nothing in the Ezhava tradition, with the possible exception of their Ceylonese claim to ancestry, which seems to link them with Buddhism.⁴⁹⁸

In the formulation of an ideology, in response to the emerging socio-economic advancement among the members of the community, Narayana the spiritual head of the community drew inspiration from the Advaita philosophy of the ninth century reformer Shankara, and interpreted life and philosophy accordingly.⁴⁹⁹ The fundamental theoretical base of Advaita was its adherence to the principle that material objects and understanding of the world were but illusions or *Maya*. The notion of *Maya* (which means that all material objects of human life are just corruption on the ultimate form of truth) was fundamental to the Advaita philosophy. The truth of the *Atman* (soul) and the truth of the world, *Brahman*, was one. He argued that *Atman* (knowledge about the self) and *Brahman* (knowledge about the world) are the same. His worldly views though seemingly distinct from the western epistemec of science and knowledge, and completely rooted on the indigenous philosophy of Advaita, in its reality the ⁹th century Vedanta philosophy was used to demonstrate the universality and the singularity of indigenous notions of truth.

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⁴⁹⁷ The term *Chovan or Chogan* is said to be the corrupt form of the Sanskrit word Sevakan meaning one who serves, which indicates his position in the social scale. The word occurs in a less corrupt form as ‘Chevaka’ in some of the old boat songs of Malabar thus pointing to the likelihood of its derivation from ‘Sevaka’. The other term ‘Izhava’ is supposed to have come from Izham, a corruption of Simhalam (Ceylon). Nagam Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*. p.399.
This underlined that all truths were part of the general notion of life. Here singular and localised truths were deemed to be corruptions on the universality of truth. A reflection of this philosophy of Narayana in particular was part of the general philosophical base of Kerala, as can be assumed from the teachings of Sankara, which compelled him to understand medicine as a single body of knowledge. Thus, as a philosophy in need of the contemporary ideological currents, Advaita was re-interpreted to prove that localized healing techniques and ways of living were but corruptions of the universal meaning of body, science and truths.

While an indigenous body of knowledge and medical practice was constituted under colonialism, it became rather difficult to accommodate diverse cultures and bodies of knowledge of the human body and its accompanying therapeutic practices. This also underlined that there was a superior form of therapeutics and health care techniques, which encompassed the truth of the indigenous society. Here local health care practices were seen as a corruption on the Ayurvedic medical practices and methods. Narayana guru urged his followers to distance from the local health care practices and cultural beliefs of the contemporary society.

Influenced by the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru, there was a spurt of literary, cultural, political and economic activities by the members of the community, particularly in the regions mentioned above. Kesavan Asan started the newspaper Sujanandini, from Paravoor in 1891 and C.V Kunjuraman of Mayyanad started Kerala Kaumudi in 1911.500 The influence that Narayana exercised on the emerging notions of life and reform of the community is well attested. The census of India notes that,

The Ezhavas as a class having been influenced by his (Sree Narayana Guru’s) teachings, have greatly reformed their religious and social customs, but have remained within the fold of Hinduism, subject to limitations of caste system. The younger generations have, however, begun to show signs of revolt. Some of them are at least, are giving expressions to their desire to break away from the orthodox Hindu religion and the caste system, which is inevitably associated with it.501

500 Samuel, One Caste One Religion, p. 167; who is who in SNDP, p. 68.
501 Census of Travancore, 1931, V. XXVIII, Part I, p. 367
Narayana was highly critical of the *Varnashrama Dharma* unlike many of his contemporaries like Dayanandasaraswathi, Vivekananda and Gandhi who struck to the idea of the *Varnashrama Dharma* in Indian society. He upheld a universal view that all men are equal and constantly stressed the idea of humanity. 502 For him, racial distinctions, like languages and customs, may give an appearance of variety to the species, but they are only external factors of no fundamental biological importance. 503 Narayana argued that caste was simply a matter of false differentiation that had to be abjured; religion or *Matham* was the literal meaning for opinion or belief. 504 If there is any difference between men, ask, 'where is the so-called caste to be found, in men’s body or mind or speech or action?' 505 This negation of the idea of caste by Narayana Guru became a compelling force for the political and social elites by the early decades of the twentieth century. His critique on the caste divisions of the Hindu society and his stress on an alternative notion of the society and humanity might have been moulded by the influence of Christianity. 506

It is also to be argued that it was the influence of the Christian missionaries on Narayana that moulded his thoughts in a manner of universal humanity rather than based on the *Varnashramadharma* alone. Christian influences in the thoughts never overcome his desire for a respectable position within the Hindu religion rather than a conversion to Christianity. Western Christianity’s epistemic bases radically transformed the Ezhava notion of life, self and medicine and integrated it with the notions of ‘modernity’. The new notion of the modern differentiated the truth from untruth and science from culture, and religion from pagan belief. This led to the

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504 Ibid, pp. 257-258

505 Samuel, *One caste, One religion*, p. 97.

506 Stephen Fuchs, writing on the social reform movement of Sree Narayana Guru, says, in his endeavour the Swami was certainly inspired by Christian ideas, for in his time social work was still unknown among the Hindus. The Christian influence is not surprising, as the swamis had had lived for some time among Christians. Moreover the Christian missionaries worked for the social and economic uplift of their low caste converts. Stephen Fuchs, *The Rebellious Prophets: A Study in the Messianic Movements in Indian Religions*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1965, p. 113.
emergence of the notion of ‘Modernity’ in the sphere of indigenous medicine, meant, accepting the western scientific notions of truth.

There were also demands by a section of the society that ‘caste’ as a category of analysis should be eliminated in the Indian context as the same signified a derogatory practice in the context of the liberal ideas associated with the Indian National movement.\(^{507}\) However, the demand for an accelerated position within the indigenous society was much higher in the period under analysis.\(^{508}\)

Economic Advancement and Social Mobility

The economic advancement among the Ezhavas generated a deep sense of desire among the community for a higher social position within the religion and society in which they were situated. This was because the idea of progress was articulated through the process of integrating the cultural practices that were considered as the prerogative of the high castes. Economic advancement was to be translated in terms of social markers for advancement.

New economic opportunities and new modes of life at least by a section of the Ezhavas forced them to look down upon the economic practices, which the community was following, with contempt. The practice of distancing from the occupations hitherto practiced by the communities was visualized among the Ezhavas. The practice of tapping toddy remained one of the most important occupations of the Ezhavas during and prior to the period under study; however there was a large-scale attempt to deny

\(^{507}\) The practice of including caste as a criterion for of the Indian society analysis was withdrawn by the government of India after independence particularly from the census of 1951 onwards.

\(^{508}\) In response to the demand to discontinue the practice of using the criteria of caste in the analysis on society, the Census of India argued that; Whatever may be the opinion about the reasons in general, brought forward by the Honourable member in the legislative Assembly, for discontinuing the classification of the Hindu population into castes and the subsequent discussion on the subject, there can be no doubt about the general inaccuracy of the figures, as many members of the comparatively low caste try to pass themselves off as belonging to a higher one, and the fact that the census acts as an exciting cause of feuds between castes. Census of Travancore, Vol. XXV, Part I, 1921, p. 105.
their traditional occupations and to shift to newer forms of occupations and ways of living.\textsuperscript{509}

Narayana Guru urged the members of the community to distance themselves from trade associated with toddy tapping, from coconut and palm trees and their sale. He argued that ‘Liquor is poison. It should not be manufactured, should not be given to others or used by oneself. The tapper’s body stinks, his clothes stink, his house stinks; whatever he touches stinks’.\textsuperscript{510} In reference to the process of social mobility and demand for a higher social position among the lower castes in Travancore, the Census of India states that,

In the preliminary enumeration, the \textit{Chanars} in this state returned their caste as such and their occupation as toddy drawing. But after the preliminary enumeration of this state was over, permission was granted to the \textit{Chanars} in the province of Madras to change their caste name into \textit{Nadar Kshatriyas}, they wanted to have in the final census their caste name changed similarly and their occupation altered into agriculture. As the final census consists only in the checking of the preliminary enumeration figures, the change was not effected. It is extremely doubtful whether, for the trouble taken in collecting the information and tabulating the figures, corresponding benefit is derived. If the classification by traditional occupation is equally so, when the Ezhavas have in public meetings solemnly disclaimed all connections with toddy drawing which has been their traditional occupation till now.\textsuperscript{511}

This is further attested by Edgar Thurston who writes that ‘with the progress of culture and enlightenment, the occupation of extracting liquor from coconut palm has ceased to be looked upon with favour, and such families are now given to that pursuit have come to be regarded as a low division of the Chovas’.\textsuperscript{512} Thus, there were attempts to shift from their traditional practices and engage in newer forms of occupation, which was considered as superior in the hierarchy of economic position. This shift in belief systems was stated by Nagam Aiya he writes, ‘Both Animistic and fetish ideas have entered largely into the popular conceptions of Hinduism, and

\textsuperscript{509} Buchanan by the beginning of the nineteenth century notes that other than engaging in the climbing of palm trees and allied occupations, they were also found in other occupations such as wood cutters, farmers, boatmen, and even a few small traders, school-masters and Ayurvedic physicians., Francis Buchanan, \textit{A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar}, London: Higginbothams, 1807, p. 421.

\textsuperscript{510} Dharmatheertham, \textit{The Prophet of Peace}, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{511} Census of Travancore, 1921, V. XXV, Part. I, p 105.

\textsuperscript{512} Edgar Thurston, \textit{Castes and Tribes}, Part. II. p. 398.
Animistic tribes have in their turn adopted some of the rituals and forms of Hindu worship. However what was occurring among the tribes was being vigorously pursued among the Ezhavas.

The fundamental argument put forward in this context is that a similar movement occurred within the indigenous medical tradition whereby those health care practices which were considered to be part of the Brahmanical knowledge and practices were accepted by the Ezhavas.

The period under study witnessed a large number of Ezhavas shifting to the practice of indigenous medicine in the name of Ayurveda. This occurred largely among those who were barbers within the Ezhavas. Ezhavathis were a section of the Ezhava community who were engaged in the profession of Barbers. They shifted to the practice of Ayurveda. The temple rites were conducted by the Ezhavattis (Vattis), which was an important functional sub-caste of the Ezhavas. The chief function of the Vatti is to act as the barber of the Ezhavas, but, he used to function 'in the capacity of quasi-priests at all important rites in connection with birth, initiation, and death.'

There was a close relationship between the rise in their economic position and the social reform movement that occurred within them. To point out, the region around Mayyanad, Paravoor and Varkala, which constitutes a small region of the southwestern coastline of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore, became the earliest geographic space where initiatives for social reform occurred. In the 1870s

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514 Ezhavathis are the barbers of Ezhavas. Formerly they were also their priests... the majority of them have, however, given up their traditional occupations and taken to medical and other professions. Census of Travancore, 1931, V. XXIII, Part. I, p. 382.
515 The priest who officiates for the religious ceremonies of the Ezhavas is called as Vathis, probably a corruption of the Tamil Vathiar, which means a teacher or a priest. It is curious to observe that these Vathis perform the function of the priest as well as of the barber to the community. Nagam Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, p. 400, also see A. Aiyappan, *Ezhavas and Cultural Change*, Madras: Madras Government Museum Bulletin, 1943, p. 58.
516 The region mentioned above is relevant for the reasons that the first wave of migration from Kerala to abroad occurred form these regions. People from Paravoor, Mayyanad, Varkala and the surrounding localities in the district of Kollam from all castes and communities, particularly from the Ezhavas, migrated to Singapore, Malaya, and other Southeast Asian countries. Their economic advancement in
Mayanadu, a coastal congregation in the Quilon district, numbered about 300 adherents, of whom about two-thirds of the male adults left for Ceylon. \(^{517}\) There was also a migration of people from this region to the Southeast Asian countries. This rapid change in the economic situation was in turn actualised through the establishment of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDPY) in 1903, a movement aimed at the reform of the community as well as achieving social and economic progress. \(^{518}\) The region became the focus of the reform movement among the Ezhavas. In 1905 Narayana Guru summoned a large gathering at Paravoor aimed at abolishing all customs and practices, considered harmful for the community. \(^{519}\) In the new context, a large number of the cultural practices which the community was hitherto practicing were branded as harmful to their interest.

Modernization of the Medical Tradition among the Ezhavas

The process of integrating the high caste medical practices of the Ezhavas was set in motion by the active intervention of the royal palace of Travancore. By the mid-nineteenth century members of the ruling families of Travancore, Attingal, Kilimanoor and Haripad, like Ananthapurathu Moothakoil Thampuran, Attingal Moothakoil Thampuran, Harippad Rajaraja Varma Moothakoil Thampuran, and others taught the lower castes Ayurvedic medicine based on *Ashtangahridaya*. \(^{520}\) K. C. Kumaran

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\(^{517}\) Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality*, p. 108.

\(^{518}\) SNDP was formed in 1903 with Narayana Guru as President and Kumaran Asan as secretary. A journal named *Vivekodhyam* was also established as the mouthpiece of the Union. Balakrishnan Nair G. *Sree NarayanaGurudeva SampoornaVyakyanam* (Malayalam), Vol.1 Kerala Bhasha Institute: Thiruvananthapuram, 2003. p. 803.

\(^{519}\) Samuel, One Caste One Religion, p. 60.

\(^{520}\) Krishnan Narayanan Kaniyar of Niranam in his application for the award of the grant in aid from the government stated that he is a member of an ancient Ganaka family of the Hindoo caste, and the President of the Ganaka Samajom, Mannar and that his family had a very long succession of Ayurvedic physicians; as such he possess a long-standing experience in Ayurvedic medicines. That he also have had the very happy privilege of being a loyal and faithful disciple of His Highness the Mootha Koil Thampuran of Ananthapuram and of Raya Sankaran Thirumani. And has 24 years of experience in
Vaidyan, and C. Krishnan Vaidyan, learned *Ashtangahridayam* from Ananthapuathamoothakoil Thampuran, Kochucherukkan Vaidyan and Kochukunju Vaidyan were instructed by Harippadu Rajarajavarma Moothakoil Thampuran and Attinugal Mootha Koil Thampuran respectively. Similarly higher castes practitioners also taught Sanskrit based medical practice to the Ezhavas. Vamannoor Vidywan Potty taught Kochukunju Vaidyan Ayurvedic medical practice. Those who had acquired medical knowledge from the royal palaces, in turn, disseminated the same to the members of their community, as they found this as a means of social acceleration and as a process of integrating the knowledge and practices of the high castes.

By the beginning of the twentieth century there were a large number of Ayurvedic physicians among the Ezhavas. Upputtu Kannan, who was a high-ranking officer with the Government of Madras, was an early proponent of Ayurveda. He collected a large number of medicinal plants from various parts of the province, established a Botanical garden and also published the first commentary of Bhaskara on *Ashtangahridaya* in Malayalam. P. M Govindan Vaidyan published a journal known as *Vaidyamanjari*, and also translated *Ashtangahridaya* into Malayalam. The opportunities thrown open by colonial influence led to the emergence of a new class of Ayurvedic medicines. 

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521 An application submitted from K. Kochuvaidyan, for the award of the grant in aid to the government of Travancore stated that he passed the Ayurvedic higher Grade Medical Certificate Examination in 1902 after undergoing a course of instruction under the illustrious physician Ananthapurathu His Highness Moothakoil Thampuran, That he is now enjoying very wide practice in Central Travancore and that his services as a physician are highly appreciated both by the authorities and the general public. He was for two years government examiner in *Ayurveda*, that he belongs to a hereditary family of Ezhava Ayurvedic physicians a Koipally Karazma in central Travancore and the members of his community are the least represented in the department of *Ayurveda* even though his community can boast of a proportionally larger number of Ayurvedic physicians. *Permanent Arrangements Consequent on the Retirement of Mr. K. Narayana Pillai, Chief Vaidyan, Ayurveda Hospital and Dispensary, on the 6th Edavom, 1105*, Bundle No. 52 File no. 6/31, LGB, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.


523 The members of the Royal palace imparted Ayurvedic education to the people overlooking their caste. In an application for the award of grant Krishnan Narayanan Kaniyar of Niranam writes that he is a member of an ancient Ganaka family of the Hindu caste, and the President of the Ganaka Samajom, Mannar. My family had a very long succession of Ayurvedic physicians; as such I possess a long-standing experience in Ayurvedic medicines. *Reorganisation of the Ayurveda Department Advisory Board*. Volume II, Bundle No. 161, File No. 1343/ Dated 30-11-3, p. 42; Who is who in SNDP, pp. 24-25.

524 Who is who in SNDP, p. 111.
social elites largely concentrated in the cities. They also had the opportunity to acquire the dominant forms of knowledge either western or indigenous that was re-constituted as a result of the influx of western ideas.

The integration of the dominant Ayurvedic knowledge into the cultural life of the Ezhavas was accompanied by the development of new thoughts, which tended to retrieve indigenous medical tradition from magic and Mantras. Though it is difficult to re-constitute a different medical episteme of the Ezhavas, it rather remains a matter of further enquiry as to the possible means of tracing the medical practices from the larger medical paradigm of the entire subcontinent in the name of Ayurveda. However, stray references of the socio-cultural and religious practices of the Ezhavas can be found out during the eighteenth century prior to their process of modernization. Francis Day, writing in 1863, argues that,

In their religion devil worshippers, or rather propitiators of evil spirits; their offerings consisting of bloody sacrifices, for a cock, hog, sheep, or goat, are generally acceptable to the deity, who has no objections to the ardent spirits. 526

Similarly the practice of Mantravada (the practice of spells) was common among many Ezhavas and occasionally a patient was to be treated by a medical man and ‘a practitioner of spells’ simultaneously. The spirits that are specially worshipped are housed in the devotee’s home and others have temples built in which bronze icons representing them are placed. Offerings of food, toddy and the blood of cocks and sometimes of goats, and the dance of Shaman through whom he blesses the devotees are the chief items in the ritual for the worship of the spirits. 527 They worshipped Bhadrakali and Madan. 528 Madan, a male character is often seen with fear among the

526 Francis day. Land of the Perumals, Madras, Adelphi press, p. 320.
527 Samuel, One Caste One Religion p. 32.
528 Writing about the religious practices of the Ezhavas, Nagam Aiya states that ‘Hinduism is the prevailing religion and there are Saivaites and Vaishnavites among them. The Ezhavas have numerous temples of their own. The most popular deity is Bhadrakali, but Sasta, Virabhadran and Madan also count a large number of devotees among the Ezhavas. One of that community, Nanu Asan (Narayana Guru) by name, a Sanskrit scholar and a pious religious reformer, horrified by the animal sacrifices offered to Bhadrakali, had that deity replaced by Subrahmania, son of Siva, and the leader of the celestial army. This deity is very popular with the Ezhavas of Central and South Travancore. Nagam Aiya, V, The Travancore State Manual. Trivandrum: The Travancore Govt. Press, 1906. p. 399.
natives, Mateer writes that, 'he is supposed to be very large and tall, his body being of black colour and covered with hair like that of a cow'. Images of Madan are never made. He is said to strike men with sudden illness, and is in consequence greatly feared. 529 Thus as Risley states, "Hinduism is animism more or less transformed by the philosophy". 530 However, the acceptance of a dominant truth for a higher social position was accompanied by attempts to distance from the practices which the community was hitherto practicing.

Similarly the practice of *Visha Chikitsa* was common among the Ezhavas. 531 Since serpents were believed to be the favourites of Kali, many serpent images were to be seen in the temples and shrines of the Ezhavas, and there was a close interconnection between the practice of *Visha vaidyam* by the members of the community and the practice of worshipping serpents as part of Kali worship. 532

In the new context attempts were made to critically evaluate and modernize the practices that they were hitherto practicing. A. Kurumpan founded the *Achara Parishodana Sanghom*, the movement to evaluate the traditional practices. 533 The cultural practices that prevailed among the community were examined and interrogated in the light of rationality. Forceful arguments were made by the leaders of the community to give up toddy tapping and consumption of liquor. The truth about life was inextricably linked to the cultural meanings within the Hindu religion and culture. This was also aimed at imbibing Sanskrit as truth, and truth as the self.

Once on a visit to the house of A. Kesavan, Sree Narayana Guru urged him to refrain from the consumption of meat and fish. Social reform for the community meant

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531 In his application of the grant, Mr. K. Narayanan stated that he is an Ezhava holding the *Vishavaidya Visharadha* Diploma. He possesses a good knowledge and sufficient experience in the treatment of eye diseases. He is a very useful and popular vaidyan enjoying the confidence of a large number of patients who resort to his Vaidyasala for treatment. Though he is a specialist for the treatment of eye diseases he treats successfully poison cases as well. *Sanctioning grant-in-aid of Rs.15 per mensem to three Vaidyasalas at Chirayinkil, Cheminthala and Cherthla*, Bundle. No 151, File no.151/30, LGB, 15-11-1930, p. 2, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.
the purification of the body and the self from its local and contemporary cultural practices that were considered as the cause of the weakness of the community.\textsuperscript{534} Medicine and food as a way of healthy life and as a method of cure are closely interconnected in the indigenous medical tradition and society. *Ayurveda* itself means 'knowledge of life' or simply a 'way of life'.\textsuperscript{535} It is a practice by which a healthy life is maintained through the consumption of food that keeps the normal life going or rejuvenates the body from its ailments. Consumption of fish and meat formed an important part of the diet among the Ezhavas. Creation of a new dietary pattern was an emulation of the cultural practices of the higher castes. Here cultural backwardness was equated with social backwardness and social backwardness as a result of physical backwardness. The physical backwardness thus was intricately related to the consumption pattern and health. The *Acharams* (traditional practices) were replaced by a new notion of the *Sadacharam* (moral codes of practices). *Sadacharam*, as norms for a healthy way of living according to a moral code, became an important way of living for the community. The purification of the self and the *Samudayam* (community) became most important agenda of social reform among the Ezhavas.\textsuperscript{536}

The emergence of the self was an important aspect of social mobility and modernization.\textsuperscript{537} Tradition, with the traits of rationality and logic, became an important way through which it was analyzed. The rise of the individual was based on a supposedly rational order. Rationality was to be the hallmark of the individual even when he defended tradition in the societal sphere. They sought to defend the elements of science in tradition. The ability of the indigenous physician to read the pulse was seen as the command that the *Vaidyan* had over scientific principles. It was understood that the physician even without having an internal view of the human body could get the knowledge of the heart beat of the patient, and hence the internal functioning of the

\textsuperscript{534} Ibid, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{536} P. R. Kochukunju founded the Sadachara Prabodhini Sabha (movement for the promotion of right practices) and the Sadachara Prabodhini Sahagarana Sanghom Who is who in SNDP, p. 92. In 1890, P. K Krishnan founded the Sanmarga Pradhayani Samajom (Movement for Right Moral conduct), Ibid. p. 63, 14-16.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid. p. 13.
body. This was seen as an important landmark in the indigenous medical system, as all traditional knowledge that Ayurveda possessed was deemed to be ‘scientific’, irrespective of the fact that surgery was rarely practiced, leave alone any theory derived from anatomical conclusions of the human body based on the visual gaze. The aim was to prove that intuitions in Ayurveda were not illusions but on the other hand, concrete conceptions, which were the result of scientific gazes endowed with divinity. The pulse was thus the gateway of the scientific location of human body in the traditional knowledge system. An Ezhava physician therefore attributed both divinity and rationality to tradition and tradition was interpreted it as scientific. Thus Ezhava physicians claimed to be part of a larger body of universal knowledge. Kunjuraman Vaidyan was one of the most prominent indigenous medical physicians among the Ezhavas. He acquired the degree of Ayurveda Bhooshanam from Madras Ayurveda College and was also trained at the Calcutta Kaviraj pharmacy and from Bombay High Caste Hindu Hospital. In 1915 he started an Ayurveda hospital at Kollam and a journal named Ayurveda was also published from Kollam. He also started an Ayurveda High school and a Sanskrit school. In a memorandum submitted to the government Kunjuraman explains his plan to re-organize the indigenous medical structure of the state both in terms of its dissemination as an organized pedagogy as well as the re-organization of the same through ‘scientific’ means. He demanded that the,

The students admitted in the College should be holders in Sanskrit Vidhwan, Siromani, Mahopadhyaya and other recognised examinations and native states with a satisfactory knowledge of English; or graduates who have taken Sanskrit as their second language. In this connection it may be recognised that as the knowledge of the minute definitions of the principles of the Ayurvedic system implies that the knowledge of Sanskrit logic should be given preference in the matter of admission. It should be made compulsory that the curriculum for the study must consist of original Sanskrit text Books on Ayurveda namely Charaka, Susutha, Malineethanthra, Nandikeswaratanthra, Vridhavagbhada, Vagbhada, Rasarathnasamuchaya, Rasagangadhara, rasahridhayathanthra, etc.

538 Who is who in SNDP, p. 43-44.
This was in tune with the demand for Sanskrit education in the indigenous medical tradition to constitute an indigenous medicine on scientific lines. The Ezhavas under the period becomes the most vocal proponents of the sanskritized form of knowledge and culture. They demanded that the study and practice of the indigenous medicine should be based on the Sanskrit literature of the past. This was an attempt to get rid of their contemporary cultural practices in their attempt to prove that they are scientific.

Similarly he argued that a large number of diseases found in the subcontinent could be eliminated by the medicinal knowledge possessed by the Ayurvedic physicians. The diseases like tuberculosis, diabetes, cancer, etc., were considered to be of serious challenge to the society. It was not part of the general argument and discourses on which the indigenous medicine as represented through Ayurveda was based entirely on the language of Sanskrit literature, rather, alike the western norms of governmentality as discussed by Foucault, the idea of excluding those considered as 'the sick and the weak' from the society was part of the idea of society visualized by the lower caste medical practitioner. Kunjuraman argued that the government should maintain separate wards for the treatment of deadly diseases.540

No one will deny the fact that venereal diseases and its terrible consequences, leprosy, cancer, tuberculosis, diabetes, and typhoid-malaria-and pneumonia-fevers are more prevalent in India than in any other country. Among Indians illiteracy and poverty, not being checked as elsewhere contribute much to their spread. Diabetes is prevalent even among rich because they are ignorant of proper diet and exercise. Indians suffer more from the dreadful consequence of syphilis than the foreigners who imported the disease, as the latter’s system are more inured to it. It is not easy to say how many of our countrymen fall (a) prey to these terrible scourges of human race. These rank foremost among the several killing diseases. In view of this light it will be a great blessing to the suffering people if special wards attached to the hospitals, and special hospitals, are maintained by the government. Three separate wards may be provided in each hospital, one for venereal diseases another for diabetes and a third one for typhoid-malaria-and pneumonia fevers. As regards leprosy, tuberculosis and cancer it is most advisable to maintain these separate asylums in each linguistic area. Each of these must be placed under the charge of an eminent Ayurvedic doctor who has invented special remedies and methods for the cure of the disease for which the hospital in his charge is intended. He may be given necessary facilities before his appointment for his medicines and methods being experimented for ascertaining the truth of their efficiencies. Of course he must

540 Ibid, pp. 2-3.
surrender his right on the medicines and methods to Government to his merit being truly recognised. We know for certain reasons that there are Ayurvedic doctors who have special remedies uniformly found successful in curing these diseases.  

However with regard to the production and distribution of the Ayurvedic medicines, he was critical of the large-scale production initiated particularly by P. S. Varier and Kottakal Arya Vaidyasala. It was because, as a community, the Ezhavas who were suffering from social and economic disabilities were not in a position to engage in the production of Ayurvedic medicines on a large scale. He therefore argued that the production of Ayurvedic drugs should be undertaken by the government through a central laboratory as a possible means towards the standardization of Ayurvedic medicines. He pointed out that,

What is needed more towards the revival of Ayurveda is the establishment of a large central laboratory for the preparation of Ayurvedic remedies for supplying not only the various Hospitals and dispensaries but also to the Ayurvedic Medical shops run by Government in all the district towns, and other important centres so as to prevent the purchase of carelessly prepared and partially efficient medicines from pharmacists that are exploiting the modern revival of Ayurveda for their pecuniary profits. Until the government can do this, those local and municipal authorities that run Ayurvedic dispensaries will not be doing the real benefit to the suffering population as they prepare medicines prepared by vendors who prepare them with mercantile interest. The government must take the needed trouble to appoint a committee of physicians drawn from different linguistic areas who possess the ability of selecting and standardising the medicines necessary for the distribution in the different hospitals and dispensaries instead of using inferior medicines on an average of not less than ten times what efficient and genuine medicine would cost if they are prepared in the central laboratory. It is only then that the prejudices against Ayurveda will be removed and its superiority over other systems of medicine is established.

He was also of the opinion that mass production of Ayurvedic medicines had to a large extend compromised the quality of the indigenous medicines and therefore argued that government should invest in the production of medicines and have to actively engage in its distribution. He was also of the opinion that Ayurvedic medical education should be supported by the western medical education. He maintained that,

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541 Ibid, pp. 4-5.

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For deriving the full benefit of the establishment of a central laboratory it is also absolutely necessary to establish a botanical garden for the availability of all the necessary drugs in proper condition for the preparation of the medicines in the laboratory. We find that the ancient Rishis subjected the whole of Animal, mineral and vegetable kingdoms to the closest possible scrutiny and analysis for the benefit of the human race and discovered the minutest detail of medicinal properties of not only the common plants, mineral and animals, but also the rarest and most valuable plants, drugs and precious stones, minerals and animals available only on the heights almost inaccessible of the Himalayan and other mountains and in the depths almost unfathomable of oceans. Their revelation of the healing powers, hidden in nature leads to a grander conception of earthly creation than can be set forth by any other aspect of it. 545

Similarly like Palpu, he argued in favour of western medicine, on the understanding that indigenous medicine could be rejuvenated through its integration with western medicines. 546 He also argued that languages like Sanskrit and English should be taught to children from childhood so that Ayurvedic education could be carried forward. 547 Similarly the Ezhavas desired for their upliftment with the aid of the state. 548 As a large number of the members of the community acquired Ayurvedic education from different parts of the subcontinent, they demanded employment and grant from the government of Travancore. 549

545 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
546 Ibid, p. 16.
547 Ibid, p. 17.
548 The children of this province, nay, the whole of India should be educated from the very beginning in their vernacular, English and Sanskrit languages in one and the same school. The study of the three languages must be affected giving equal importance to the three and those who become graduates may be admitted in Ayurvedic and Allopathic sides according to their taste and tendency. It goes without saying the graduates who have taken up Sanskrit-logic as optional only should be admitted in the Allopathic side of the medical college. Ibid, p. 3.
549 Kunjuraman argued, “Of course both the Ayurvedic and Allopathic students must study both these systems—one as main and the other as subsidiary—and those who have taken up allopathy as main may be employed as doctors in Allopathic hospitals and dispensaries and also as professors in the Allopathic Branch of the Medical college, and the students who have taken up ‘Ayurveda’ as main may be appointed as Doctors in the Ayurvedic hospitals and dispensaries and as professors in the Ayurvedic branch of the college”. Ibid, p. 17.
The belief in individualism and the sense of liberty promoted individual initiatives in medicine. While the community embraced Ayurveda in their desire for a claim to tradition, surgery and biomedical practice were equally promoted. Modern medical practice meant science, rationality, logic and objective knowledge. Narayan Guru encouraged his community to learn and practice Western medicine as well. He told P. K. Narayanan Vaidyan, a practitioner of Ayurveda, to practice surgery and biomedicine. Many practitioners among the Ezhavas had acquired the degree from the Ayurvedic colleges outside the state. Palpu, who was also a nominated member of the Legislative Assembly, while highlighting the health conditions of the state of Travancore referred to the unsatisfactory condition of medical relief in the state, owing to the want of an adequate supply of drugs and specified that sufficient encouragement was not given to native Vaidyans, who were seen only as a bad substitute for English doctors. In his opinion the question of state’s attitude towards the Vaidyans and his argument had to be carefully considered and defined by the government. If it was found that he was very much inferior to his English rival, it should be further considered whether he had to be paid an aid of Rs. 25 per month. Since my transfer to Nagercoil my practice grew up to a considerable extent so much so I was compelled to open a hospital especially in order to meet the demands of patients from very far off places. Though I am conducting the hospital according to the government rules regarding the same and had applied for a grant to your Excellency’s government. I am not yet fortunate enough to get any help in this direction. I may also submit that recently I have been the recipient of the diploma of "Bishagacharya" from the Dacca Medical College, Bengal. Further I am an Ezhava, which community can claim a larger number of successful Ayurvedic physicians, but at the same time not yet adequately represented in the higher ranks of the service if the Ayurveda Department. As submitted already I am one of the grant-in-aid Vaidyans (second grade) from whom the department has hitherto been recruiting competent Vaidyans for the vacancies that arose from time. This evidently is an additional claim to support my prayer. I have now 17 years to my credit as a grant-in-aid vaidyan and I humbly beg to state that I am enjoying a very wide practice in the whole of south Travancore. If an enquiry is made, your Excellency will certainly be convinced of my proficiency as an Ayurvedic Physician, and my competency to be in charge of an Ayurvedic hospital again, a kind perusal of the testimonials, copies of which are already sent to the government along with my application for grant to my hospital at Nagercoil, will also testify to my popularity and efficiency as a Vaidyan. I therefore most humbly request that your Excellency may be kindly pleased to recognize my claims by appointing me to the post of the chief Vaidyan, Ayurveda Hospital at Thiruvananthapuram that will soon fall vacant and thus encourage my humble services for the cause of Ayurveda. Award of Grant to the Ayurveda Hospital at Nagercoil conducted by Vaidyan B. Nilakanan, Bundle. No. 148, File. No. 106A/ 30, Ayurveda Department, pp. 14-16. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

550 Who is Who in SNDP, p. 151.
551 Award of Grant to the Ayurveda Hospital at Nagercoil conducted by Vaidyan B. Nilakanan, Bundle. No. 148, File. No. 106A/ 30, Ayurveda Department, p. 12.
should not be made useful at all. If it was possible to improve him, it should be done, otherwise his practice ought to be summarily ended in the public interests.\textsuperscript{552}

The movement towards the revival of the traditional knowledge under colonialism was accompanied by the revival of classical Sanskrit language, as most of the traditional literature of the social elite was in this language. Sanskrit became the new medium of a revived tradition. The sanctity of Sanskrit as a divine language, that encompassed the elements of ancient science, was glorified and the language was revived. Kumaran Asan in one of his articles wrote

\begin{quote}
It would be better if one acquires the basic knowledge in a classical language like Sanskrit, for the soul of India lies in the Sanskrit literature\textsuperscript{t}, in the legislative Assembly debates he argued for the compulsory education of Sanskrit and the pursuance of such disciplines as Ayurveda, Jyotisha, Malayalam literature etc.\textsuperscript{553}
\end{quote}

The spread of Sanskrit accelerated the dissemination of Ayurvedic knowledge among the Ezhavas. A large number of Sanskrit schools were started by the emerging social elites of the Ezhavas and its learning promoted.\textsuperscript{554} The mastery of Sanskrit helped in the dissemination of Ayurvedic knowledge based on a dominant ideology, which was hitherto confined largely to Brahmin households (illams). Students who had acquired the basics of Sanskrit found it easy to acquire Ayurvedic medical knowledge. Ayurvedic schools were started at Kollam and Attingal, which helped in the organizing and dissemination of Ayurveda through a proper framework and curricula.\textsuperscript{555} The Ezhava physicians formed associations and organisations like the Uttara Kerala

\textsuperscript{552} Kerala State Archives (1912: Some suggestions for the promotion of medical relief research, File no. 457, General, Sree Moolam Popular Assembly, Subjects eighth session, Assembly Proceedings, Eighth Session Paper 69, subject No. 57, Palpu suggested that the government should give native medicines a fair trial and a fair chance of justifying its existence and its historical usefulness, by making some provision for competent research into the properties of the drugs ordinarily used by the Vaidyans and the methods employed by them in treatment; and he proposed that a full time young medical graduate should be set apart, with a proper laboratory, for this work of research, it being his duty especially, to publish the results of his investigation in English and in the vernacular. He then pointed out the harm done by some native physicians through their ignorance of physiology, anatomy, chemistry, antiseptic treatment and the properties of mineral drugs and poison, and he proposed as remedial measure, that a grant-in-aid or diploma should be given only to those candidates who have passed from the Ayurveda Patasala. These would undergo a further examination in the above subjects, conducted by a board constituted by the Durbar Physician-facilities being afforded at the same time for Vaidyan candidates to attend the hospitals and learn work therein.

\textsuperscript{553} Enaadu Annual Publication – 1986, Thiruvananthapuram, - “Asan’s Educational Thoughts”, p. 181.

\textsuperscript{554} Who is who in SNDP 1956(?), p. 189.

\textsuperscript{555} Ibid. pp. 43-44.
Vaidya Samajom, Ayurveda Mahamandalam, Uttara Kerala Dharma Vaidya Sala, Ayurveda Samajom, etc. 556

This new knowledge over time spread among the community along with other forms of traditional Sanskrit literature, philosophies like Nyaya, Jyotisha, Yoga, etc. replacing the earlier methods of therapeutic practices associated with treating like Mantram, Kaipunyam, Ottamuli, etc. Velayudan Vaidyan 557 popularly known as Arackkal Vaidyan acquired the knowledge of indigenous medicine from Pappu Vaidyan a physician among the Ezhavas. He was famed for his Yukti Chikitsa, Kaipunyam, Ottamuli and other forms of indigenous treatment. However, in the course of time these practitioners who followed indigenous and local practices largely practiced by a subaltern group were replaced by a refined medical practice of the dominant tradition. 558

Print as a Medium of Socio-cultural Hegemony

The press played an important role in the dissemination of knowledge among the lower sections of the society. Language, literature and print have often been viewed as the means for contests over power, propagation of dominant ideas and the fashioning of national, regional and community identities. 559 The dissemination was also accompanied by a claim to authenticity, which was attached to tradition. Books printed at the Church Mission Society (CMS) Press were copied into palm leaf manuscript. Those who possessed manuscripts acquired a certain sense of authenticity and laid claim to traditional knowledge. Manuscripts were copied and produced in bulk by the.

556 Ibid. pp.43-44.
557 Who is Who in SNDP, p. 230.
558 In 1917, (1083 ME) Narayana Guru visited Kotar near Nagercoil and removed the images of Mallan, Chudalamadan Karinkali and other Dhurdevathas and built a temple named as Pillayar kovil and placed a beautiful Ganapathi idol as the icon. In the same time he also wrote Vinayakashtakam a Sanskrit poem in praise of Ganapathi. Balakrishnan Nair G, Sree Narayana Gurudeva Sampoorna Vyakyanam (Malayalam), Vol.I, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2003, p. 3.
559 Charu Gupta, p. 20.
second part of the nineteenth century, leading to a reconstitution and dissemination of the dominant tradition.\textsuperscript{560}

The print explosion created a wide arena for the circulation of ideas that led to the cultural hegemony of the print and created a dynamic public sphere.\textsuperscript{561} The easy availability of books helped a wider readership among the community. What is interesting is the fact that Ayurveda as a system of medicine, which was believed to be of ‘divine intervention’, hitherto became a prerogative of the Brahmin households and got printed at a press which was owned by the Christian Church. Such activity helped in making Ayurvedic knowledge a mass based activity and a secular enterprise. Thus the new public domain with its print culture, emergence of urban centres, means of communication and above all the understanding that knowledges are secular and had to be disseminated, enabled communities who were hitherto kept away due to rigid caste boundaries to engage themselves in knowledge.

Conclusion

The indigenous medical tradition among the Ezhavas underwent rapid transformation under colonial dominance. Social reform for the community meant that many of the cultural practices of the community were to be reformed or to be given away with in their process of becoming ‘modern’. Those cultural practices, which the community sought to transform or give away with, became in effect part of their dietary and health care practices. This was also accompanied by a movement towards imbibing the cultural practices of a Sanskritic tradition considered to be part of the elite section of the population. Thus modernity and social reform for the community in effect erased many of the therapeutic practices, which the community was earlier engaged in.

\textsuperscript{560} Notes on Bala chikitsa copied into Palm Leaf as manuscript from the book printed at the CMS press, Kottayam, Oriental Manuscript Library, University of Kerala, 1868.
\textsuperscript{561} Charu Gupta, p. 21.