Chapter - I

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF AGASTHEESWARAM TALUK BEFORE 1958

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

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

### 1.1. Evolution of caste system

The Varna model of caste system is supposed to have evolved during the Vedic period of Indian History.\(^5\) The Brahmin writers who propounded the structure of society placed them at the top and gave them the privilege of declaring the study of the other castes, including the Kings.\(^6\) The Savarna castes were regarded as pure and the Avarna castes as polluting. Each caste

---


is characterized by a number of attributes insignificant to its position in the ritual ranking.\textsuperscript{7} Thus the distinction of purity and pollution set one section of the people above the other section and thus the polluting castes began to be suppressed by the so called pure castes.\textsuperscript{8}

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

During the pre-Aryan period, social stratifications were not based on birth, but on functions where mobility between functional groups were possible. There was no stigma attached to any other caste. The Brahmins who reached Travancore from the Deccan subjugated the land during the period between the 8\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} centuries A.D., Travancore was fully in the straitjacket of caste system.\textsuperscript{10} Since then, caste has been the dominant factor

\textsuperscript{7} Hardgrave, R.L., \textit{The Nadars of Tamilnad}, California, 1969, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{8} Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{9} Kunjan Pillai, E., \textit{op.cit.}, Kottayam, 1979, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}
in the economic and cultural life of Travancore. In course of time, the distinctions between castes increased. The harmony of the society rested on the disunity within it.

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

At the same time there was also a growth of caste segregation among the lower castes. Thus every caste became a strong unit in itself where the upper caste dominated the lower. All the social relationships such as marriages were limited within the caste, and the only exemption granted was for the Brahmin men to have concubinage with any women from the Savarna castes, mainly the Nayar caste. However, the Brahmins, the Namboodiris and others formed the Savarnas and the rest of the human beings in all parts of Travancore were Avarnas.

---

12 (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Nayars were called the caste Hindus or the Savarnas. Ezhavas, Shanars, Kammalars, Mukkuvas, Pulayas and Parayas were called the non-caste Hindus or the Avarnas. Samuel Mateer, *The Land Charity*, London, 1871, pp. 27-28.
1.2. Communal Divisions

1.2.1. The Brahmins

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

The Namboodiri Brahmins were mostly found in the states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. They formed the “socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar and the traditional land-holders of Parasurama”\textsuperscript{16} the legendary founder of Kerala. The Namboodiri was treated with utmost reverence in the society and was considered to be the God on earth.\textsuperscript{17} The author of Keralopathi went to the extent of saying that only through Namboodiri seed good kings, would born.\textsuperscript{18} The Namboodiris are found in all the taluks of Travancore.

\textsuperscript{14} Nagam Aiya, V., \textit{op cit.}, Vol. II, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{15} Census of India, 1911, Travancore.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{18} Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Studies in Kerala History}, p. 315.
Potti is another groups of Brahmins. Potti is a Tamil word signifying reverence, and this term is used to designate all Malayalee Brahmins except Nambudiri Brahmins. There are three classes of Potti Brahmins corresponding to the three periods of their settlements in the country. Among the Brahmins, next stood the Paradesi Brahmins. They are non-Malayalee Brahmins speaking Tamil, Kanarese, Telugu and Marathi languages. But in the Agastheeswaram taluk there are Nambudiri Brahmins, Potti Brahmins and non-Malayalee Brahmins.

### 1.2.2. Ampalavasi

Ampalavasi is the generic name applied to all classes of temple servants of Travancore. There were many sub-divisions in the caste, which were assigned to different services in the Hindu temple, such as preparation of garlands, sweeping of the temple floor, fetching fire-wood, carrying idols in procession, etc. As a peculiar castle in Travancore the Ampalavasis occupied an intermediary position between the Brahmins and Sudras or Nayars. Each Ampalavasi hopes to regain the lost position by serving his

---


21 The term literally means ‘a dweller in a temple’.


term of life in temples.\textsuperscript{24} Unni is the largest sub-division comprises of four castes – Nampiyassan, Pushpakan, Puppalli and Brahmin.\textsuperscript{25} Their traditional occupation is preparing pushpams or garlands for the temple use.

\textbf{1.2.3. Nayar}

On the non-Brahminical Hindus in Travancore,\textsuperscript{26} the Nayars constituted the largest caste in Travancore.\textsuperscript{27} The first scientific census of 1875 calculates them about twenty percent.\textsuperscript{28} They are found in all parts of Travancore. In Agastheeswaram taluk they are limited in number. They were numerous in Trivandrum, Neyyattinkara, Mavelikara, Thiruvalla and Quilon. Kerala Mahatmyam and Brahmin tradition say that the Nayar caste was the result of the union between the Namboodiris and Deva Gandharva and Rakshasa women\textsuperscript{29} introduced by parasurama.\textsuperscript{30} They are considered as a mixed race of Aryan and Dravidian. The term ‘Nayar’ was derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Nayaka’ meaning a leader.\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} They are considered as fallen Brahmins.
\item \textsuperscript{25} The caste group is also named as ‘push pakans’.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Census of India, 1911, Travancore, Part I, Report, p. 290.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Thulaseedharan, K., \textit{Studies in Traditional Kerala Society}, Trivandrum, 1979, p. 34.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Robin Jeffrey, \textit{op cit.}, p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{29} They were considered to be the divine courtisans. Elemkulam Kunjan Pillai, P.N., \textit{Studies in Kerala History}, p. 296.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Edgar Thurston, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. V, p. 284.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Panikkar, K.M., \textit{A History of Kerala}, 1498-1801, Annamalai Nagar, 1960, p. 3.
\end{itemize}
Most of the feudal chiefs in Travancore were Nayars. They were first mentioned in three copper plates and inscriptions of seventh to ninth century A.D. and rose to the position of small kings by the mid 13th century. Kublakhan, a Chinese Emperor had trade relation with Travancore through two coastal Nayar Chieftains with strategic ports. The Nayars with other indigenous castes formed a long standing army of the state.

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

1.2.4. The Avarnas

The Ezhavas were spread throughout the length and breadth of Travancore. In certain parts of Travancore they are called the Chovans even now. Regarding their origin it is said that a Pandya princess Alli and her

32 Panikkar, K.M., op.cit., p. 3.
33 William Logan, op.cit., p. 265.
34 David, M. Schneider, Kathleen Gough, (ed), op cit., p. 303. The two kingdoms were Kolattiri and Travancore or Venad.
husband Narasimha, the Raja of carnatic migrated to Ceylon and became the sovereign of Ceylon. Later their successors returned to the motherland and settled in Kerala by name Ezhavas in remembrance of Ezham or Ceylon.37

Most of the Ezhavas were tappers and tenders of coconut palm to public offices, temple roads and the houses. They followed the custom of Nayars, their women were prohibited from covering their breasts and wearing certain clothes and ornaments till the second half of the nineteenth century. Keeping cows and metal vessels, and wearing sandals and fire clothes were not allowed to them. In general, they were a people despised by the higher castes.38 As a slave caste of the Nayars, the Ezhavas inherited the social customs of Nayars. According to 1911 census, the Ezhavas were numbered 456,265 against 592,489 Nayars.39

1.2.5. The Nadars

The Nadars originally lived in and around Madurai. They were a group of rich people who lived in peace. In 1630 A.D. Thirumalai Nayakkar came to power. During his period there were rebellion in his country. The king sought the help of the Nadars. But they refused to help him. The enraged Thirumalai ravaged the Nadar settlements. So the Nadars ran in

37 Census of India, 1901, Travancore, Part I, p. 278.
38 Robin Jeffrey, op cit., p. 2.
batches for their safety. Those who ran to the northern part of Tamilnad called themselves as Gounders to protect them from the onslaught. Those who ran to the South, settled in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari Districts mostly at Agastheeswaram taluk, Rajakkamangalam and places west of Rajakkamangalam. As there was no means for their livelihood, they adopted palmyrah climbing and agriculture.\(^{40}\)

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

In the later centuries, the Nadars of Travancore occupied a social limbo between the Nayars and the outcaste groups. They were the highest division of the lowest classes or the lowest of the middle classes.\(^{43}\) A large number of them were converted to Christian faith mainly for getting social

\(^{40}\) Encyclopaedia of Agastheeswaram, pp., 9-11.

\(^{41}\) They were also contemptuously called as Shannars.

\(^{42}\) Robin Jeffrey, \textit{op cit.}, p. 22.

equality with higher classes of the society. After Tirunelveli riots of 1889, they became popular.  

1.2.6. Krishnavakaikkar

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

Tradition traces their origin to Ampadi, near Madura and from there they migrated to Conjuvaram. They migrated from there to Travancore and presented an image of Lord Krishna to the reigning king Udaya Martanda

\[\begin{aligned}
44 \text{ The important riots of Tirunelveli and Madura called The antishanar riot. A riot between the shannars and the maravas to treat them as high caste with strong antagonism between the two. G.O. No. 1077 Judicial, July 1899, dated 20.08.1990.}
45 \text{ Censuses of India, 1911, Travancore, Part I, Report, p. 261.}
47 \text{ Edgar Thurston, op cit., Vol. IV, p. 74.}
48 \text{ Censuses of India, 1911, Travancore, Part I, Report, p. 261.}
49 \text{ Also called Ayar padi, which was the native of Lord Krishna.}
50 \text{ Censuses of India, 1931, Travancore, Part I, Report, p. 373.}
\end{aligned}\]
Varma in the first year of the Malabar Era. The Maharaja asked them to serve in the temple of Krishna within the abode of Sri Padmanabha Swami at Trivandrum. They lived at Vanchiyur near Trivandrum for many years. As most of them follow matrilineal system they observe strictly the birth and death pollution. Thus the daily ceremonies at the temple were constantly interrupted. It was not tolerated by the rulers of Travancore. So the Maharaja asked them to remove their residence from Trivandrum at least by three rivers. As a result they settled in the taluks of Eraniel and Kalkulam.

The Marumakkathayam Krishnavakaikkar speak Malayalam whereas the Makkathayis speak a very corrupt Tamil dialect inter-mixed with Malayalam.

1.2.7. Nanchilnad Vellala

Situated between the southernmost part of the country, Nanchilnad comprises of Thovalai and Agastheeswaram taluks of Travancore. Several families from Pandynad and Coromandal coast migrated to this land, cleared the jungles and settled. The term ‘Nanchilnad’ means the land environed by Nanja lands or country fortified by natural barriers. The names of present day villages like Azhagia Pandiapuram, Kulasekharanputhur and

\[\text{51} \quad \text{The king was identified as Pallivana Perumal, according to another account.}\]

\[\text{52} \quad \text{Edgar Thurston, } \textit{op cit.}, \text{ Vol. II, p. 74-75.}\]

\[\text{53} \quad \text{Pandyanad – Tirunelveli and places north of it was called Pandy Nad.}\]
Cholapuram indicate the supremacy of the Pandya, Chera and Chola kings over this land.

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

---

54 Report of the nanchilnad Marumakkathaya Vellala Committee, 1921, Trivandrum, 1922, p. 4.
(property of the women) and Ukanthudama (property right by love), patrilineal while in all other respects they followed matrilineal system.

1.2.8. The Parayas

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

Here in South Travancore the untouchables were considered impure unclean and polluted in both their bodies and minds. They caused pollution to anything by their mere contact, just by touching it. They had no rights to go near a caste Hindu. They had to bow their heads and stand at a distance prescribed by them. An untouchable was forbidden to wear a turban or

---

55 Proceeding of the Adi Dravida Mahajana Saba, 1932.
56 Yesudhas, R.N., op.cit., p. 9.
57 Ibid., p. 9.
cover his head in the presence of a Brahmin or a caste Hindu even at work in the hot sun.\textsuperscript{58} Even if he took bath many times a day, he could not make himself pure, and was still an untouchable. The depressed classes all over Travancore had suffered perhaps the most barbaric manifestation of man’s inhumanity to man. While in the other parts of the country the condemnation was due to economic or social condition, in Travancore it was because of caste and religion.

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

The Parayas form a huge chunk of the people of South Travancore. Some scholars say that the Parayas are the descendants of the Chera kings who were defeated by the powerful Chola kings.\textsuperscript{61} It is also said that the Parayas were the Mager of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) conquered by the Chola king

\textsuperscript{58} Samuel Mateer, \textit{Native Life in Travancore}, 1883, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{59} Edgar Thurston, \textit{op.cit}, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{61} Edgar Thurston, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. VI, p. 87.
and taken as prisoners to Chola kingdom where they were kept as slaves.\textsuperscript{62} It is also suggested that the Parayas were originally Buddhists who were in the habit of condemning and ridiculing the Brahmins before the latter became powerful.\textsuperscript{63} Later the tables were turned against them. When the Brahmins became all-powerful they condemned and ridiculed the Parayas and branded them as untouchables forever.

1.2.9. Pallans

The Pallans form the larger community of untouchables in South Travancore.\textsuperscript{64} They form a segment of agricultural labourers, and are mostly employed in the cultivation of paddy. The Pallans were engaged themselves in ploughing and agricultural work in those low lying areas.\textsuperscript{65} So it is assumed that their caste name originated from the name of the place where they worked. In the Tamil dictionary, Pallans are classified as out-castes. After the defeat of the Pallava dynasty, the remaining Pallavas were taken as prisoners and treated as slaves by the Imperial Cholas. It is probable that the slaves were treated as unclean and untouchable human beings. They were

\textsuperscript{63} JRAS, Vol. XVI, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{65} Thurston, E., \textit{op cit.}, p. 473.
also ill-treated by Vellala landlords.\textsuperscript{66} It is said that the low class Pallavas were called as Pallans. According to Tamil literature, Pallans were an ancient community of Tamil Nadu, and owners of large cultivable lands. Therefore it is obvious that they have been suppressed into slavery by the subsequent invaders who came down to south from the north.

Apart from these communities, there are fishermen in the coastal areas who profess fishing. But they could not be brought under the feudalistic society, because they professed Catholic religion. The priests and the elders of the society protected them. Next to them the Muslims settlers who were mostly traders. Tradition states that the Muslims came and settled in this part, when Muhilan, a Muslim invaded Kottar, and settled in the near vicinity of Kottar.\textsuperscript{67} There were other communities too found in different places of Agastheeswaram. The dominances of the superior caste led to the caste hierarchy not only in South Travancore but the whole of Travancore.

1.3. Caste hierarchy

The role and influence of caste system was the root cause for all the social evils. The Brahmins, were at the top of the society. They were considered as Jenmis of the land or tenants in Chief. They acted as the

\textsuperscript{66} Hanumanthan, \textit{Untouchability}, Madurai, 1979.

\textsuperscript{67} There is a place called Muhilan Kudiyiruppu situated at the south west of Kottar, now a part of Agastheeswaram. This place is called so after Muhilan.
advisers of the kings. The Nayars were the feudal lords, who assisted the kings in warfields and in all other areas of the kings day to day affairs.

Immediately below the Nayars were the Ezhavas or Thiyans or chogans or chovans. They cultivated the gardens and also grew dry crops. Under the direct supervision of the Ezhavas, the paddy fields were cultivated by the slaves. The Nayars who occupied important places in the government forced the Ezhavas to serve them. The Ezhavas as a class were considered low in social estimation. On grounds of pollution they had to remain at a distance of thirty six feet from a Brahmin and twelve steps from a Nayar. They could not rear cows or enter the bazaar for purposes of trade. They could use only coarse clothes and wear ordinary ornaments. They could not live in tiled houses or use umbrellas or move about in conveyances. No Ezhava could enjoy or own landed property.

Thus the condition of the Ezhavas was miserable. Next to the Ezhavas, the Nadars who were also treated as a low caste slave. They were forbidden from wearing a turban on their heads to carry the loads that were thrust upon them by compulsion.

---


70 Col. Munro to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort St. George, dated 7th March 1818, Nagercoil, Foreign Political Proceedings, Fort William, 17th July 1818, No. 20, p. 66.
The next in the social hierarchy were the Pulayas, the Parayas and Kursvas. The slaves were doing bonded labour for the Nayars and Syrian Christians. On the abolition of slavery they became domestic servants of their masters.\footnote{Thomas, P., \textit{Hindu Religious Customs and Manners}, Bombay, 1960, p. 18.} Having been thus exploited for a long time, the Pulayas were below the Ezhava and Nadar. They were known as Cheruman in Travancore. Etymologic pulaya denotes pollution and cheru signifies the soil.\footnote{The Indian Journal of Social Work (Tata Graduate School of School Work), Vol. I. No.4, December, 1950-1941, pp. 393-394.} The concept of pollution and low birth was suggested by term. Naturally the children of these unfortunates were obliged to be born into slavery, but their numerical superiority enabled them to secure certain privileges which guaranteed them steady maintenance. Every noble man or wealthy Nayar kept a certain number of them under him, of course their masters were not supposed to provide them their daily bread. But in Malabar they were given fixed wages in cash or in rice for their labour.\footnote{Jacob Conter Visscher, \textit{Letters from Malabar}, pp. 70-71.} As polluted beings they were supposed to construct their huts in swamps and slums where caste Hindus never went.\footnote{Barbosa, \textit{op cit.}, pp. 142-143.} Being a miserable lot, they called themselves as ‘adiyans’ and were expected to place their hand over the mouth when
addressing a high-born person.\textsuperscript{75} Centuries of degradation made them filthy in their habits. They practiced polygamy but polyandry was unknown. Intellectually they were at the low level.\textsuperscript{76}

They were not permitted to worship Hindu deities, but they worshipped a Goddess called Baradevatha. They had no temple for worship but they placed a stone on a mount in the open air and worshipped it as their deity\textsuperscript{77} offered fruits, fowls and liquor. One from their own caste served as the priest. They believed in the power of spirit and offered gifts to please them for earthly benefits. Faith in the supernatural power was very high among them.\textsuperscript{78}

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

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{76} Christian Mission Intelligencer, April 1883, p. 216.
\item \textsuperscript{77} James Forbes, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. I, p. 401.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Francis Day, The Land of the Perumals, Madras, 1869, p. 328.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Ward and Corner, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. I, p. 401.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Francis Buchanan, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. II, p. 492.
\end{itemize}
The Parayas were at the bottom of the social ladder. They wore leaves and ate the flesh of wild animals. The Parayas used to eat the carcasses of all domestic animals.\textsuperscript{81} Their ordinary profession was cultivation of paddy fields, cleaning of ponds, and tilling the ground using bullocks. Also they engaged themselves in skinning animals, making baskets, bamboo mats, umbrellas and such other mental occupations.\textsuperscript{82} Their chief deity was Marutai and believed that after death the spirits of the good would become god like while those of the bad become devils. They had temples dedicated to Marutai whose idol was installed in them. They had their priest called velathan parayan.\textsuperscript{83} They were at the mercy of their masters by whom they were bought and sold like cattles and were generally treated inhumanly.\textsuperscript{84}

Majority of slave populations in South Travancore sprang from the Pulayas and Parayas. They could even be killed by their masters with impunity.\textsuperscript{85} Even in the courts of law justice was denied. They could not put up huts near public roads. Also they were not permitted to use sircar ferry

\textsuperscript{81} Nagam Aiya, V., \textit{op cit.}, Vol. II, p. 402.
\textsuperscript{82} Francis Day, \textit{op.cit.}, p 328.,
\textsuperscript{83} Francis Buchanan, \textit{op cit.}, Vol. 2, p. 493.
\textsuperscript{84} The Madras Church Missionary Record, Vol. XVII, No. 6, June 1850, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{85} Christian Mission Intelligencer, April 1883, pp. 217-218.
boats to cross the rivers in times of flood. In order to avoid pollution they were required to keep away from public places, roads and offices.

In addition to Pulayas and Parayas, Kuravas also represented one of the lowest untouchable groups of Kerala. Once upon a time they were powerful and influential. About the 12th century a tribal chief called Nanjil Kuravan, declared himself the king of Nanchilnad in South Travancore. Later he was overthrown and Nanchilnad was annexed to Travancore. Slowly they lost their independent status and became a group of untouchables. The system of caste hierarchy became an instrument for oppression and consequent disabilities. But there was nobody to fight against these disabilities. This was made possible only after the arrival of Protestant Missions.