AWAKENING OF THE ĪḶAVAS

THE HISTORY OF THE AWAKENING

OF

THE ĪḶAVA COMMUNITY OF KERALA

BY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October 1982

MASTER OF ARTS (1982)
(Religious Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: The History of the Awakening of the Ilava Community of Kerala

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 135

ABSTRACT

The Īḻavas are the largest community in Kerala. They were traditionally considered outside the pale of "varṇa" and treated as "untouchables' by the higher castes. A member of the community Śrī Narayana Guru (1855-1927) and his disciples introduced religious and social reforms that brought in an awakening among the Īḻavas at the beginning of the twentieth century. The changes among the Īḻavas brought them into a series of escalating confrontations between themselves and the supporters of the caste-structure.

This thesis focuses on the transformations of the Īḻava community and analyses how they now fit into the larger social structure. It asserts that the awakening of the Īḻava community should be understood as a process of "modernization". It is described as modernization because it is an indigenous, historical and ongoing process in which people participate consciously. The Īḻavas in their awakening have incorporated the values of modernity into their culture without losing the core-values of tradition. The history of the awakening of the Īḻavas is a case of the modernization of a traditional society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to express his deep appreciation and gratitude to Professor Paul Younger who had consistently throughout the whole time frame generously helped in the preparation of this thesis. Sincere gratitude is also amply due to Drs. J. G. Arapura, D. R. Kinsley and P. Granoff for constructive criticism and helpful suggestions.

MALAYALAM

Vowels and diphthongs[1]

അ	a	ഋ	ṛ
ആ	ā	ഌ	ḷ
ം	ṁ[2]	എ	e
ഇ	i	ഏ	ē
ഈ	ī	ഐ	ai
ഉ	u	ഒ	o
ഊ	ū	ഓ	ō
ഋ	ṛ	ഔ	au

Consonants[3]

Gutturals		Palatals		Cerebrals		Dentals	
ക	ka	ച	ca	ട	ṭa	ത	ta
ഖ	kha	ഛ	cha	ഠ	ṭha	ഥ	tha
ഗ	ga	ജ	ja	ഡ	ḍa	ദ	da
ഘ	gha	ഝ	jha	ഢ	ḍha	ധ	dha
ങ	ṅa	ഞ	ña	ണ	ṇa	ന	na

Labials		Semivowels		Sibilants		Aspirate	
പ	pa	യ	ya	ശ	śa	ഹ	ha
ഫ	pha	ര	ra	ഷ	ṣa		
ബ	ba	റ	ṟa	സ	sa		
ഭ	bha	ന്റ	tṯa[4]				
മ	ma	ല	la				
		ള	ḷa				
		ഴ	ḻa				
		വ	va				

Anusvāra[5]		*Visarya*		*Avagraha*
ം	ṃ	ഃ	ḥ	ऽ '

[1] Only the vowel forms that appear at the beginning of a syllable are listed; the forms used for vowels following a consonant can be found in grammars; no distinction between the two is made in transliteration.

[2] When ം is used in combination with the vowel ഋ (ൃ), the combination is also transliterated by *d*.

[3] The vowel *a* is implicit after all consonants and consonant clusters and is supplied in transliteration, with the following exceptions:

(a) when another vowel is indicated by its appropriate sign;
(b) when the absence of any vowel is indicated by the superscript symbol ് (also used for the vowel d); and
(c) when the following modified consonantal forms are used:

ക്	k	ൻ	n	ൽ	l	ർ	r
ൻ്	ṉ	ൺ	ṇ	ൾ	ḷ		

[4] When ന്റ appears as a subscript in a cluster, it is transliterated *ṯa*.

[5] Exception: *Anusvāra* is transliterated by
ṅ before gutturals, *n* before dentals,
ñ before palatals, *m* before labials.
ṇ before cerebrals,

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CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF PRE-BRITISH KERALA

Kerala lies on the South-western coast of India. It has a total area of 38,846 sq. k.m. According to the census of 1971 the state has a total population of 21,347,375. This state comprises the narrow coastal strip bounded by mountains called the Western ghats on the East and the Arabian sea on the west. Kerala has a unique geographical position which has given the state a distinctive individuality. A. Sreedhara Menon says:

> The distinctiveness of its geographical personality has enabled Kerala, even from time immemorial, to enjoy a degree of isolation from the rest of the country and build up its way of life and institutions without being subjected to undue influence from the people inhabiting the regions beyond its traditional borders.[1]

The state of Tamil Nadu borders it on the South and part of the East and the state of Karnataka on the North and part of the East. The contacts the state had with Tamil Nadu and Karnataka influenced the evolution of its language and culture.

The geographical and linguistic entity now called Kerala came into being seven years after the independence of India. (Nov. 1, 1956) It was formerly divided into three areas: Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. These three had different political, communal and economic backgrounds. They also

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[1] A. Sreedhara Menon, Social and Cultural Heritage of Kerala, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt.Ltd, 1979, p. 1.

had their own systems of administration. The Southern part of Kerala formed part of the old Travancore State, and the central area, the Cochin State. These states were till 1947 ruled by hereditary rulers or Mahārājas. In 1949 these states were joined together to form the Travancore-Cochin State which was then governed by the local Rājapramukh who performed the same function as a governor in other states of India. Malabar was part of the Madras Presidency of British India until 1947. The reorganization of the states on the basis of the spoken languages brought these three areas - Travancore, Cochin and Malabar - into one single State on November 1, 1956.

Twentyone million people living with their tradition, culture, language, hopes and aspirations constitute the Kerala society. Three religions divide the people - Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The 4.2 million Muslims of Kerala are divided into two main categories. The first category is made up of the descendants of the early Arab settlers of the seventh and eighth centuries who came for trade to the Malabar coast. The second category is made up of the descendants of those voluntarily and forcibly converted into Islam during the invasion of Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan from the neighbouring Mysore region in the eighteenth century. The bulk of the Muslims are poor peasants, fishermen, labourers, artisans, petty traders, shop keepers and daily wage earners. The Christians are spread all over the state and number about 4.5 million. The Christian Church exercises considerable control over the lives of the Christians by providing unity, cohesion, mutual assistance and guidance. The European missionaries who came in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided the local Christians with help in modernizing their tradition. The Hindus form the dominant religious community in Kerala. The four-fold caste division of the Hindu community as defined by Manu is not prevalent in Kerala. The role of the merchant community is performed largely by Christians and Muslims. The Brāhmans, Ksatriyas and Nāyars are called the 'Caste-Hindus'. The others are called the 'Backward Communities' or the 'Untouchables'.

The Caste Groups

The Brāhmans were traditionally at the apex of the social hierarchy of Kerala. Among them pre-eminence belonged to the Malayāli Brāhmans known as Nambūdiris. According to Mayer the traditional view of a Nambūdiri is:

> His person is holy; his directions command; his movements are a procession; his meals nectar; he is the holiest of human beings, the representative of God on earth.[2]

Most of the temples and a considerable portion of the land formerly belonged to the Nambūdiris. The Tamil Brāhmans who formed a distinctive group in Kerala, were attached to courts and palaces. By the nineteenth century, at least in Travancore, many of the posts in government service were held by them. They exercised considerable influence over the local rulers of the state.

In Kerala, the Ksatriyas were only a small minority and they were

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[2]Adrian C. Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 26.

generally counted along with the Brāhmans. Below them came the Nāyars. The traditional functions of the Kṣatriyas were shared by this group. The upper class Nāyars were hereditarily attached as fighting men to the feudal nobles. The Nāyars provided a national militia. The wars with the neighbouring Cōla kingdom in the eleventh century brought the Nāyars into prominence. In the ritual hierarchy, they were considered to be Śūdras as they did not wear the sacred thread. Their social organization was based on matrilineal descent and they lived in a joint family system with impartible family properties. The upper class Nāyars were allied by a system of common law marriage with Nambūdiris. According to this arrangement the Nambūdiri men could marry Nāyar women but Nāyar men could not marry Nambūdiri women. With the disbanding of the hereditary militia by the British in 1802, the Nāyars turned to agriculture. With the advent of the English education many Nāyar families were quick to send their children to the new educational institutions.

Among the "untouchable" communities the Īḻava community constituted the upper most layer and they came next below the Nāyars. Like the Nāyars they were evenly spread all over Kerala and constitute the largest of the socially and educationally backward communities. A majority of the Īḻavas traditionally followed the practice of matrilineal descent while a minority followed the patrilineal system. Traditionally, the Īḻavas were associated with the growing and tapping of coconut trees, although the well known story of Āromal Cēvakar, a hero of the 16th century, shows that there were Īḻava families who had an important role in martial history as well. The community as a whole was in a state of social and economic depression in the eighteenth century when records of social

history became available. It was only during the last decade of the nineteenth century that a new class, consisting of young men who had the benefit of English education and visits outside the state, emerged. Despite severe social disabilities and inhibitions, this class became self-conscious and self-assertive presence in the community.

At the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy, even below the Īḻavas, was what are now called the other "scheduled castes" and "scheduled tribes". Although they live in close interdependence with the higher castes, many areas of life were considered inaccessible to these people and they were considered "untouchable" and even sometimes "unapproachable". They used to live segregated in their own settlements which were often a little away from the residential quarters of the upper classes. The "scheduled tribes" generally live in the hill and forest areas and largely remain in illiteracy and poverty.

History of Pre-British Kerala

A problem peculiar to Kerala history is that much of the work done by scholars in recent years deals with the modern period. Many of the historical events of Kerala in the earlier centuries are obscure. None of the scholars of ancient Kerala took pains to compile genuine historical narratives or accounts recording the events of each epoch in regular chronological order. Sreedhara Menon says:

> Historians of the orthodox school in Kerala and elsewhere relied till recently on the different versions of the Malayāḷam work Keralōlpatti and the Sanskrit work Keralamāhātmyam in reconstructing early Kerala history, but both these works are of doubtful or no historical value.[3]

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[3]A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1967, p. 13.

The Brāhmanical legends say that Kerala was reclaimed from the Arabian sea by Paraśurāma.

> The Brāhman hero, Paraśurāma, who standing on the summit of the Ghats, threw an axe westwards and the sea retreated in terror. Paraśurāma made a gift of the new land to his Brāhman followers from the north in order to expiate his sin of killing his enemies, the Kṣatriyas.[4]

It should be stated that there is no historical basis for the Paraśurāma tradition, Paraśurāma himself being considered a mythological hero.

The early Tamil works form one of the most important sources of information for the history of ancient Kerala. Ancient Tamil literature presents the picture of a settled society and well-developed civilization. The Tamil works which are of particular value in this connection are those of the Sangam age which covers roughly the first five centuries of the Christian era. According to these traditions at the beginning of the Christian era, Kerala was a small kingdom inhabited by the Keralaputras known as 'Cēramāns' with its capital at Kodungallur. K. V. Krishna Ayyar says:

> In the Tamil poems Patirruppaththu or Ten Tens and Purananuru or External Four Hundred of the Sangham literature and contemporary Roman accounts we see the Cheramans gradually extending their power as far as Kasargod in the north, Karur and the Kollimalai's in the east, Cape Kumari in the south and the Laccadives in the west.[5]

Kerala during the Sangam age was part of the larger unit of Tamiḻakam and the people enjoyed a large measure of social freedom and

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[4]A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, Madras: Bullettin of Madras Government Museum, 1945, p. 7.

[5]K. V. Krishna Ayyar, A Short History of Kerala, Ernakulam: Pai and Co., 1966, p. 17.

equality. The dignity of labour was recognized everywhere and no person was looked upon as inferior in social status on account of his occupation.

> The evils of untouchability and unapproachability were unknown in Kerala society in the early Sangam age. In other words, the four canonical castes, viz, the Brāhmins, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras had not taken clear shape.[6]

It is known that Kerala had foreign contacts from the very early periods of its history.

> The Arabs, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Israelites, the Greeks, the Romans and the Chinese were among the foreign peoples who had contacts with the Kerala coast in the ancient period.[7]

These contacts were mainly commercial but they also led to the introduction of religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The history of Kerala in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries is, however, now lost in obscurity.

Some of the Tamil works composed in a later period again supply information on Cēra history. The Muthollayiram composed about 800 A.D. tells us about an illustrious line of kings known as the Kulaśekharas, otherwise called the 'Second Cēra Empire', who ruled over Kerala from 800 to 1102 A.D. with their capital at Tiruvanchikulam. This period saw the establishment of Hinduism as the predominant religion of Kerala. This Hindu religious activity was given all-India significance with the advent of the great Advaita philosopher Śankarācārya born in Kerala in 788 A.D. His teaching provided an intellectual basis for Hindu practice

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[6]A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 78.

[7]ibid., p. 52.

and the monasteries which Śankarācārya founded provided the religion with an effective organizational framework.

The expositions of the teachings of Hinduism done by philosophers like Śankarācārya were beyond the comprehension of the common man. The task of making the masses comfortable within the Hindu fold was accomplished by the people who belonged to what is often called the bhakti movement which started in the eighth century. The Vaiṣnavite and the Śaivite branches of the bhakti movement in South India were led by the āḻvārs and nāyanmārs respectively. One of the twelve āḻvārs and two of the sixty three nāyanmārs hailed from Kerala. A wave of religious enthusiasm swept through the length and breadth of the country. The progress of Hinduism had the effect of consolidating the social life of the society. One of its immediate effects was seen in the rise of the temple to a place of importance in religious and cultural life. The work of the nāyanmārs and āḻvārs led to the establishment of a number of Śaiva and Vaiṣnava shrines all over Kerala. The construction of structural temples which began in the eighth century A.D. received a fillip during the age of the Kulaśēkharas. The rulers and the people vied with one another in making liberal endowments for the construction and maintenance of temples. The inflow of wealth into the country from Kerala's prosperous overseas trade had brought into existence an affluent mercantile community during this period and the richer elements in this community made handsome donations for the construction of temples and shrines. The protection of the temples came to be considered one of the basic functions of the state. Vedic schools attached to the temples also sprang up during this period.

The period of the Kulaśēkharas in the ninth and tenth centuries was one of peace with no major upheavals. Almost throughout the tenth century relations between the Cēras and the Cōlas retained an air of cordiality and there were intermarriages between the two houses. This relationship came to an end with the accession of Rāja Rāja the Great, under whom the Cōla empire became even more powerful than it had been in the Sangam epoch. Rāja Rāja served notice that the alliance had terminated by a lightening attack south of Trivandrum in 989. Yet for a time he occupied himself with conquests elsewhere; only ten years later did he actually invade South Travancore and inflict a defeat on the Cēras. Thus the Cōla aggression against Kerala started and the whole of the eleventh century witnessed the great conflict between the two imperial powers.

The Cōla-Cēra war led to far reaching economic and social changes in Kerala. The way of life that emerged in Kerala at the end of the war was radically different from what it was before. The war led to a total mobilization of the resources of the state under the leadership of the Kulaśēkharas. The Nambūdiri Brāhmans who were at the apex of the social hierarchy helped the rulers in mobilizing the resources of the community in the fight against Cōla aggression. Several of them gave up their traditional priestly occupation and scholarly pursuits and took to arms. Military training was made compulsory during the period. The establishment of Kalaris all over the country was an important feature of the age.

> The Kalari system consists of various kinds of physical exercises combined with scientific methods of attack and defence applied in actual fight with varieties

of weapons.[8]

Several classes of people had to give up their time-honoured occupations and take to the sword. A new institution called chāvers or suicide squads also sprang up.

> Suicide squads comprised of more valiant members of the armed forces who had banished all fear of death from their hearts and accepted 'Do or Die' as their motto.[9]

The Cōla wars gave birth to feudalism (Jenmi system) in Kerala. During the wars the only way in which land and houses could be effectively protected from the armies raiding across Kerala was for it to become 'sacred', that is to become the property of either a temple or a Brāhman joint-family. The inscriptions of the later Kulasēkhara period give details of many transfers of lands from non-Brāhmans to Brāhman landlords and temples.

> The land owner would transfer his title by a transaction recorded in Tamil and written with a stylus on cadjan or palm leaves; he would then revert to the position of tenant, paying his priestly landlords a share of the produce. Over the century of strife, the temples and the Brāhman families gained janman rights over the vast areas, particularly in Malabar, until most of the cultivated land except that held by Kings and local chieftains was in their hands, and many of the Nairs became tenants, subletting to Ezhavas or employing Pulayas as serf labourers.[10]

The division of Hindu society on the basis of castes and subcastes became more evident in Kerala under these circumstances. The Nambūdiri

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[8]Krishna Chaitanya, Kerala, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972, p. 19.

[9]A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 153

[10]George Woodcock, Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast, London: Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 102.

Brāhmans acquired economic power through the control of large areas of land. They also made use of the terrors and perils of the war to consolidate their spiritual ascendancy over the people. They began to use the threat of excommunication as a weapon even against the rulers.

> In 1102, after he had shifted his capital to Quilon, Rāma Varma Kulasēkhara was forced to make a gift of land to one of the temples to atone for the sin of having caused offence to Brāhmans.[11]

Another result of the Cōla-Cēra war was the disintegration of the patrilineal or Makkattāyam system of inheritance and its eventual replacement by the matrilineal or Marumakkattāyam system. A Sreedhara Menon says:

> It is clear from the negative and positive evidence furnished by the accounts of foreign travellers that the matrilineal or Marumakkattāyam system was an innovation introduced into Kerala at a later stage replacing the earlier patrilineal system . . . The political and religious ascendancy of the Namboothiri Brahmins during the Chola-Chera war, their rise to economic ascendancy as the Janmis of Kerala, the introduction of compulsory military training and the formation of the chaver army to meet the threat of the Chola invasion were some of the compelling circumstances which brought about the adoption of Marumakkattāyam system by the people of Kerala in the eleventh century A.D.[12]

The matrilineal system was followed by the Kṣatriyas, Nāyars and by some among the Īḻavas and the outcaste groups.

Northern and central Kerala split up at the beginning of the twelfth century into an assortment of small principalities, where local

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[11] ibid., p. 103.

[12] A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 154.

chieftains set themselves up as kings. The revival of trade gave an immense advantage to those chieftains who were on the coast. The chieftain of the Ernad in Northern Kerala, called by the title Zamorin became powerful and occupied nearly half of northern Kerala by the end of the fifteenth century. It was he who gave a warm welcome to Vasco da Gama who with the four ships from Portugal reached Kōlikkode (Calicut) on May 20, 1498. But their friendship did not last long.

The Portuguese could retain their hold on the local rulers only so long as other European powers like the Dutch and English were absent from the scene. They were not able to win the confidence and support of the native population. The Portuguese were very fanatical and they tried to establish the supremacy of the Pope of Rome in Kerala. They harassed those who did not profess the Catholic faith and even plundered some of the temples.

> Some of the later Portuguese Governors resorted to plunder and destruction of Hindu temples without any scruple. The temples of Tēvalakkara (Quilon District) and Palluruthi in the suburbs of Cochin were among the temples so destroyed by them.[13]

The Portuguese left the scene when the Dutch captured Cochin in 1663. Initially there was a good relationship between the Zamorin and the Dutch. But it soon drifted into war in 1701. The chieftain of Palghat who was under military and political pressures from the Zamorin sought the help of Haider Ali of Mysore and he soon

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[13] ibid., p. 222.

entered Kerala. The Dutch plans were also upset by the rise and expansion of Travancore under Marthanda Varma (1729-1758).

> Marthanda Varma inflicted a severe defeat on the Dutch in the famous battle of Colachel 1741 and he annexed to Travancore one after the other all the states in the neighbourhood with whom the Dutch had been carrying on intrigues.[14]

The action of Marthanda Varma shattered the Dutch dream of the conquest of Kerala. The Dutch establishments in Travancore were absorbed in the Kingdom. In 1748 the Dutch entered into an agreement with Travancore. The most important clause of the treaty was the one which provided for Dutch neutrality in the wars which Travancore might choose to wage against native powers.

The Mysorean invasion by Haider Ali in 1766 and later by Tipu Sultan in 1788 further weakened the power of the Dutch in Kerala. The rise of the European powers like the French and the English also brought the decline of Dutch. The English came in by 1795 and rescued Kerala from Tipu Sultan.

The Caste System

The tradition ascribes the origin of caste to Paraśurāma, the reputed leader of the first Brāhman colony. Dr. T. K. Ravindran says:

> According to this the mythical Brāhmin hero Paraśurāma reclaimed the land of Kerala from the Arabian sea and made a gift of it to the Brāhmins whom he brought from outside.[15]

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[14] ibid., p. 247.

[15] T.K. Ravindran, Institutions and Movements in Kerala History, Trivandrum: Charitram Publications, 1978, p. 41.

The Brāhman works of the twelfth century testify to the dominant position of the Brāhmans in Kerala society. Each caste in Kerala was at that time restricted in its behavior and life-style. The principle of treating each group following a certain occupation as a separate caste and of prohibiting inter-marriage and interdining between different castes was prevalent in Kerala at that time. A man born into a caste, regardless of his personal fortune, remained in that caste. Any violation of this practice resulted in excommunication. Hindus of each caste in Kerala lived in complete segregation from other castes. In addition to the many castes, there was a bewildering variety of subcastes within the framework of each caste, each of the subcastes having its own rank in the social scale. An instance could be cited to show the intensity and cruelty of the exclusiveness observed by some of the communities.

> An upper class Nair-Kartha married a Nair woman of an aristocratic family. He could not take his wife to his house; he used to visit her house but would not eat any food prepared in that house unless prepared by himself. Then, when children were born he would not touch them or permit them to go near him or his food for fear of pollution.[16]

In the pre-modern society of Kerala, there were customs that were rigid and inviolable as any law. The various customs, traditions and conventions went under the name of Maryāda, Ācāra or Mārga. These established rules constituted the customary laws. According to Dr. T. K. Ravindran,

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[16]R. Ramakrishnan Nair, Social Structure and Political Development in Kerala, Trivandrum: The Kerala Academy of Political Science, 1976, p. 6.

> Malabar law deviated from the institute of the Sanskrit 'dharma-śāstras' in a significant way as it had to provide room for the private and clanish interests of the local law givers - the Nambūdiris.[17]

The Maryāda or Ācāra included in the law code the peculiar decency, propriety, manners etc. of the dominant class. "These Maryādas were sanctified by them by creating some legal myths, the most important of which was the Paraśurāma tradition."[18] The various Ācāras and legal codes framed by the Brāhmans had to be observed scrupulously by all the castes and communities in Kerala. These gave birth to various regulations and practices regarding untouchability, unapproachability and unperceivability. Prescriptions of proper polluting distance from each caste became the greatest source of the social disabilities of lower castes and the biggest legal problem that confronted the masses. The concept of pollution assumed various dimensions. A. Aiyappan says:

> To signify respect, when men of lower caste status interact in any manner with those of higher castes, the essential parts of the pattern are: i) keeping aloof at the prescribed distance in order not to pollute the superior person, ii) Removing cloth, if any, covering the shoulders and/or head, iii) using in conversation self demeaning forms of speech with the special standardised servile expressions, iv) assuming bodily poses which have been culturally standardised.[19]

Traditionally in Kerala the social structural distance between castes was translatable into spatial distance. In order to prevent the upper castes from being polluted, the distance at which the polluting castes had to

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[17]T.K. Ravindran, Institutions and Movements in Kerala History, 1978, p. 41.

[18]ibid., p. 41.

[19]A. Aiyappan, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965, p. 86.

remain was fixed and prescribed by tradition. Jonathan Duncan says in his Asiatic Researches:

> The Nayar may approach a Nambudiri, but not touch him. A Tiyan (Izhava) must remain 36 paces off, a Malayan must remain three and four paces further off, a Pulayan must keep 96 paces from a Brahmin. A Tiyan must not come within 12 paces of a Nayar, a Malayan must keep three to four paces further off, and a Pulayan must keep 96 paces from a Nayar as well as a Brahmin. A Panan may approach, but not touch, a Tiyan, but a Pulaya must not approach a Panan. If a Pulayan touches a Brahmin, the latter must at once bathe, and read much of the divine books, and change the sacred thread. A Nayar polluted by a Pulayan's touch needs only bathe to purify himself.[20]

The high caste Hindus did not permit the low caste Hindus to approach them without feeling themselves polluted. The Brāhmans and Nāyars considered themselves polluted if a Pulayan (slave) approached within fifty yards.

> Pulayan cried out as they walked along the edges of roads to warn high castes of their approach; if a high caste man or woman approached, the slave took to the fields.[21]

The Mukkuvās of Cochin used to lie prostrate on the ground on the sight of a Brāhman or a Nāyar and they remained in that position till they passed by. A Nambūdiri considered himself polluted even at the mere sight of a Pulayan. According to the tradition, a polluted person had to take a bath before his meal. Those who evaded this tradition were degraded from their rank and never readmitted to their group. The higher castes were careful to keep away from the lower castes.

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[20]Quoted by L.A. Krishna Iyer in his book Social History of of Kerala, Madras: Book Centre Publications, 1970, p. 47.

[21]Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nayar Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, London: Sussex University Press, 1976, p. 24.

> When Nair nobles came out in the public roads, an attendant of theirs preceded them shouting Po, Po (Get away, get away) so that they would not be polluted by a person of the low caste even by a chance encounter within the prohibited distance. Failure on the part of the lower castes to make way for the Nairs and other upper castes on the public road even led to their being murdered with the connivance of the custodians of law and order.[22]

The majority of the people were thus driven away from the public roads and public places to which they had no access in the presence of caste Hindus. A modern example of the extremes to which this arrangement could go is found in the following example of a newly wealthy Īḻava.

> Channar had a car and a Muslim Driver. When the car reached a spot beyond which the Tiya [Īḻava] should not proceed, the Channar got down and walked along lanes and fields, taking a devious path up to the spot on the road, a mile or so away, beyond which he was allowed to walk on the road. Meanwhile the driver drove the car along the road forbidden for his master and he could be seen waiting at the wheel for Channar to arrive.[23]

The Land Tenure and Administration

During the Cōḻa-Cēra wars several ordinary landowners transferred their properties to temples and Nambūdiri landlords. They did so because the land and properties so transferred came to be regarded as Dēvasvams and Brahmasvams and enjoyed freedom from devastation by the enemy forces in times of war as well as exemption from the payment of tax to the state. The Nambūdiris thus acquired the status of wealthy and powerful landlords called Janmis. The Janmi has been defined in the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 as "a person entitled to the absolute

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[22]A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 261.

[23]M. G. S. Narayanan, ed., Historical Studies in Kerala, Calicut: Calicut University, 1976, p. 49.

proprietorship of the land."[24] In the ninth and tenth centuries Kerala was a homogeneous political unit with a centralised administration under the Kulaśēkharas. But following the Cōla-Cēra wars,[25] a number of small principalities arose based on the Janmi system. The small unit called dēśam or tara was presided over by the dēśavāli. A number of dēśams constituted a nādu presided over by the nāduvāli who himself was subject to the Rājah. The nāduvāli was expected to supply the Rāja with fighting forces in times of need.

The feudal polity of Kerala also had a religious character. As the dēvasvams or temples served the purpose of sanctuaries or sanketams which enjoyed protection from the attacks of the enemy in times of war, there was a regular scramble among the rulers for the acquisition of the right of over-lordship (melkoyma) over the temples, irrespective of whether they were situated within their own domains or not. This added status to temples and also to the Nambūdiri priests who controlled the temples,

> The sanketam functioned almost 'as a state within a state' with the ruling sovereign having no effective political control over it . . . They (the Namboodiris) owed allegiance

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[24] A. Sreedhara Menon, Social and Cultural Heritage of Kerala, 1979, p. 76.

[25] In 1070, the last of the great Cōla Kings, Kulottunga, attacked Kerala by advancing from the south around Cape Comorin and pushing the Cēra defences up to Quilon. This struggle continued for thirty years. Rama Varma Kulaśēkhara, who began his reign in 1090 fought the Cōlas to a standstill on the borders of Kerala by 1102. From this date it was the resurgent power of the Pandyas against which Cēras had to struggle.

> not so much to any ruler as to their caste chief, the Azhavancheri-Tamprakkal, who alone had the authority to punish them.[26]

With all these, Kerala was in a decentralized political condition with a number of petty chieftains engaged in interminable quarrels and its religious polity providing yet another cause for potential discord.

All the chieftains from the ruler to the dēśavāli possessed their own land-properties which were either cultivated by them through their slaves or leased to kudiyāns or tenants. A majority of the backward castes were really slaves who were duty bound to do agricultural labour, rearing of cattle and scavenging work. They were used to being paid in kind. Because of the practice of untouchability, they were always kept at a distance.

> A Nair landlord had to stand on his Verandah shouting the labour instructions on his Harijan workers who remained outside the wall of the compound. Just beyond the wall was a hut, kuliparambu (wage place) where the landlord would leave the paddy for the wages when the labourers were not in the fields. On returning he would bathe to remove the pollution contracted by entering his hut.[27]

A similar practice was used in the sale and purchase of goods.

> If the Pulayan wishes to make a purchase, he places his money on the stone and retires the appointed distance. Then the merchant or seller comes, takes upon the money, and lays down whatever quantity of goods he chooses to give for the sum received.[28]

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[26]A. Sreedhara Menon, Cultural Heritage of Kerala, Cochin: East-West Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1978, p. 206.

[27]ibid., p. 206.

[28]K. C. Alexander, Social Mobility in Kerala, Poona: Deccan College, 1968, p. 52.

The nāduvāli or regional chief had several rights and privileges. He could usurp the estates of his decaying neighbouring chiefs. When Kerala traded with European countries, the nāduvāli levied customs duties on imports, exports and transport. Fees for protection were levied from all strangers and dependents. Ships which came ashore or their cargo could be seized in order to enrich the coffers of the chieftain. The nāduvāli received presents from his subjects on such occasions as weddings, births, funerals etc. A succession duty called purusāntaram was levied from every person who assumed charge of family property on the death of the owner. The construction of tiled houses could not be undertaken without obtaining prior permission which was granted only in rare cases. The nāduvāli also conferred titles like 'Mēnon' on the members of the Nāyar community after receiving presents of money and other articles. Bracelets could be worn on both arms only by those who were permitted to enjoy this privilege. The wearing of certain ornaments like mukutti (nose ornament) by women required permission. The chieftain could dictate to his subjects many matters of detail concerning their daily routine or mode of living. A number of slaves were condemned to agrestic slavery and could be bought and sold like chattel by the chieftains. The janmi or landowner had the power to put these slaves to death without being called to account. Women of adultery were made over to the nāduvāli and the latter sold them to foreign merchants and kept the profit from the transaction.

Members of the backward community were denied many of the privileges enjoyed by the Caste-Hindus and were treated as if they

had no rights of their own. The holding of umbrellas was prohibited to all castes except Brāhmans on public occasions, though the rains were pouring much of the time in Kerala. The members of the lower castes were not allowed the use of shoes and costly ornaments. Prohibitions were enforced against their keeping milk-cows, using oil mills and metal vessels and wearing finely woven cloth. Īḻavas and other lower castes were refused entry into the public services till about the second decade of the present century and even then they were not given any administrative positions. All these traditional practices led to a series of iniquitous imposts which imposed an intolerable burden on the members of the backward communities.

The Administration of Law

The members of the backward communities had no place in the counsels of the state. It was the special privilege of the Brāhman judge to give judgements in all important cases. The law administered by them was not equalitarian in any sense. The lower a person's rank in the social scale, the more severe the punishment meted out to him. While the Brāhmans enjoyed freedom from the death penalty, the members of the backward castes were given this punishment. They were treated in an inhuman and barbarous manner by the officials.

> The law spared the Brāhmins from the death penalty even for the most heinous crimes while those of the low castes who committed even such ordinary offences as theft, killing of a cow etc. were awarded the death penalty.[29]

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[29]A. Sreedhara Menon, Social and Cultural Heritage of Kerala, 1979, p. 69.

An Īlava or Pulaya condemned to death for any crime was hanged while a Nāyar placed in similar circumstances was beheaded. Trampling to death under an elephant, blowing from the mouth of a canon and hanging spread over three days were the common punishments imposed on the lower castes even for ordinary offences. Murderers, if of the low caste, were either hung or suspended by a hook through the chin.

> Tortured by thirst but denied water, scorched by sun but denied shade, devoured by insects but refused any means of keeping them away, his miserable existence terminated in a lingering death, that in some instances was protracted for three days. A shower of rain was hailed as the greatest blessing as it caused the wound to mortify and death rapidly ensued.[30]

The type of ordeal to which a person was subjected depended on his caste status. A. Sreedhara Menon says: "Ordeal by balance (tūkku)was reserved for the Brāhmins, fire for Kṣatriyas and poison for Śūdras."[31] Trial by battle was another important feature of the judicial administration of Malabar. Civil cases generally were not fought out between the parties themselves but between the respective champions in a duel fight appointed by the nāduvālis. A man of inferior caste, if he uttered a bad word against a Brāhman, had to lose his tongue. If he had sexual relations with a woman of superior caste, had to suffer castration and death. In the case of caste offences, in castes below the Śūdra down to the Caṇḍālas, the accused persons were tried by the six Brāhmans (Vaidīkas) by whom those who have to be put out of caste could be excommunicated.

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[30]T. K. Ravindran, Institutions and Movements in Kerala History, 1978, p. 71.

[31]A. Sreedhara Menon, Cultural Heritage of Kerala, 1978, p. 210.

If a person outcasted belonged to the backward community, the rest of the members of the family were purified after the person excommunicated was turned out.

In addition to the barriers of caste which stood in the way of social mobility, there were inter-subcaste barriers among the Nāyars and the lower castes which prevented the members of the various caste groups from acting in unison and harmony as homogeneous communities. A glaring paradox on the social scene in Kerala was that while a non-Hindu such as a Christian or Muslim was not barred entry into approach roads or admission to schools, Hindus who by birth happened to be born in the low castes, were kept out of the places and subjected to social humiliation. To make the irony complete, those Hindus who converted themselves to Christianity or Islam immediately got these privileges conferred on them without demur or protest from among the upper caste Hindus.

As this discussion shows the dichotomy between the caste Hindus and the untouchables stood in the way of the advancement of the less privileged classes. Rev. Mateer says:

> Narrow short sighted laws, exclusive legislation and oppressive monopolies effectively hindered the extension of trade, the growth of commerce and the spread of agriculture, while barbarous caste restrictions produced disunion and national weakness.[32]

The mounting agrarian unrest among the tenant classes arising from arbitrary evictions, rackrenting and social tyranny produced everywhere

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[32]Quoted by A. Sreedhara Menon in his book A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 367.

a feeling that land reforms were over-due. The demand for agrarian reform grew under such circumstances.

Historians have generally praised the social harmony that existed in Kerala in the past. The ancient Kerala society seems to have been a casteless community divided into groups on the basis of topography and occupation. Lying on the bank of the Arabian Sea with its richness of spices, Kerala became a meeting point of many worlds from early times. The foreigners were generally welcomed by the ruling chieftains as the heralds of prosperity and culture. According to M.G.S. Narayanan, "The caste system, and the consequent separation between the communities appear to have manifested themselves only at a later stage."[33] In southern and central Kerala sub-castes were formed as a result of the introduction of a temple centred society based on hereditary occupations. The Zamorins in Malabar in northern Kerala, around twelfth century encouraged many conversions to Islam. The untouchables and backward people who embraced Islam acquired higher status in society and were freed from many social humiliations. The quick growth of the Muslim community in wealth and numbers upset the old balance of power.

Signs of social tensions were found reflected in Kerala's medieval folk literature.

> The Vadakkan Pāttukal - Ballads of North Malabar - bear witness to the clashes between the wealthy Muslims of the bazaars and the Hindu aristocratic families.[34]

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[33]M.G.S. Narayanan, Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p. 2.

[34]ibid., p. 7.

The Portuguese who were in Kerala at that time exploited this situation to their own purpose. The drift which started then continued for about a century and it was quickened by the Mysorean invasions of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan. The Portuguese efforts to create a pocket of influence by winning over the local Christians to allegiance towards the Roman Church also created a communal bitterness in Kerala society.

The Mysorean invasion shattered the feudal system of administration and replaced it by a centralised system of government. Most of the nāduvālis and local chieftains left their subjects at the mercy of the invaders. Haider and Tipu showed scant respect for the high castes. Many of the Brāhmans and the Nāyars were seized and converted to Islam or forced to flee from their old sanctuaries. It shattered the myth of their social superiority and instilled among the members of the lower classes a consciousness of their own dignity and status. The Mysorean system of administration was based on progressive ideas. It was on the foundations laid by the Mysoreans that the British administrators built up their administrative and political system in Malabar. The coming of the British set in motion the process of modernization. The old-world social structure based on the sovereignty of the upper caste Hindu feudal aristocracy was not to endure in the modern world. The process of modernization liberated the lower castes within Hindu society and added a new dimension to the traditional social relations.

CHAPTER II

THE PRE-MODERN ĪḶAVA SOCIETY

The Legendary History

The Īḷava subsect of the Hindus constitute, according to the 1971 census, 22.19% of Kerala's total population. They are the largest single community, making up about 40% of the Hindu population of Kerala. They are distributed over a vast area with corresponding cultural differences. The Īḷavas in North Malabar, South Cochin and Travancore are matrilineal, while others are patrilineal. The cultural areas with the local names for the six major subgroups can be tabulated as follows:

a)	Northern Matrilineal	(i)	Tīyas	North Malabar
b)	Central Patrilineal	(ii)	Īḷavas	South Malabar
		(iii)	Tandāns	South Malabar and North Malabar
		(iv)	Īḷava Pānikkars	"
c)	Southern Matrilineal	(v)	Cōvas	South Cochin and N. Travancore
		(vi)	Īḷavas	Travancore

Historians of Kerala are finding it difficult to trace the origin of the Īḷava community as there are no valid historical records referring to them until about the 9th century A.D. The etymology of the words 'Īḷavas' and 'Tīyas' seem to indicate that the Īḷavas were immigrants from Śrī Laṅka. The word 'Tīyan' is another form of 'dvīpan' which means an 'islander'. 'Īḷavan' signifies one that belongs to 'Īḷam' which is the

ancient name of Śrī Laṅka. Jaffna is specially known by the name of 'Īḻam' and from this place the Īḻavas are believed to have originally proceeded to Malabar.

One legend says how the Īḻavas came from Śrī Laṅka and settled in Malabar:

> An ancient king of Malabar injured and insulted the artisan section of his subjects, who left his kingdom and settled in Ceylon. The king and his subjects who were hard put to it by the absence of the artisans, succeeded at last in inducing them to return with the two protectors provided by the king of Ceylon. The protectors of the artisans were the ancestors of the Izhavas. They were allowed to capture the first pair of women they chanced to meet and make them their wives. The first captured a Brahman woman and the second a Cheruma woman; the descendants of the former are the Tiyas and Tandans and descendants of the latter are the Izhava Panikkars.[1]

Another myth is found recorded in the Mackenzie collection of manuscripts in the Madras Oriental Manuscripts Library. The purport is to exalt the Īḻavas by giving them a divine origin from the God Śiva and Gandharva women

> The nymphs were bathing in a stream one winter morning and Siva, enamoured by the bathers' charms enticed them by transforming himself into a fire. They came and sat round the fire to warm themselves and the reproductive fire of the god entering them, they conceived and brought forth seven boys. Siva employed his sons to manufacture toddy for offering in his temple. The Brahmin pujari (priest) of the temple, a dishonest man, used himself to drink part of the toddy and dilute what remained with water. This was discovered and Siva's seven sons murdered the Brahman forthwith, but to kill a Brahman, even though he be a thief and murderer, is one of the five great sins. Siva, therefore punished his sons by lowering them from their divine status to that of the low castes.

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[1] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 16.

> The palm trees would no longer bend down for the extraction of toddy as they did of old, but the brothers had to climb up laboriously to the top. These seven brothers, who were polyandrous by the way, are, according to the legend, the ancestors of the Izhavas.[2]

This myth points to the traditional occupation of the Īlavas. The planting of coconut and the manufacture of various articles from it had been their monopoly from ancient times. E. Thurston agrees with this and says:

> In the famous grant of 824 A.D., it is distinctly mentioned that they had a headman of their guild, and their duty was planting up waste lands. They had two special privileges, known as the foot-rope right and the ladder right, which clearly explain the nature of their early occupation.[3]

The word 'cōvan' is a corruption of 'sevakan' or 'servant' and indicates the position held by them in Kerala society. They were often employed as soldiers along with Nāyars by the old rulers of Kerala.

> Tiyyans of North Malabar formed a military class in former times, and there was a Tiyya regiment of a thousand soldiers at Tellichery with men of their own caste.[4]

The English and the Dutch employed a number of Īlavas as soldiers and Dr. Gundert's dictionary defines the Īlavas as a 'community which arose into prominence by serving the British in India'.[5]

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[2] ibid., p. 17.

[3] E. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of Southern India , II, Madras: Government Press, 1909, p. 393.

[4] Ananthakrishna Iyer, Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, Madras: Government Printing Press, 1969, p. 278.

[5] M.G.S. Narayanan, ed., Historical Studies in Kerala, 1976, p. 50.

By and large the Īḻavas were a landless community. The great majority lived as agricultural labourers, road makers and builders, petty traders and bullock-cart drivers. Most of the Īḻavas in Travancore were weavers and some of them were lemon-grass oil distillers. This untouchable community had several Sanskrit scholars some of whom became pandits. The adventurous among them with a craving for an independent means of livelihood moved into the jungles, cleared a piece of ground and became agriculturists owning their own land. Hard work with hands available through the joint-family system produced in the course of time several landlords and even zamindars from within this community. Many Īḻavas were practitioners of the indigenous system of medicine, and their skill was recognized even in official publications. One of the native physicians, Itti-Achutan, assisted in the compilation of the Dutch botanical monumental work in twelve volumes (1608-1703) called the Hortus Malabaricus.

The practice of a single woman having marital relations with several brothers is called fraternal polyandry. This was prevalent among the Tīyas of Malabar.

> The Malabar marriage commission of 1894 stated that polyandry existed till the third quarter of the 19th century. In south Kerala fraternal polyandry persisted till recent times. With the spread of English education polyandry came to be looked upon as barbarous and uncivilized custom and it was gradually given up.[6]

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[6] A. Sreedhara Menon, Social and Cultural Heritage of Kerala, 1979, p. 96.

Systems of Inheritance

A distinctive feature of the social organization of Kerala till recent times was the prevalence of Marumakkattāyam or the matrilineal system among certain castes and communities. It involved inheritance and succession through the sister's children in the female line. A.L. Basham in his book The Wonder that was India says:

> In the early days of the Chera Kingdom of Kerala inheritance was through the male line but about the twelfth century a matrilineal system became regular, according to which the heir to the throne was the son not of the king, but of his eldest sister. This system, called Marumakkathayam, continued in Cochin and Travancore until very recent times, both for royal succession and the inheritance of estates.[7]

As noted earlier some of the Īḻavas in particular areas followed the matrilineal system of inheritance while others followed the patrilineal system. In the northern matrilineal section, north of Calicut in the Malabar district, the Īḻavas had two endogamous groups; the majority Tīyas and the minority group called Iyyors or Īḻavas. Tīyas, being regarded as the higher of the two, had only sambandham, a kind of morganatic-marriage[8] with Iyyor woman. The Tīya man who cohabitted with these women had no responsibility for the maintenance of the offspring of their alliances, because under the matrilineal system, they were taken care of by the matrilineal family called Taravād. The Īḻava Paṇikkars

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[7]Quoted by A. Sreedhara Menon, Social and Cultural Heritage of Kerala, 1979, p. 96.

[8]'Morganatic marriage' is a legitimate marriage between a man of superior rank and a woman of inferior rank, in which the titles and estates of the husband are not shared by the wife or their children.

of the Palghat district are patrilineal. They followed the same profession as other Īlavas but could not enjoy commensalism, nor did they have marriage with the rest of the Īlava community in the state.

Pollution and the Denied Privileges

In the traditional classification of the castes the Īlavas were included at the top of the polluting castes called 'feudal jātis'. They were regarded as polluting the Nāyars and other higher castes. C. J. Fuller says:

> At the house of a Nayar belonging to the Illam subcaste, another illam Nayar could enter and eat in it; a lower sub-caste Nayar could enter some of the rooms, but not eat there . . . an artisan or Īlava could come up to the outer gate.[9]

The higher castes treated the Īlavas contemptuously and owned them in a kind of servitude. A. Aiyappan observes:

> But in the Kerala scheme of Aryanization of the caste order, the Brahmin does not seem to have been prepared to treat the Nayars as superior to Sudras but categorized them as good or clean Sudras. If the Nayars were treated as Sudras, the Izhavas who ranked below them had to be treated as outside the fourfold caste system; and measures were taken to maintain the appropriate degree of social distance.[10]

Īlavas were thus relegated to the lower positions in society and subjected to gross social disabilities. Even the Nāyars were not kind to them.

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[9]C. J. Fuller, The Nayar Today, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926, p. 43.

[10]A. Aiyappan, A Social Revolution in a Kerala Village, 1965, p. 121.

> Very often, being the managers and tax collectors of temples and Brahmin landlords, they [Nāyars] were arrogant, proud and oppressive towards the lower class including the Izhavas.[11]

The Malayālam language had a rich vocabulary of terms of respect to be used by the caste-inferior to the caste-superior in conversation, in letters and even in documents. While addressing another person, caste honorofics were to be used, not the personal name. An Īḻava was expected to address a man of higher caste as Tampurān (Lord) while he was addressed by men of the higher caste in servile expressions such as etā and nī. An Īḻava addressed a caste-woman as Tampurātti (My Lady) while he referred to himself as atiyān (servant). When an Īḻava talked with upper caste persons, he was expected to bend his body a little, cover his mouth with his hand and show his respect and obedience to the higher caste person. The Īḻavas were not allowed to pass through the roads round the temples of high castes for fear of pollution. The water touched by an Īḻava was considered impure by the Nāyar; but the toddy manufactured and sold by him was considered pure. The toddy was drunk by the Nāyar without becoming polluted. The oil touched by an Īḻava was purified by the touch of a Christian for the use of a Nāyar.

Until 1865 neither the males nor the females of the Īḻava community were permitted to wear any garment above the waist. The males wore around their loins a 'mundu' of four cubits in length and two cubits and half to three cubits in breadth. When they went out they wore a

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[11] R. Ramakrishnan Nair, Social Structure and Political Development in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala Academy of Political Science, 1976, p. 5.

second 'mundu'. Usually they had an oval patch of hair on the head tied into a knot. Women of the richer class wore around their loins a piece of white cloth, three yards in length. The women of the middle and poorer classes wore round their loins a 'katcha' folded twice. It was only when they went out that they wore a second cloth. The Īlava and the Nāyar women could be distinguished by the tie of the hair lock; the Īlava women brought it to the centre of the forehead while the Nāyar placed it generally on the left side. Īlavas wearing the clothes extending below the knees was also objected to. Covering up the breasts of the Īlava women was regarded as an infringement or encroachment on the rights of the caste-men. The proper salutation from a female of the lower rank to persons of higher rank was to uncover the bosom. The higher caste men took it for granted that women of their community as well as that of the lower castes were created for their enjoyment. Accordingly absolute freedom in sexual life was the right of every male Brāhman and absolute surrender was ordained for all females. A proclamation issued by the ruler of Venmani said, "The women who do not yield to the wishes of the man of the same and superior castes are immoral and should be put to death immediately."[12]

As was noted in the first chapter, the dēśam or tara was the political and administrative unit of Kerala right up to the time of the British occupation. The dēśavāli or the head of the tara did the

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[12]T.K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p. XII.

management of the lands and men belonging to the temples. He maintained law and order and directed all the ceremonies in the village. It was only in such places where there was no hereditary dēśavāli that the king appointed an officer called pravartikar or the manager. The village assembly was called the tarakkuṭṭam where all the heads of the joint families were members. This assembly exercised considerable control in the affairs of the village and no man could be turned out of the village without its permission. An Īlava, however, could not even dream of becoming a dēśavāli.

> The kuttam was closely linked with caste, as the Nayars, the caste of soldiers par excellence, were the chief people represented on it. The Izhavas and the Mohammedans, who were numerous everywhere, were not members of the kuttam, their head man or pramanis, being only consulted as occasions arose for joint actions or the settlement of disputes.[13]

The Caste Functionaries

The tandān was the caste leader of the Īlavas in each locality. In some parts of the Southern Kerala he had an assistant known as ponembans. The tandān had the following function to perform:

> (1) Settle caste disputes, eject from the caste those that should be ejected and readmit those who can be readmitted; to excuse offences as payment or kiri (small bag of money).
>
> (2) In the public matters of the village and for ceremonies in the house of the chief men of the village, to execute their commands 'standing in front of all others of his caste'.

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[13] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 21.

(3) Settle disputes among the castes below the Izhavas and help the Nayar chief in settling them.[14]

The legal functions of the tandāns were most important. A. Ayappan narrates the other duties of tandān's as follows:

(1) To supervise the arrangements for marriage and other ceremonies of the Izhavas of his tara, for each of which he is given a fee and gifts of betel leaves. He is expected to be proficient in all the traditional knowledge regarding ritual procedure.

(2) In the communal religious festivals of the village, as for example, the annual puram festival at the village temple, the contributions by way of cash or services are made through the agency of the Tandan . . .

(3) Supplying coconuts and tender fronds and inflorescence of the coconut tree for decorative purposes during domestic rituals for all superior castes.

(4) Relics of the political part of the Tandan's work consists in his acting as the link between his people and the local Nayar chief, wherever such a one still exists.

(5) His authority extends, not only over his caste, but also over castes lower than the Izhavas. He presides over the marriage of the artisans. Either he or an agent of his, has to accompany their marriage party; otherwise, the Tandans of the village through which the party has to pass do not allow them to proceed.

(6) As an extension of his legal authority in the village, he is invited to attend joint council of neighbouring Tandans to settle important disputes.[15]

Under the old economic conditions, the tandāns were men of means and highly influential. The obedience to the authority of the tandāns could be enforced in earlier days by various means such as the

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[14] ibid., p. 54.

[15] ibid., p. 54.

prohibitions of mārru to the women of the offender's family. Without the mārru the women could not purify themselves after menstruating and without purification they could not enter the kitchen and take up their normal activities. The mārru was also required for purification after child birth. The tandān would issue orders to the caste-men not to have dealings with the man under trial by his caste-court. In North Malabar, the supervision of the making of the funeral pyre, the cutting of the mango tree for the pyre, etc. was a function of the tandān.

An important functional subcaste of the Īḻava was vatti or kāvudiyān (Īḻava of the temple). He was primarily a barber of the Īḻavas in his tara. He was paid in two half-yearly instalments. He derived a considerable income from the Īḻavas by acting in the capacity of quasi-priests at all important rites in connection with birth, initiation and death. It was his function to sprinkle purificatory fluids on the women to purify them ceremonially after confinement and on the mourners after the period of pollution. For the ceremony called tālikettukalyānam it was his duty to decorate the booth where the ceremony was conducted and his wife was in charge of teaching the girl the rudiments of the duties of adult woman. He was the assistant of the tandān in his executive functions and followed him wherever he went for caste business. In the funeral ceremonies he performed the various rites and directed the mourners in what they had to do. He kept the Īḻava temples clean and made wicks for the oil lamps of the temple.

Belief in Magic and Sorcery

Among the non-hereditary professions, followed by the Īlavas, mantravāda or the practice of spell was usually included. They believed in magic, sorcery and witch-craft. The Īlava magicians or ritualists received no training other than what they acquired by observing their elders. The sacred syllable OM and many of the magical syllables were not known to the natives. Īlavas believed in spirit possession. Following is a modern example:

> A few years ago a Kanarese Brahmin in a village in Kerala died suddenly, and as he was far from his house, he could not be cremated with proper rites. His body was burnt in a compound adjoining the temple. A few days after this an Izhava woman who was passing through the compound at dusk was heard to shriek and began to dance in terror, possessed, as the villagers thought, by the spirit of the Brahman, and soon she fell ill and had to be treated by a mantravadi.[16]

Sorcerers were believed to have power to have men and women possessed by spirits. "Delayed puberty, permanent sterility and still births are common ills of a spirit-possessed woman."[17] When a house or its compound was believed to be haunted by a demon, doing harm to the residents therein, or when a woman who was possessed by the same being, a kaniyān (astrologer) was often consulted and after calculations he mentioned the name of the demon and suggested the means of relief which was then sought for with the aid of a magician or a devil-

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[16]A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 137.

[17]L. A. Krishna Iyer, Kerala and Her People, Palghat: Educational Supplies, 1961, p. 143.

driver. A person possessed by a demon was relieved of it by transferring it to some other person or by building a sacrificial fire or making it depart by providing offerings. They also used to draw the figures of demons and songs in praise of Kāli were sung in order to drive the devils away. It was believed that all kinds of diseases were caused by the spirits of deceased ancestors. Charms were also worn to ward off their attacks.

> Children are often found to have amulets strung on their waist-thread or cotton strings with several knots round their neck or wrist. It is a string tied with spells.[18]

In magical spells references to religious myths were also made. In the following simple spell used in curing swellings caused by thorns, a mythical incident is mentioned:

> Aum. When Mahadeva (the great god) and his wife Parvati went out hunting, the goddess saw a thorn on her left foot, and wondering whether it was the thorn of a bamboo or of some shrubs, he took water in a silver kindi (a spouted vessel) muttered spells on the water, washed the feet, and extracted the thorn with a golden needle. In a similar manner, let the poison in this thorn go, oh, lord, by my teacher, svaha.[19]

Temples and Religious Practices

The temples and the goddesses meant much to the villagers. Earlier days the Īlavas had only a few temples of their own which could be regarded as public temples. Most of the deities worshipped in them were evil spirits or some hero-spirits for whom they offered

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[18] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 136.

[19] ibid., p. 148.

bloody sacrifices of hundreds of goats and cocks annually. Some of the deities whom they worshipped were Muttappan, Kutticāttan, Pārukutty, Karinkutty, Muni, Mundian and Kandakaranan.

> Offering of food, toddy, and the blood of the cocks and sometimes of goats and the dance of shaman through whom he blesses his 'children' are the chief items in the ritual for the muttappan.[20]

Each village has its peculiar deity.

Other than the tribal deities, they also worshipped Śiva and Visnu. The goddess called 'Aghora Śakti' was worshipped in some of the temples like that at Cranganore, Pazhayannur and Cochin. The goddess in her fierce and cruel aspect is believed to protect the people against demons.

The customary cultus of the caste centered around 'Kotungallūr Bhagavati'. She was zealously adored by the Īlavas with the offering of fowls. In ancient times, the adorations of 'Ancu Tampurākkal' or the five deities, now identified with the 'Pāndavās' of the Mahabharata was also popular among the people. 'Bhadrakāli' was usually worshipped in relation to their military undertakings. Animal sacrifices were often offered to her. When a village was infected with small pox or cholera, offerings were made to the Bhadrakāli shrine in that locality. The Īlavas of central Travancore worshipped a sprit called 'Kayalil Daivam' (deity of backwaters). The Īlava women visited the shrines on Mondays and Fridays, with a view to worship Gauri, the consort of

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[20] ibid., p. 140.

Śiva. The male Īḻavas devoted the first and the last days of the month to religious worship. A. Aiyappan says:

> 'My mother, Tampuratti, protect me' is the simple prayer that the men and the women utter standing in front of the temple, joining their palms on the chest in front of the face.[21]

A religious observance called 'māmaccirappu' was very popular among the Īḻavas of Central Travancore. The Īḻavas observed it in the month of Vṛścikam (November - December). Every Īḻava bathes in the evening, addresses the deities by their names for about an hour and then makes an offering of tender coconuts, fruits and fried grain. This observance lasted from twelve to forty one days according to the convenience of each family.

The Īḻava temples were generally low thatched buildings with a front porch. Only rarely did they have enclosure walls. Serpent groves were maintained. Carved granite stones representing the figure of hooded serpents were kept in every serpent grove. Every snake shrine was worshipped and pūjas were performed with offerings of milk, eggs and boiled rice. It was believed that serpents could exercise an evil influence if the serpent shrines were not properly respected.

In the interior of the temple enclosure, there could be seen a kind of pyramid pillar structure or stones with their faces towards cardinal points and often near a tamarind tree. In front of these

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[21] ibid., p. 136.

was a slightly elevated flat surface made of earth, on which the offerings to the gods were given. Bloody sacrifices and devil dancing were the essential items of these ceremonies. The persons who officiated at such ceremonies are called the 'velicapād'. The animals to be sacrificed on such occasions were smeared with turmeric and adorned with flowers. The head was severed at one blow and was held up over the altar so that the blood may fall over it. The sacrificial animal was distributed to the worshippers who cooked and ate it. In some instances, the 'velicapād' drank the blood and appeared during the ceremony as if he was possessed by the demon.

The 'hook-swinging' ceremony was prevalent among the Īlavas in the past. The ceremony was performed in fulfilment of a vow, to obtain some of the favours of the deity Kāli. The performer bathed in the early morning and worshipped the deity for forty days. In preparation he abstained from meat, intoxicating liquors and women. He rubbed his body, especially the back with oil for a number of days. There were two kinds of 'hook-swinging'; the 'kite-swinging' (garuda) and 'boat-swinging' (tōni). In 'kite-swinging' the performer had his face painted green. He had to put on artificial lips and wings in imitation of those of the kite and wear long locks of hair. The swinger in the boat swinging also puts on the same kind of dress, except for the lips and the wings. The swinger in both cases performs certain feats to the accompaniment of music. The bloodshed by the insertion of the hook through the flesh was intended as an offering to the goddess. E. Thurston says:

> In the fight between the goddess Kāli and the demon Dārika, the latter was completely defeated, and the former, biting him on the back, drank his blood to gratify her feelings of animosity. Hook-swinging symbolizes this incident.[22]

The 'Śakti-worship' of the Īḻavas was the worship of the power personified goddess with a view to possess supernatural powers for the achievement of anything desired through her help. The 'śakti-pūja' was performed generally during the night in accordance with the tantric precepts. The pūja lasted about eight hours and the worshippers consumed meat and liquor. Ananthakrishna Iyer says:

> The Saktas believe that true knowledge can be acquired only by taking spirituous liquor. It is, they believe, productive of salvation, learning, power, wealth, destruction of enemies, curing of diseases and removal of sin.[23]

An Assessment

This was the life of the Īḻavas before the advent of the British in India. The Īḻavas were divided into various subgroups and there was no unity among them. This lack of unity effectively prevented any sort of upward social mobility. The belief in witchcraft, sorcery, magic, fear of ghosts and evil spirits engulfed the Īḻavas more than it engulfed any other community above them in social rank. The hard earned money of the Īḻavas was spent in employing magicians and in conducting various religious ceremonies. The social and religious functions

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[22]E. Thurston, Caste and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p. 401.

[23]Ananthakrishna Iyer, The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, 1969, p. 319.

attached to the birth, ear-boring of the child, annaprāsam, puberty of the girl, tālikettukalyānam, pregnancy, death and the like were highly expensive. The tandān and ponemban collected lots of money from Īlavas for temple festivals.

> There were competitions among families and between localities to show off their prestige in celebrating temple festivals on grand scale.[24]

These kept the Īlavas in a low economic position and they suffered from economic disadvantages. Politically Īlavas did not count. They had no access to the royal courts. They were the depressed classes, the down-trodden, the inarticulate, illiterate and voiceless mass. The family organization and the systems of inheritance of the Īlavas were not conducive to the growth of common brotherhood and individual initiative. There was no unified view of the marital relationship. Some people practiced polygamy; some others observed polyandry. In addition there were group marriages. Child marriage was common. No rigorous rigidity was anywhere insisted on in regard to the right of sexual relations. The Īlavas were victims of exploitation by the caste Hindus. They were Hindus, but could not enter the temples of the higher castes or approach anywhere near them for fear of pollution.

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[24] G. Rajendran, The Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics, Trivandrum: Kerala Academy of Political Science, 1974, p. 25.

> The use of public highways was forbidden to outcastes and anyone daring to pass on within polluting distance of a Nair would be cut down at once.[25]

The Īlavas were driven away from all public places and were not given admission in educational institutions. Illiteracy and ignorance were two big drawbacks of the community.

> Lack of opportunities, lack of facilities, lack of incentives and untouchability were the most important causes for the poor rate of literacy among Izhavas and other backward classes.[26]

The coming of the British and the introduction of Western education acted as an effective catalytic agent in bringing about a radical social change.

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[25]A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 367.

[26]G. Rajendran, The Izhava Communnity and Kerala Politics, 1974, p. 24.

CHAPTER III

THE BRITISH IN KERALA AND THE AWAKENING OF THE ĪLAVAS

Like the other European powers the English also came to Kerala for the purpose of trade. Captain Keeling arrived in Malabar in 1615 and entered into a treaty with the then Zamorin according to which the English were to assist Calicut in expelling the Portuguese from Cranganore and Cochin. But the Dutch capture of Portuguese possession at Cochin in 1663 upset the plans of the British. They subsequently turned their attention more to the southern parts of Kerala. On April 1723 a formal treaty was concluded between the English East India Company and Rama Varma, the king of Travancore. The period of the Mysorean invasion was one of stress and strain for the English East India Company's possessions in Kerala. During the second invasion of Kerala, Haider came into open clash with the English at Tellicherry. With Tipu's march on Travancore in 1789 the English decided to enter the war actively on the side of the king of Travancore. When the British marched on Seringapatam in 1790, the Mysore troops withdrew from Kerala and their old strongholds started falling one after the other. The British then brought Malabar and South Canara (Mysore) gradually under their direct rule by pensioning off the local chieftains. A joint commission was first formed in Malabar to set up a new administrative system. But with the transfer of Malabar from

Bombay to Madras Presidency on May 20, 1800 this commission was also abolished. Major Macleod, the Principal Collector took charge of the District of Malabar on October 1, 1801. By a treaty concluded with the company in 1791 the Cochin Raja undertook to become a vassal of the English and to pay an annual tribute. A formal treaty was concluded between Travancore and the English East India Company in 1795. According to the treaty the king accepted British supremacy and the company promised to help the state in the event of external aggression. A fresh treaty of alliance and friendship was concluded between the English and Travancore in 1805. With the establishment of British supremacy over Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, the medieval period in the history of Kerala came to an end. From the tenth decade of the 18th century to the fifth decade of the 20th century was a term of continuous British rule in Kerala in which the people, freed from the fear of war, settled down to shape their destiny.

Travancore though nominally an independent state, was in reality a tributary to the British government. All important measures of legislation and finance, the appointment of higher officials and even the succession to the throne, had to be submitted to the British Resident for his opinion and sanction, before being carried into operation. Velu Tampi was appointed Dalava of Travancore by 1800 with the approval of the Resident, Col. Macaulay.

Velu Tampi brought under paddy cultivation many of the uncultivated wastelands. The revenue department was reorganized

under his personal supervision and the prompt collection of revenue was ensured. The Resident Divan, Col. Munro, introduced a reform for a methodical collection of revenue. Accordingly each landholder was given a pattayam in which the extent of the land held by him, the nature of tenure, the government demand etc. were noted. The dēvasvams were brought under the direct management of the government in order to prevent mismanagement. Certain significant agrarian reforms took place in Travancore during the reign of Ayilam Tirunal Rama Varma (1860 - 1880). The Pandarapattana Proclamation (1865) enfranchised all Sirkar Pattam lands and made them heritable and transferable. The Janmi-kudiyan Proclamation (1867) provided for fixity and tenure to the tenant. The Nāyar Regulation of 1925 which sought to substitute the principle of makkattāyam for the marumakkattāyam law of inheritance was an important reform measure during the reign of Setu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931).

Velu Tampi was also interested in the promotion of education. But the educational effort in Kerala was deeply dependent on Christian missionary work also. The Travancore University Committee of 1923 acknowledged this in their report.

> English education began in Travancore much earlier than in the most parts of British India, before any of the other native states undertook it . . . The existence of a large and ancient Christian population within the state attracted to it European missionaries early in the nineteenth century. Seminaries for imparting a Christian

> training and for giving some general education along with it, were started through their efforts.[1]

In 1834 the first English school was started in Trivandrum. "It was a government aided private school. Caste was no bar for admission."[2] Swati Tirunal (1829 - 1847) opened many district schools and converted in 1836 the Engish school at Trivandrum to Raja's Free School. This gave an opening to many lower class people including Īḻavas to acquire higher education. Two Īḻava brothers, P. Velayudhan and P. Palpu, completed not only their school education but also studied further and graduated from the Madras University. Dr. Palpu, an Īḻava who took a degree in medicine, was, however, denied appointment in government service in Travancore. He became an assistant surgeon in the Mysore Government service.

A fullfledged Arts College was established at Trivandrum in 1866 during the reign of Ayilyam Tirunal (1860 - 1880) and a law class was started later in 1874. A number of English, Malayāḻam and Tamil schools were also opened all over the State. Śrī Mulam Tirunal Rama Varma (1855 - 1924) gave special attention to the education of the backward classes. He made primary education free for all. The Government schools were thrown open to the boys and girls of the less privileged communities. It was during the time of Śrī Chittura Tirunal Balarama Varma (1931 - 1949) that Travancore University was founded (1937).

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[1]M. J. Koshy, K. C. Mammen Mappilai, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1976, p. 35.

[2]G. Rajendran, The Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics, 1974, p. 29.

Education in the new schools and colleges led to freer intercourse between the younger generations of the various castes than was possible in pre-British days, and this led to the bridging of the social gap to some extent. The missionary schools actively discouraged any show of caste prejudice.

Ummini Tampi, who reigned after Velu Tampi, established in Travancore four law courts for the dispensation of justice with the appointment of a Nāyar judge and the necessary clerical staff in each of them. Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bai who came next established a court of appeal at Trivandrum. Śrī Mulam Tirunal Rama Varma (1885 - 1924) set up a Legislative Council in 1888. It consisted of eight members with the Divān as its president. Later on at the time of Śrī Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma (1931 - 1949) a council of thirty seven members with twenty seven non-officials was formed to move resolutions of public interest. In the law courts and other public institutions, from the very beginning of their establishment, all castes were admitted and no consideration was given to any particular caste.

Rani Gouri Parvati Bai (1815 - 1829) introduced several reforms to establish social freedom and civic equality. All persons, irrespective of caste and status, were permitted by a royal proclamation to have tiled roofs for their houses. The Nāyars and Īlavas and other less privileged communities were permitted to wear ornaments of gold and silver without making the customary payment to the state. Earlier the backward communities got relief from the burden of slavery by the

royal proclamation of 1812. Swati Tirunal who reigned from 1829 to 1847 stopped the practice of Sucindram Kaimukku, which was an ordeal of putting the hand in boiling ghee.

An early evidence of Īḻava aspiration for greater equality and dignitiy was found in the 'breast cloth controversy'. During the period of Utram Tirunal Marthanda Varma (1857 - 1860) an agitation of the Shanars (Īḻavas) of Travancore took place (in 1859) to secure for their women folk the same rights in regard to dress as were enjoyed by the upper class Hindus. The Royal Proclamation of July 26, 1859 abolished all restrictions in the matter of the covering of the upper parts by Īḻava women, though there was still the stipulation that they should not imitate the dress of the women of the upper class.

Setu Lakshmi Bai who acted as Regent from 1924 to 1931 during the minority of Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma introduced some progressive social reforms like abolition of the traditional custom of animal sacrifice in temples under the control of the Dēvasvam Department. Later, Śrī Chitra Tirunal Balarama Varma (1931 - 1949) opened the temples of Travancore by the 'Temple-Entry Proclamation' of 1936 to all Hindus irrespective of caste or sex.

Col. Munro in Cochin (1812 - 1818) made arrangements for the systematic collection of land revenue and brought Dēvasvams under the direct control of the government. Education was given special attention and a vernacular school was opened in every village. An elementary English school was opened in 1845 at Ernakulam. A Christian judge was appointed to each of the courts in Cochin to avoid possible

prejudices to caste groups. A proclamation was issued in 1854 abolishing slavery. Later during the Divānship of Sankunni Menon (1860 - 1879) English schools were opened in all tāluk headquarters. Divān Govinda Menon (1879 - 1889) opened the first school for girls in Cochin State at Trichur in 1889. Cochin came to have its Legislative Council in 1925. C. G. Herbert (1930 - 1935) introduced a special department for the protection of depressed classes. A staff selection Board was set up by the Divān R. K. Shanmukhan Chetti (1935 - 1941) for making recruitment to the State service on the basis of the scheme of communal rotation in regard to appointments. The Cochin High Court was formally opened on June 18, 1938 at Ernakulam. The Cochin Tenancy Act of 1937 was passed to confer security of tenure on kānams created between 1885 and 1915 and to restrict the ground for eviction.

Till Indian Independence in 1947, Malabar continued as a district of Madras State. The Basal Evangelical Mission was responsible for starting some of the earliest weaving mills and tile factories in Malabar. They opened a primary school at Calicut in the year 1848. The first English school in North Malabar was opened by the Mission on March 1, 1857. This decade witnessed the Moplah Uprising (1921 - 1923). This uprising was primarily the outcome of agrarian discontent. The Moplah (Muslim) tenants had been at the mercy of the Hindu landlords.

> The demand was forcefully put forward that the janmis should not be permitted to evict and that they should not impose heavy rents on the cultivators.[3]

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[3]Sukhbir Choudhary, Moplah Uprising, Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1977, p. 66.

The Malabar compensation for Tenants Improvement Act was passed into law to protect the tenant from arbitrary eviction by the landlord. The assumption of the leadership of the Indian National Congress by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the National movement in Malabar. In April 1921 the first All Kerala Political Conferance, attended by delegates from Malabar, Travancore and Cochin, was held at Ottapalam. The fifth All Kerala Political Conference which met at Badakara on May 5, 1931 passed a resolution urging free temple entry. It resulted in the Guruvāyur Satyāgraha (1931 - 1932). Malabar became independent from British rule with the independence of India. When the states of the Indian Union were re-organized on a linguistic basis on November 1, 1956, Malabar was added to Travancore-Cochin to form part of the new state of Kerala.

Throughout British rule in Kerala a great transformation was taking place within the Īḻava community. Some educated and progressive minded men in the community, some of whom had the benefit of contact with the outside world, took a fresh look at their community and urged crucial social reforms. Dr. Palpu, an Īḻava who was in Government Medical Service outside Kerala, was the pioneer among them in calling for and working for the social emancipation of the Īḻavas. At the same time, Śrī Narayana Guru, the saint philosopher belonging to the same community was also awakening the Īḻavas to rise up and act. Several men of the community like Kumaran Āśān and T. K. Mādhavan (1886 - 1930) also came forward and dedicated themselves to the uplift

of the community.

Dr. Palpu

Dr. Palpu, the man who activated a huge agitation during a period when great changes were taking place in the history of Kerala, was a man of strong will. He was born in 1863 in the Īlava family of Nedungode in Trivandrum. After his preliminary English education at Trivandrum, he studied Medicine at Madras Medical College. He then entered service under the Mysore Government. Dr. Palpu always exhibited an untiring readiness to work for the uplift of his own community and other depressed classes. He thought that their main handicap was the lack of educational facilities. Even the Government of the enlightened State of Travancore denied Īlavas admission in government schools and barred their entry into service in some government departments. M. J. Koshy narrates:

> The masses of the low caste population were as yet but slightly touched by the partial reforms of the Tranvancore Government. They ought for instance, to have a fair share in the scheme of government education, from which they were excluded solely on account of caste. Children of low caste were refused admission into nearly all the government English and vernacular schools; yet these contribute their fair share to public funds, which were misappropriated for the education of higher castes.[4]

When a movement was started under the leadership of non-Īlava men such as Barrister G. P. Pillai and K. P. Sankara Menon, demanding recognition of the rights of all citizens to enter government service,

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[4]M. J. Koshy, K. C. Mammen Mappilai, 1976, p. 5.

Dr. Palpu joined hands with them. The resentment was against the policy of the government in importing persons from outside, particularly the Tamil Brāhmans, to hold the most important posts in public service even when persons with similar qualifications were available inside the State. The resentment of the people against this policy found concrete expression in the 'Malayāli Memorial' submitted to the Mahārāja Śrī Mulam Tirunal Ramavarma on January 1, 1891.

> The petition which was signed by 10,028 persons belonging to all castes and creeds drew the attention of the Maharaja to the exclusion of the educated natives from the higher grades of the public service and pleaded that rules be enacted to provide them with a fair quota of Government appointments.[5]

Since its copies were circulated in Travancore for publicity and endorsement, people became widely aware of the injustice perpetuated by the administration on the common man. This memorial was the first of its kind engineered by the educated class in the State. It embodied not merely the grievance of a section of the people, but that of the community as a whole. It expressed the natural desire of the people for a fair share in the government of the State. The memorial was well ordered with facts and figures. It said:

> In other words, while out of a total Malayali Hindu population of 1,461,835 only 11,668 or 0.79 percent hold Government appointments and out of a total Christian population of 498,542 only 1029 or 0.26 percent, out of 318,775 foreign Hindus, 3185 or 0.99 percent are employed in the State. But, since the population of the Census

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[5] A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 346.

> Report, nearly ten years have elapsed, and during this period, the number of appointments in the country has increased greatly . . . According to this authority [Travancore Almanac] for 1889 there are 3,407 appointments in the State carrying with them salaries of Rs. 10 per mensem and upwards and they are thus distributed: -
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> | | |
> |---|---|
> | 1,650 Malayali Hindus | (0.11% of their population) |
> | 1,444 Foreign Hindus | (0.45% " " ") |
> | 272 Christians | (0.06% " " ") |
>
> ...Out of 1,650 appointments held by Malayali Hindus 1,575 are shared by Malayali Sudras, 75 by Nanjanad Sudras and not a single appointment by the Tiers though they form nearly one-sixth of the total population of the State . . . Worse than all, there is not a single representative of the Tiya community holding any Government appointment on Rs. 5 or upwards a month in the State, though intelligent and educated men are not wanting among them...[6]

The memorial was wound up with the prayer that though it was too late to repair the injury done in the past, the government should take such steps as might be necessary for the prevention of similar evils in the future.

In the reply of the Government it was stated that considering the social condition in the State, the Īḻavas were generally illiterate and that as a rule they preferred to continue in their traditional occupations like tapping and making coir yarn rather than go for higher education which would make them fit for government service.

> ...the Government stated that any attempt to force their [Īḻavas] social growth could only end in failure for they were confirmed social inferiors.[7]

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[6]M. J. Koshy, Genesis of Political Consciousness in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, pp. 80 - 83.

[7]ibid., p. 35.

Dr. Palpu was determined to fight for social justice through all available means like using the Press, holding meetings, writing letters and requesting interviews with the authorities. From Mysore, he submitted a memorial to the Divān of Travancore, Col. Munro, highlighting grievances of the community (May 13, 1895). Neither his memorial nor his two reminders elicited any reply. Therefore he came to Trivandrum and met the Divān in February 1896. The Divān pointed out the difficulties in admitting Īḻavas to schools and appointing them in the government service as these were contrary to tradition. Realizing that an organized agitation was necessary to change the attitude of the government and the upper class Hindus towards Īḻavas, Dr. Palpu organized a state wide campaign. He came on leave to Travancore and travelled in almost all tāluks, in order to collect signatures from Īḻavas for a memorandum to be submitted to the Mahārāja. But most of the Īḻavas were reluctant to sign the petition because of fear and because of blind faith in tradition. With much effort he collected signatures from about thirteen thousand Īḻavas and presented a mammoth petition to Śrī Mulam Tirunal Mahārāja, called the 'Īḻava Memorial'.

The petition couched in the traditional and humble style, recalled the services the forefathers of the present generation of Īḻavas had rendered to the Crown, pledged their undivided loyalty and put forward the grievance that the benefits of many of the welfare measures the Government had introduced were being denied to them. Dr. Palpu wrote in that petition the following:

> The Tiyas or Elavas of Travancore, number nearly half a million, and form the second community in the State in point of numerical importance . . . In point of native intelligence, the community is as good as any other, and under favourable conditions, would not be slow to embrace every opportunity of improving their status. However, compared with the other classes in the State and with the Tiyas of British Malabar, the community is far behind. This can only be attributed to the political and educational disabilities to which the Tiyas of Travancore are subjected.
>
> Public service, which it must be admitted, is the strongest incentive to education in this country, is entirely denied to them in Travancore, and to this day the Government has not shown any encouragement worth the name to an educated Tiya, whatever his qualifications may be . . . At present no qualification can secure to a Tiya any of these appointments in his own native land unless he becomes a convert to Christianity or Mohammedanism or at least takes shelter under mere Christian or Mohammedan name. . .
>
> Another reason urged against the entertainment of the Tiyas in Public service, is that their social position is low . . . As regards this social position, it cannot be ignored that the attitude of Government towards the Tiyas was itself the main factor in having kept the community in the backward condition . . . It should be noted that Government in their solicitude to avoid giving rise to antagonism, have, so to speak, only set one class against another. When the two most numerous classes in the State, viz, the Nairs and the Tiyas, have learned to recognize the claims of each other, and asked for a due share in service of the State, Government have pointed out the former as being opposed to the interests of the latter . . . Permit me to say, that a great deal has yet to be done by the Government before it can be truly said that they are doing all they can for the Tiyas.[8]

The petition reflected the utter helplessness of the petitioners. The reply of the Government to the petitioners was as follows:

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[8] ibid., pp. 190 - 199.

> It noted that the questions raised, viz, educational facilities and employment under the Government, concerned not the Ezhavas alone and hence Government had to be extra-cautious in tackling the questions so as not to impair the structural compactness of an ancient society, governed by age old customs and traditions. As regards educational facilities Government could not go against the wishes of different sections of the people and insist on giving admission to all children in all schools, especially in the remote villages. Besides admitting all children in certain institutions Government had opened separate schools for different castes in certain places including schools for Ezhava girls . . . Government had made a departure favourable to the petitioners in regard to service rules also, throwing certain departments open to qualified Ezhavas.[9]

Dr. Palpu realized that these provisions were not adequate. With the help and co-operation of progressive minded people like G. P. Pillai, Dr. Palpu made an effort to make the entire country aware of the injustice to which the community was being subjected. Parameswaran Pillai, who was an editor of the newspaper 'Madras Standard' raised the issue of rights of the Īlavas in a speech at the National Social Conference in Poona in 1895 and editorialized in the newspaper in 1896. All these attempts did not have much immediate effect. Attracted by the works and teachings of Svāmi Vivekānanda, Dr. Palpu thought of directing the Īlava activity on the lines of religious revivalism and reformation. But a medical doctor in a different State could not do much on this line in Kerala.

Narayana Guru

In Śrī Narayana Guru (1856 - 1928), one of the most famous Indian ascetics of the last hundred years, Dr. Palpu found an ideal

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[9] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978, p. 72.

complement. Born about 1856 near Trivandrum, Narayana was the son of an Īḻava āśān (traditional school master) and cultivator. He was educated in Malayālam, Tamil and Sanskrit. Though he started his career as a school teacher by starting small vernacular schools, and was married against his will in 1882, he left home before his father died in 1884, to wander as a Saṁnyāsi. After engaging in austerities and meditations for a long time, he dedicated himself to a far-reaching social revolution. C. P. Sivadasan says:

> Coming as he does from one of the lower castes of Hinduism, he not only tried to give the lower castes a sense of direction and self-respect, but also tried to consolidate Hinduism as a casteless living religion.[10]

From his childhood, Śrī Narayana Guru abhored the caste system and mingled freely with the Pulaya children with whom he ate his food. By his personal example, more than by advice, he showed the people at large and his followers in particular that all men belong to one and the same caste, that human society is one, and that the so called caste distinctions are man made and are of no good to any one. Emphasizing the fundamental oneness and equality of mankind Narayana Guru took as his motto: "One caste, One Religion, One God for man".[11] He discarded everything that was based on superstition or offended the dignity of man.

Śrī Narayana Guru realized that the contemporary society was

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[10] M. Govindan, ed., Poetry and Renaissance, Madras: Sameeksha, 1974, p. 209.

[11] M. G. S. Narayanan, ed., Historical Studies in Kerala, 1976, p. 53.

suffering from three ills:

> The first and foremost was that vast masses of people were weighed down by ignorance, superstition and cultural backwardness which made them meekly submit to a cruel caste system and other inhuman practices. The second ill of the society was the economic backwardness of the people. Thirdly, the people were disunited and therefore they had no power to overcome obscurantist and orthodox forces which wanted to perpetuate feudal backwardness and the caste system.[12]

Narayana Guru who devoted his life for the uplift of the millions of downgraded people of Kerala felt the need to put to practice the idealistic and pragmatic religious philosophy of Hinduism. Subscribing to the advaita philosophy of Śrī Sankaracārya, Narayana Guru carried it to its logical conclusion. Acceptance of the non-duality of the individual self and the divine self, according to him, naturally led to the assertion of non-duality of individual selves.[13] He therefore opposed caste systems that segregated human beings. Guru said:

> It goes to say that human nature is essentially one and fundamentally of one single sameness. The idea of dualism or plurality in the nature and race of man is a super imposition on reality by interested parties. Thus the terms 'Pariah' and 'Brahmin' exist only in imagination. In the light of reason, they are bound to disappear.[14]

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[12] ibid., p. 52.

[13] See Nataraja Guru, Trans., An Anthology of the Poems of Narayana Guru. (Bangalore: Gurukula Institute of the Aesthetic-Values, 1977). The poem Nirvruti-Panchakam says:

"I or thou; this and that; inside or out; or none at all;
From cognitions such, when one is free
He gains release."

[14] T. K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p. XLIX.

A short verse written by Śrī Narayana Guru in Jāti-Mīmāmsa (A critique of caste) says:

> One of kind, one of faith, and one in God is man
> Of one womb, of one form, difference here is none
> Within a species, is it not, that offspring truely bred?
> The community of man thus viewed to a single caste belongs,
> Of the human species is even a Brahmin born, and is the Pariah too,
> Where is difference then in caste as between man and man.[15]

The Guru proclaimed the idea of ' Universal Brotherhood' in the injunction, "Ask not, speak not, think not of caste."[16] He never wanted man to be tied down to any particular religion. For him man was more important than religion. So he declared his great principle: "Whatever be the religion, the fundamental idea is that man should improve."[17]

Narayana Guru realized that the way for the less privileged castes to attain this was to break the religious monopoly of the Brāhmans. Though the Īlavas did have their own temples to their own deities, they did not have temples consecrated to Śiva and other Vedic deities. So Guru, a low caste Hindu, in 1878 installed a Śiva idol at Aruvipuram near Trivandrum. In the temple he inscribed in Malayālam:

> This is the ideal house
> Where all live in full fraternity
> Without distinction of caste or prejudice of creed.[18]

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[15] ibid., p. XLIX.

[16] ibid., p. XLIX.

[17] Balachandran Nair, ed., In Quest of Kerala, Trivandrum: Accent Publications, 1974, p. 123.

[18] G. Priyadarsan, ed., S.N.D.P. Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, Quilon: Jubilee Celebration Committee, 1978, p. 15.

In those days, the foundation and consecration of a Hindu temple was the exclusive monopoly of the Brāhmans. As a concrete step in the direction of revolting against the Brāhman supremacy in the sphere of religion and as a blow against the age old tradition of not permitting lower class Hindus to enter and worship in temples, Śrī Narayana Guru, acted quite contrary to the previous practice in establishing the temple at Aruvipuram. What he did there was to show that a man of an untouchable caste could not only make offerings to the deity but also consecrate the deity. This event did not go unprotested. A Brāhman among the infuriated section of the orthodox Hindus questioned Narayana Guru on the propriety of his action. He answered: "I installed not a Brahmin Siva, but an Izhava Siva."[19] By this action, Narayana revealed to the public the hollowness of caste distinctions. By about 1890, his remote hermitage and temple at Aruvipuram were attracting a great many pilgrims. By 1896 Narayana's fame was wide spread and the annual Śivarātri festival drew not less than 10,000 people, mostly Īḻavas, to Aruvipuram.

Later Narayana Guru travelled the length and breadth of Kerala and established many temples. Śiva and Subramanya were the principal deities he installed in these temples. Some Īḻavas were trained to serve as priests in the temples he consecrated. He stopped the traditional practice of worship with meat and liquor. He exhorted the people to stop the practice of animal sacrifices in the temples.

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[19]Balachandran Nair, ed., In Quest of Kerala, 1974, p. 123.

Dr. E. Thurston noted the transformation within the Īlava community. M. K. Sanoo says:

> In 1909 he [Thurston] wrote that the Bhadrakali cult was on the decline due to the exhortation of a Vedic scholar, Nanu Asan, under whose directions Subramanya temples had been opened in many places in South and Central Travancore with daily services conducted by priests belonging to their own caste.[20]

At Śivagiri in Kerala a temple was dedicated to Śiva and another to Śārada. There he provided facilities for devotees to come and sing hymns and meditate. On the same hill he started a school and founded another place for the study of Sanskrit.

Narayana Guru used different patterns when he consecrated temples at various places. "Illumination in the hearts of devotees-that was Swami's concept about the purpose of temples."[21] So he installed a lamp, when he consecrated a temple at Murukumpula near Trivandrum in 1922. On it he inscribed words to mean Truth, Duty, Compassion and Love. It was a 'mirror' with the words OM inscribed on it, that Guru installed in a temple at Kalavankodam near Sertalley. It resulted from a controversy between two groups of devotees. When Svāmi reached the spot these groups were debating whether an idol be installed or not-those claiming to be progressive denouncing idol-installation as a retrograde step and others demanding the conventional idol.

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[20] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, 1978, p. 102.

[21] ibid., p. 86.

> He [Svāmi] did not proclaim that idols were unnecessary, nor did he say anything to the contrary. With his natural smile he asked for a good mirror.[22]

Svāmi threw open all the temples he consecrated for the worship of all the people irrespective of caste. Whenever people raised objections, Narayana Guru calmly persuaded the orthodox Īlavas and made them agree to admit Harijans into the temple. Svāmi considered the temples as centres useful for acquiring the spiritual strength and thereby purifying oneself. Svāmi said to Moorkoth Kumaran:

> There is no need to build temples in the old style spending a lot of money. Money should not be wasted on festivals and fireworks. What temples need are spacious rooms where people can congregate and where discourses could be held. There should be schools and gardens attached to each temple. Each temple should have facilities to impart industrial training to children. The money received as offerings from devotees should be utilized for the benefit of the poor.[23]

The Svāmi stressed the need for personal hygiene and cleanliness of surroundings. He repeatedly told his devotees how to keep themselves and their habitations clean. He did not approve of temple tanks. He thought that public tanks could never be kept clean. He advised the construction of several bathrooms near temples where people could bathe under showers. Moorkoth Kumaran once spoke at a mammoth temple assembly:

> The temples as envisaged by Svāmi should be such as would enrich the people culturally and financially through their groves, libraries, lecture halls, educational institutions and industrial centres.[24]

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[22] ibid., p. 87.

[23] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, 1978, p. 83.

[24] ibid., p. 85.

The Svāmi was also interested in transforming the personal lives of his followers. The habit of drinking toddy and home made alcohol was prevalant among the Īḻavas of his time. Guru advised them to stop drinking liquor. He said: "Liquor is poison - don't produce it, don't vend it, don't consume it."[25] Further he said: "The body of the tapper would stink, his clothes would stink, his house would stink, whatever he touched would stink."[26] These teachings had their effect in the lives of his followers. A. Aiyappan quotes the words of an old Īḻava who had given up the profession of toddy tapping: "Our Guru has said that it is a sin to make and sell liquor. Our caste can rise only if no one among us is a toddy tapper."[27]

Narayana Guru turned his attention to various religious ceremonies prevalent among the Īḻavas. There were various customs among the Īḻavas with regard to pregnancy and childbirth. Pulikudi, one of such, was a ceremony performed during the fifth month of pregnancy. For this, small branches of the tamarind tree were tied together by a rope and planted on the ground in front of the courtyard. The pregnant woman was asked to stand in front of it and then go around it seven times. A dance called kalamtullal was played during that night to relieve the woman of all demonic influences. The next morning she was again

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[25] ibid., p. 114.

[26] ibid., p. 114.

[27] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 37.

asked to go around the tree seven times. A preparation of tamarind juice was poured into her mouth by the husband. After this the relatives and friends were treated with food. Narayana Guru argued that this practice was quite unnecessary and that customs like tālikettu, pulikudi etc. were draining the hard earned money of the rich and the poor alike through expensive ceremonies.

Another ceremony which Guru put a stop to was tirandukuli. According to this ceremony as soon as a girl had the first menstruation she was lodged in a separate room. A standing oil lamp was kept burning and a pot with a bunch of coconut flowers was kept. She was given a valkannādi (bell-metal mirror) to see her face in it. This was to make her understand that she was no longer the old person. The period of seclusion for the girl was three days after which she was taken ceremoniously to a tank for a purificatory bath. She returned home in a procession. The females of the neighbourhood visited her. This involved merriment and expensive feasts. Guru felt that ceremonies like this were only causing mental strain.

Tālikettu was a ceremony performed in respect of all girls before marriage. It was a sort of mock marriage in which all girls in a family below the age of twelve were seated in ceremoniously decorated sheds and a single boy or a group of boys brought to the place in a procession put the sacred thread or chain round their necks as in a real marriage. Elaborate preparations involving huge expenditure had to go into this ceremony and the family had to arrange feasts for four continuous days. At the end of the festivities the mock bridegrooms

would surrender their ceremonial robes and depart with fixed fees. They had no rights over the brides who often included sucklings. The actual wedding consisted of the presentation of a garment to the bride by the groom's sister who then led her to the husband's house.

Guru urged the people to give up these ceremonies. In the year 1904 an Īḻava conference was held at Paravūr (Quilon) under Svāmi's chairmanship. It was at this conference that Svāmi gave concrete shape to steps to be followed for putting an end to the practices tālikettu, tirandukuli, pulikudi, etc. This conference also evolved a new code for the conduct of marriages. In a letter Svāmi said:

> It has been mentioned at my instance that since we have a regular wedding, the mock-wedding ceremony 'Talikettu' is no longer necessary. I have great pleasure and satisfaction to learn that already people of different parts of this land who love me and have faith in me have accorded recognition to them.[28]

Narayana Guru stopped a few aristocratic families from performing the 'tālikettu' rite for their daughters by his personal advice and influence. Svāmi toured several regions and introduced his reform suggestions among the Īḻavas.

The Īḻava marriage had as its most important item the giving of the cloth by the bridegroom's group to the girl. Sometimes the bridegroom did not go to fetch his bride, but had her brought to his home by his sister and a party of his relatives and villagers. Narayana Guru wanted to reform this practice. He modified it in the following manner:

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[28] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, 1978, p. 102.

> It was to be like the prajapatya form of marriage of Hindus, wherein the father or guardian of the bride joins the hands of the bride and bridegroom by putting the right hand of the former on the right hand of the latter and pouring water from his hand to the groom's. Then the bride garlands the bridegroom and the latter ties a tali around the neck of the bride.[29]

Narayana Guru by this reform was introducing the Vedic ritual among the Īlavas. This was not a borrowing from the higher caste inorder to raise the status of Īlavas in the caste hierarchy but to purify the community from the evils that had accumulated in the religious institutions. Guru by his reformation was also retaining the core-values of Hinduism.

Svāmi was against pomp and show in marriages and he ordered that not more than ten persons should be present for the function - the bride, the bridegroom, their parents, one companion for each of the new couple, one priest and one local chief. Narayana Guru gave some more suggestions:

> Some parents may wish to spend a considerable amount on the wedding. They can deposit the amount in a Bank and make a present of the receipt to their children at the wedding. This money could be useful for them and their children. Nothing more is really required for a wedding . . . Indiscreet action would finally lead to poverty.[30]

It was not merely religious reformation that Narayana Guru attempted. He also felt the need to eradicate the cultural backwardness of the people. He appealed to the down-trodden masses to get themselves educated in modern education and become mentally strong. He started educational

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[29] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 154.

[30] ibid., p. 154.

centres and libraries in the vicinity of the temples and admitted pupils belonging to all castes and creeds. Speaking at a meeting in Cherai, Svāmi said in 1912:

> In our community only a few have higher education. During the last few years members of our community have turned their attention to education. This is indeed heartening. Education leads any community to higher standards and therefore, if we are interested in the welfare of the community, we have to encourage it . . . The importance of Sanskrit education is declining gradually. The chief language now is English. Therefore our attention has to turn towards English. Women also should be educated. They should not be left in the lurch. After education comes industry.[31]

Narayana Guru realized that education alone would not eradicate the economic backwardness of the people. They had to take to industry and other productive business and earn material wealth. As early as 1916 Guru told the people that industrialization and mechanization of traditional industries like coir were the only means for achieving economic prosperity.

> Improvement is possible only through industry. This demands the attention of the rich. They can get from outside various types of machinery and run industries. If one cannot do it many should join as company and boldly venture out. Though the paths to prosperity are open, men of our community do not have the courage to step out . . . We have to change this situation by sending our children to study in factories.[32]

Guru alerted the people to the fact that other countries were given the products of Kerala like copra and coconut husk at a cheap price and in turn the people of Kerala paid a high price for the consumer goods they manufactured out of such products. This happened because the

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[31] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, 1978, p. 113.

[32] ibid., p. 113.

people did not know the manufacturing process. So Guru said that the only way to make a flourishing economy based on such products was to mechanize after getting the technical know-how from England and other European countries.

The Guru was always thinking of an organization in which all people irrespective of caste, creed and colour could come together. He encouraged the people to assemble at a common place once a month to discuss their problems and take relevant action. Guru said:

> Each village should have its own cultural societies and libraries and the community can derive much benefit from them in matters of education. Each member of the community should do his bit in strengthening these institutions.[33]

In the course of time a regular sanctum and a hall were built at Aruvipuram through local efforts. An eleven member committee was established in 1900, for the purpose of managing the affairs of that temple under the guidance of Śrī.Narayana Guru. In December 1902, ten shareholders paying Rs. 100 each for a life membership, met at Aruvipuram to found the Śrī Narayana Darma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P. Yogam). This society was for the propagation of the moral teachings of Śrī. Narayana. It was registered as a limited company on March 15, 1903. The by-laws mentioned that its (S.N.D.P.'s) main object was to promote and to encourage religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Īlava community.

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[33] ibid., p. 114.

> The spiritualism, the reformism and the pragmatism of Sree Narayana Guru, whose chief message was "One God, One Religion and one caste", combined with the modernism, sense of revolt and the love of liberty, equality and fraternity of Dr. Palpu, who represented the best in the rising middle class of Ezhavas, formed the basis of the S.N.D.P. Yogam.[34]

Svāmi sent out able speakers from place to place to speak on topics like religion, morality, education and industry. The relevant portion of the directives Svāmi gave to the touring speakers are given below. He instructed:

> Speeches should be made on the following topics which would generally be beneficial to the society . . .
>
> 1. Religion:
>   (a) Reject superstitions and rituals with animal sacrifices and the like meant to propitiate evil spirits.
>   (b) Speak about the superiority of worship done in the best form and also about the Saguna and Nirguna aspects of pure Hindu philosophy.
>   (c) Intelligently induce people to build temples or monasteries in the required places. (Decrying other religions should never be done).
>
> 2. Morality:
>   (a) Speak about truth, cleanliness, fear of unrighteousness, theisms, unity.
>   (b) Speak about avoiding meaningless and harmful customs and adoption of nobler codes of conduct in tune with the times (as enunciated by Swami) and guide the people on to those lines.
>
> 3. Education:
>   (a) Explain the benefits of education and the loss caused by its lack and encourage the people to see to it with pride that not a single one of either sex in the Ezhava community went without at least primary education.
>   (b) Enthuse and help people to open schools and libraries wherever necessary.

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[34] G. Rajendran, The Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics , 1974, p. 54.

4. Industry:
   (a) Speak about thrift and the development of agriculture, trade and handicrafts in the best possible way. Instill enthusiasm in the community so that everyone would feel it an unsocial act to lead an idle life.
   (b) Induce people to establish industrial factories wherever required and to study and popularise industries in a scientific way.

Apart from these general instructions two special rules the speakers were to observe were also laid down:

(1) No speaker should ever tell the people anything about which he had a doubt. He should get all his important doubts resolved by Swami through the Secretary of the Yogam [S.N.D.P. Yogam].

(2) Speeches should never be such as to hurt the feelings of the so called lower classes or cause agitation to the so called higher. Care should be taken to make the people interested in the uplift of the so-called lower classes.[35]

Kumaran Āśān:

Śrī Narayana Guru was the patron saint of the S.N.D.P., Dr. Palpu its main force and the poet Kumaran Āśān (1873 - 1924) its first General Secretary. Kumaran was born on April 12, 1873 at Kayikkara near Trivandrum. He was eighteen when he first met Narayana Guru. Their association was a turning point in Kumaran's life and he became a disciple of Narayana Svāmi. Guru sent Kumaran to Bangalore for higher education. Dr. Palpu exerted some influence to get Kumaran admitted to Śrī Chamarajendra Sanskrit College, Bangalore. After his three years of study, Kumaran went to Madras and studied Sanskrit under a private tutor. It was difficult for him, being a low caste, to get admission at Madras

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[35] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, 1978, pp. 97 - 98.

Sanskrit College. Then he proceeded to Calcutta where he studied Sanskrit and English. Bengal was at that time in the throes of a cultural renaissance with Vivekānanda and Tagore at the centre of the stage. With considerable scholarship, maturity of vision and a broader cultural outlook, Kumaran came back to Trivandrum in 1900. He settled down at Aruvipuram where he started a Sanskrit school and taught the young aspirants. It was in 1903 that the S.N.D.P. was formed and he was called to work as its General Secretary. He continued there for about sixteen years.

> In the capacity of the Secretary of the S.N.D.P. Yogam, Asan had the opportunity of contacting large sections of the victims of caste oppression all over Kerala and cognizing the miseries and wretchedness they experienced in the caste bound society strongly upheld by Hindu culture.[36]

To propagate the ideals of the S.N.D.P. Yogam, Āśān started a monthly journal called Vivekodayam, which soon became an influential little magazine devoting itself to new trends in literature, social philosophy and other ideas.

Āśān understood that a change of heart was essential for a change of the environment, politically, economically and culturally. Poetry was the medium Āśān chose to create a favourable response in the minds of the general public in Kerala for the legitimate claims of the lower strata of society.

> It was under the Guru's influence that the young poet turned away from erotic sentiments, took heavy draughts

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[36] M. Govindan, ed., Poetry and Renaissance, 1974, p. 240.

> at the fountain of religious literature in many languages and produced several poems which are the outbursts of a heart overflowing with Bhakti.[37]

Through his literary creations Kumaran Āśān effected a tremendous transformation in the intellectual horizon of Kerala. "No poet had ever shaken the conscience of Kerala as much as Asan did."[38]

In 1908 Āśān wrote his first poem Vīna Pūvu (Fallen flower). This is a symbolic poem depicting the various aspects of human life and philosophy on the meaning of life.

> Classical gods and goddesses and kings and queens and mighty men of valour gave way to a fragile fallen flower on the threshold of decomposition. That fallen flower is the symbol of purity and beauty, an allegory on human life and the vicissitudes of human destiny.[39]

Through this poem, the poet called for bestowing faith in Śruti or Vedic teachings. The influence of age-old tradition and its consequences on human life were well portrayed in Āśān's poems Nalini (1911) and Līla (1914). The story in Līla is the attachment of a boy and a girl.

> It is the story of the attachment of a boy and a girl blossoming into love. The timid girl could not resist her parents and she is given away in wedlock. Her young husband dies soon after the marriage and she comes back into her home. Her parents had passed away and her distraught lover had left for Vindhyas, heart broken and semi-demented.

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[37]G. V. L. N. Sarma, Great Indian Social Reformers and Philanthropists, Madras: Triveni Publishers, 1975, p. 33.

[38]T. K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p. XXXIII.

[39]M. Govindan, ed., Poetry and Renaissance, 1974, p. 183.

> Accompanied by her maid she wanders over all the hills and forests of the Vindhyas and finally they meet. But Madanan has already reached the stage of frenzy. The caresses of his long-lost love upsets his balance. He jumps into the river Reva, and Leela follows her lover to be united in death.[40]

Āśān's poem 'Thoughts of a Thiyya Boy' depicts the disabilities suffered by the Īḻava community. Āśān wrote:

> Poverty used to be the scholar's mark;
> But now it belongs to the uneducated.
> No fee was there for instruction in the past,
> But no one without money can acquire it now.
>
> And no one can today hope to prosper;
> Without graduation from an English College.
> And then you need a lot of money for it,
> But all our folks are without any wealth.[41]

This poem was a document that demanded just and equitable treatment and restoration of the inalienable civil rights which had been withheld from the Īḻavas for the simple reason of their being born in that community. It also gave a call to the depressed people to organize themselves with discipline and unity and make their own way to progress.

When the Śrī Mulam Popular Assembly was constituted in 1904, Īḻavas and other backward classes were left without representation. Āśān's persistent efforts through the volumes of Vivekodayam, the official organ of the S.N.D.P. Yogam, had the desired effect, for, in the second meeting of the assembly in 1905, they got a representative in Āśān himself. As soon as he entered that august political body, he started representing

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[40] ibid., p. 184.

[41] ibid., p. 238.

the various political, social and religious disabilities of the people. It was through the Śrī Mulam Popular Assembly that Āśān's social and political action produced a new horizon of hope for the depressed classes:

> Asan spoke on the disabilities of the Izhavas and stressed the necessity for providing increased opportunity for them to educate their children by throwing open all government schools for them, for entertaining more members of the community for government employment, for giving them representation in the legislative council and Town Improvement Committee and also for granting financial aid to the temples organized by the community.[42]

Although Āśān discussed the particular grievance of the Īlavas in the Assembly, he was keen to make his appeal a collective grievance of all suffering classes.

> Āśān's voice was always sober and balanced; his reasoning sharp and convincing and his demands moderate and within the limits of propriety and chance of being met.[43]

Āśān spoke vehemently to convince the world that no government could for long continue to disregard public opinion and no people would suffer injustice indefinitely. Hearing Āśān's speech, Sesha Aiyer, a prominent Brāhmaṇ member of the Assembly noted:

> The disquieting thought that, in the Divine scheme, the lowliest Pariah is as useful to man and dear to God as the most highly placed of God's creatures, rarely entered our self-complacent minds; and we did not seriously trouble ourselves to know how many of the great human fraternity went through life, unaware of the most elementary rights of

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[42] T. K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p. LXXVI

[43] ibid., p. XXXIV.

> free citizens, unillumined by a ray of light, unkindled by a spark of amibition.[44]

Kumaran Āśān knew, much more than anybody else, that social change can be effected both by the direct process of propaganda and indirect intellectual and emotional awakening. The first he accomplished through his speeches and petitions in legislature and editorial notes and comments in the magazines Vivekodayam and Pratibha and through his social work as secretary of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. The second and more enduring was through his literary compositions. During this time Āśān produced two more works: Duravasta (1922) and Candālabhikṣuki (1922 - 1923).

Duravasta (The wretched State) was written after the Moplah revolt of Malabar in 1921. Āśān through this literary piece criticized the state of contemporary Hindu society. He gave an exhortation for regeneration by virtue of the inherent strength. Duravasta is the story of Sāvitri:

> Savithri is the daughter of a rich Brahmin house. The mutineers loot her home and kill her parents. She manages to escape and finds refuge in the humble dwelling of Chathan, an outcaste labourer. The single illiterate Chathan cares for the refugee with the devotion due to a goddess. Savithri learns to admire the guileless ways of Chathan. She resolves to educate him herself and give him the religion jealously guarded by her class. She knows this would raise him to the rank of the Brahmin and by his example others of his community too may be induced to raise themselves. She also realizes that she is in love with her benefactor and marries him, choosing to be one among the outcastes and to devote her life to their service. [45]

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[44] ibid., p. XXXIV.

[45] M. Govindan, ed., Poetry and Renaissance, 1974, p. 324.

Āśān was exhorting the members of the higher castes to take the initiative to give to the lower castes what they deserve. Āśān wrote in Duravasta:

> O Holy Vaidikas permit me to address you
> Even though I am not qualified to do so
> Think of the country, think of the creed,
> Think of your own revered selves,
> It is very late in the day, the threads of custom
> Are almost all giving way.
> It is futile to bind the people with this rope
> It is beyond the reach of hope.
> Change the laws by your own choice
> Or they will change you. Hear this voice
> Hear the voice of the wind echoing
> Everywhere in Kerala the same thing.[46]

These words of Āśān because of their social content and reformist spirit, had their effect on the minds of the people. The resurgent forces of progress and nationalism started the Vaikam Satyāgraha, the struggle to establish the right of the depressed classes to use the road adjacent to the Vaikam Temple, just a year after the publication of Duravasta.

Āśān's Candālabhiksuki further highlighted the cruelty of caste and the denial of justice. The story was taken from a Buddhist legend. The Candāla woman Mātangi offered water to a thirsty bhiksu, Ānanda, which he happily accepted and was satisfied. This created a new stir in her heart and she went the next morning to the Vihāra where she was accepted as disciple by the Buddha. The King's protest made the Buddha preach to him the foolishness of the caste system:

> Caste is a myth: caste differences are born of jealousy and selfishness. Nature makes no difference between a Brahmin and a Chandala. Caste determinations

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[46] ibid., p. 267.

are observed only by evil-minded men. The Universe, in fact, is born out of love and thrives only through love. The end of love is the end of the universe . . . [47]

Āśān's words were sharp when he wrote about caste in Candālabhiksuki:

Caste is a ridiculous mimicry
The ireful animal will fight
With the echo of its own sound.

Tell me, whence the Brahmin's born?
From the bud of plant or cloud?
Or from the rubbing of dried butea twigs
Like sacrificial fire?
Is there caste in the blood, in the bones
And in the pith and marrow?

Will the Brahmin's seed of procreation
Be sterile in the womb of a low-caste woman?
Is the holy sandal mark on the fore-head
Or the sacred thread or the tuft of hair
On the pate a natural legacy in birth?[48]

Āśān was certain that each individual given an opportunity would evolve to higher standards of life by his own impetus. Āśān said in Candālabhiksuki:

The gentle Pulaya is not wild weed
Sprouting from the foot of the paddy plant
Surely it shall yield golden sheaves of grain
Given an equal opportunity.[49]

Āśān wrote with a luminous sense of universal brotherhood. He considered every being in the world to be God's creation. He asked looking at a fallen flower (Vīna Pūvu):

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[47] ibid., p. 43.

[48] ibid., p. 357.

[49] ibid., p. 359.

> Aren't we one, O blossom, born of the same womb:
> Isn't it the same hand that created us both?[50]

Āśān's social thought contained in itself progressive ideas. He wanted the people to come out of their own self-made prisons of prejudice and to free individuals from each other's fetters. "He was trying to convince the oppressors and their victims that change was the basis of life; changelessness decay, stagnation was death."[51]

Āśān favoured 'love' as the means of promoting peace and justice, social, political and economic ideal among all people. This ideal in his poetry assumed larger dimensions. The love he advocated was a positive state of doing good even to the enemy and evil-doer, not alone to the people near and dear to him.

> One whose heart is given to love can find no difference in beings. Equality in the order of existence, distributed by love, will be sufficient guarantee for the continuance of humanity.[52]

In collective life, Āśān used the concept of love for more useful practical purposes. When a powerless, unprivileged, backward people stood in confrontation with an all-powerful, aggressively violent superior class, any violent action would only cause disastrous results to the weaker section. Āśān advocated 'love' to meet such situations.

> When one party to a conflict chooses to offer love instead of hatred, the antagonist is confronted with the sequestration of his conscience by the former. This will

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[50] T. K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p. XLI.

[51] ibid., p. XLV.

[52] ibid., p. XLIII.

eventually lead to the victory of both; nobody surrenders.[53]

Because of the social injustices accorded to the Īḻavas towards the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, there was a tendency for the Īḻavas to embrace other religions. Uncertainity about their religious future also brought representatives of other religions and causes to the scene in an attempt to win them over. An Īḻava leader C. Krishnan even advocated that the community as a whole should leave Hinduism and accept Buddhism to get rid of the caste barriers. In this state of tension, Āśān gave the Presidential address of the S.N.D.P. Yogam in 1923 in which he said:

> . . . The Yogam has now and then considered conversion to another religion to get over the caste restrictions. At the present moment Buddhism is in the forefront. The chief advocate of Buddhism is my personal friend and outstanding leader of the community C. Krishnan, Editor of Mitavadi. The respect and love we have for him makes us think seriously about it. As far as I am concerned, Buddhism is not a subject which enters my mind newly. For its Dharma and Moksha, I maintain a high regard. But my humble opinion is that one cannot change the mental approach that one has cultivated for years, just as one might change a shirt. That is psychologically untenable. Secondly, about its physical benefits I entertain no faith. Thirdly, a community consisting of several lakhs of people with varying mental predilections cannot be converted into another religion en masse. Such a step will be unwise and will lead to disintegration in the community. And more especially, it is Swami who should advise us on religious matters. When such a person who has considerable experience and knowledge of religious philosophy is alive, it is an insult to him if we go elsewhere for advice . . .[54]

Kumaran Āśān explained further the position of the S.N.D.P. Yogam through the paper Mitavādi.

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[53] ibid., p. XLIII.

[54] K. M. George, Kumaran Asan, New Delhi: Sahitya Academi, 1972, p. 80.

The S.N.D.P. Yogam is a body functioning under a definite programme to promote the well-being of the Thiyya community. One of its main target is religious reform. The very word 'Sree Narayana Dharma' connotes the religion propounded by Sree Narayana Guru. You should be aware that, that religion is nothing but the precept of 'One Caste, One Religion and One God for mankind'. It is not necessary for me to explain further that the religious reform, included in the programme of the S.N.D.P. Yogam is based on this ideal of His Holiness. Between this and the Buddist religion there are some essential variations . . . The recent movements to win our social rights in tune with the declared policy of the State also form part of this. What greatly helps us in all these is our numerical strength. And the Swami's religion helps in bringing the members together. Though on a clear analysis Buddhism may not appear contradictory to this, it is obvious that on being presented all of a sudden, the mere fact that it is a different religion may evoke divergent views . . . In countries like Ceylon where Buddhism is widespread there do exist community distinctions. Buddhism has not placed all of them on the same footing. On the contrary, the Hindu religion has brought several low caste people into the lime light. Acharyas like Sankara, Ramanuja and Sri Krishna Chaitanya have uplifted several people. Such an uplift would be rendered possible depending upon the character of the Acharyas and the environmental conditions . . . Why do you reject the 'Arya Samaj' which after all is more akin to Hinduism? Why don't you also revere the Dayananda religion which goes so far as to drag the untouchables out of their den and crown them as Brahmins? Why can't the Thiyyas become 'Arya-Brahmins?' Can you name any one Buddhist Sangha which meetes out such wonderful humanitarian treatment to the fellow beings in the name of religion and kindred spirit like the Arya Samaj of this province? Perhaps you do not like to wear the sacred thread and perform 'Homa' as they do. Then why can't you join the Brahmo Samaj? Why were you not attracted by the Brahmo Samaj which has adopted the modern norms of life, at the same time not sacrificing the high religious principles, which was founded by such eminent men like Raja Ram Mohun Roy and patronised by saints like Dr. Rabindranath Tagore and has in its fold followers who are leading stars in the political arena of the country and which has already attracted the attention of some of our own men? . . . I believe, it would be evident to the analytical reader that the reference to religion in 'Duravastha', 'Chandalabhikshuki' or in any of my other works only contemplates religious reform and not religious conversion. I may also emphasize that the basis for the religious reform, which I propose is the cardinal

> principle of 'One Caste, One Religion, One God' enunciated by the Guru . . . [55]

Śrī. Narayana, the Guru of Kumaran Āśān, did not advocate a theory of harmony of religions. He spoke to the ordinary people who were disgusted with their own religious tradition and were uncertain as to whether they should retain their own religious identity or adopt another that seemed to offer greater measure of dignity. To them and to others he said that there is only 'One Religion' for man.

> For Narayana Guru religion was not static, but ever growing and changing. Therefore, conversion to another religion was meaningless. According to him, religion has two sides - the inner and the outer. Change of the outer religion is a social conversion. Among the thoughtful people, the religion of the heart goes on gradually changing. The change is brought about by cultural growth and increasing experience of life.[56]

The S.N.D.P. Yogam

The S.N.D.P. Yogam while originally intended for all Kerala was practically an organization of the Īlavas of Travancore. The idea was to have a unit in every village; such units to be controlled and coordinated by a tāluk branch and all such branches by a District body and the District bodies by a Central Committee which was to be the real governing body. As S.N.D.P. Yogam had more branches attached to it, its headquarters was shifted from Aruvipuram to Trivandrum and later to Śivagiri in Varkala. Now it functions with its head-

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[55] M. Govindan, Poetry and Renaissance, 1974, pp. 377-383.

[56] V. T. Samuel, One Caste, One Religion, One God, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1977, p. 126.

quarters at Quilon. As Travancore, Cochin and Malabar were three different political units, there was practical difficulty in expanding the Travancore based Yogam to other regions. Yet the leadership of Śrī Narayana Guru and the success made by S.N.D.P. Yogam in Travancore inspired the Īḻavas of Cochin and Malabar to achieve strength through the organization. An organization called the 'Cochin Īḻava Samājam' was formed in 1916 with C. Krishnan, editor of the 'Mitavādi' (Newspaper) as the president of the Yogam. In 1938 its name was changed to 'Cochin S.N.D.P. Yogam'. In Malabar, 'Theeyar Malabar Association' was formed in 1925. This did not last long. Later another organization called 'Śrī Narayana Guru Smaraka Samājam' was formed at Ponnani with A.C. Sankaranarayanan as its leader. This gained strength by 1930. On April 28, 1938 this Samājam changed its name to 'Malabar S.N.D.P. Yogam'. A daily newspaper, Navakeralam, was started later as its mouthpiece.

Śrī Narayana was the spiritual force behind the activities of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. In 1908 Svāmi sent the following message to the Yogam:

> The following measures aimed at improvements concerning the faith and practices of the community should be brought to the notice of the coming general meeting and steps should be taken for their implementation through the Yogam.
>
> FAITH: Enthusiasm in the matter of construction of temples is in evidence at many places. But it has to be examined whether the temples actually fulfill their aims in full measure. God should reach every home, every heart. For this purpose arrangements should be made to propagate the principles of religion. Wherever possible, provision should be made to have at the temples, talks on stories and the like depicting the glory of God to make the people informed. In other places talks by competent speakers should be arranged.

PRACTICES: Functions like 'Thirandukuli' and 'Pulikudi' have almost ceased to be expensive. Advice regarding the stopping of 'Talikettu' is no doubt getting accepted; but the message has not created the same impact in all places. This practice should be completely stopped as early as possible. It is unprincipled and unnecessary. The new procedure for the conducting of weddings is being followed only among a few cultured people in some places. Though there may be variations in rites and details depending on status the main part of the ceremony should be common everywhere and steps should be taken to ensure this. Along with the exchange of garlands during the ceremony it is good to fasten around the neck of the wife a 'Tali' indicative of marital status. But a widow or divorcee at the time of her remarriage should not wear anything in memory of her dead or divorced husband. Therefore a woman who gets married again should not wear either during her subsequent marriage or there after the 'Tali' used at the time of the earlier marriage. Clear and detailed views on divorce and remarriage would be made known on a later occasion.

Polygamy and Polyandry are being practiced in some places. Steps should be considered to stop free indulgence in these practices in future. Where 'Marumakkathayam'[57] system is followed in the community legal provision should be made to give to the wedded wife and children the right to a portion of a man's individual earning. Otherwise marriages would be meaningless. Necessary steps in this direction should be taken after careful consideration.[58]

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[57] Marumakkattāyam centred on the taravād is a family unit which consisted of all the descendants of a common ancestress in the female line. The family property was administered by the eldest male member of the taravād, who was called the karanavan. In this system, at the time of the marriage, the uncle of the bride would tie around her wrist a cord to signify that, despite her marriage, she still belonged to the matrilineal taravād, as would her children. The husband either lived in the wife's taravād or became a 'visiting husband'. The woman had no legal right over his individual earnings.

[58] M. K. Sanoo, Narayana Guru, 1978, pp. 102 - 103.

The S.N.D.P. Yogam, under the guidance of Guru and leadership of Kumaran Āśān focussed its attention in gaining the basic religious rights of any Hindu to worship in the Hindu temple. In Kerala at many places, 'Tindal palakās' or prohibitory notice boards on public roads were visible in the vicinity of temples to ward off the untouchables. Kumaran Āśān drew the attention of the Government to this evil and referred to roads in Vaikkam, Tirunakkara, Sucindram and few other places, demanding the removal of these prohibition boards.

An agitation called 'Vaikkam Satyāgraha' was started in 1924 for securing the freedom of movement along the public roads around the Hindu temple at Vaikkam. Though the roads were constructed with public money, the outcastes were not allowed to pass that way. Paradoxically, it was open for those untouchable castes who had been converted to Christianity and Islam. T. K. Madhavan, a brilliant leader of the Yogam successfully persuaded the Kerala unit of the Indian National Congress to take up this agitation. The agitation started on March 30, 1924. Facing the brutalities of the orthodox Hindus and police repression with exemplary self-control, the agitation lasted for about twenty months. T. K. Madhavan succeeded in getting the all out support of the Nāyar Service Society (N.S.S.) and the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi. Mannath Padmanabhan, leader of the N.S.S., organized a Savarna Jātha of the caste Hindus who supported the agitation. They went to Trivandrum and submitted their demand before the Regent Setu Lakshmi Bai. The Satyāgraha finally ended

successfully in 1925, in that the approach roads to that temple was opened for all Hindus irrespective of caste. By 1928, the approach roads to all temples in Travancore were thrown open to Hindus. Eventually, not only the approach roads, but also all the temples of Travancore were thrown open to all Hindus by the historic 'Temple Entry Proclamation' by the Mahārāja on November 12, 1936. The proclamation said:

> Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all-comprehending toleration, knowing that its practice has, throughout the centuries, adapted itself to the needs of changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should, by reason of birth or caste or community be denied the consolations and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by Us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should hence-forth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping in the temples controlled by Us and Our Government.[59]

In the meantime a similar but more intensive agitation started in Malabar at the famous temple of Guruvayūr on November 1, 1931. It started with the objective of obtaining the right of worship for Harijans in the temples. The Satyāgraha attracted country-wide attention and political workers from all over India converged on Guruvayūr to extend help to the Satyāgrahis. The Zamorin of Malabar, who was the trustee of the temple, adopted an uncompromising attitude

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[59] K. Balachandran Nair, In Quest of Kerala, 1974, p. 125.

towards the demand for temple entry. The temple was closed and all pūjas were suspended. The Satyāgraha was given up on Gandhi's advice.

Another field to which the S.N.D.P. directed its attention was securing jobs for the Īḻavas in the public services. Jobs in government service were not normally open to the Īḻavas. Against this injustice the Yogam raised its voice. The fight succeeded by 1935, when the Government of Travancore appointed a public service commission and framed rules reserving nearly forty percent of jobs for the backward community. The beginning made in 1935 registered tremendous progress since then and now members of the Īḻavas and other backward communities are found in all posts in the Kerala Government service. The present demand of the S.N.D.P. Yogam is to continue the system of reservation in the government service at least for the next twentyfive years.

Still another significant achievement of the Yogam was securing communal representation in the State Legislature. Though a legislative council was created in Travancore by 1888, not a single Īḻava was there in the council for about thirtyone years. It was after 1919, following a legislative reform that an Īḻava was nominated. The S.N.D.P. Yogam asked the government several times for reservation of seats in the Legislature. The franchise was based on property qualifications. The Nāyars continued to have a majority in the Legislature, as they constituted the largest number of land tax payers in the State. The leaders of the Īḻava, Christian and Muslim communities submitted representations to the government urging the latter to abolish property

qualifications and to introduce adult franchise and the system of communal electorate. They also asked for reservation of seats for particular communities in the Legislature. The Government turned down their demands. The leaders of the three communities came together to form a United Front called The Joint Political Congress and to launch an agitation. The three top leaders were, C. Kesavan from the Īḻava community, N. V. Joseph from the Christian community and P. K. Kunju from the Muslim community. The agitation assumed the shape of a boycott of the elections to the legislature under the new forms. It is known in Travancore history as 'Nivartanam' or the Abstention Movement. This movement which swept the whole of Travancore in 1932 demanded that the Christians, Īḻavas, Muslims and Harijans should be given adequate representation in the legislative assembly and in the government appointments according to numerical strength. The agitation in which all communities participated succeeded in its objective. Following the legislative reform in Travancore, the Government of Travancore on August 17, 1936 issued a press communique conceding the demands of the Īḻavas. Eight seats were reserved for them in the Lower House and two seats in the Upper House. In the 1937 elections, S.N.D.P. Yogam contested and secured all the eight plus two seats and for the first time, Īḻavas got representation in the Legislature through elections.

In assessing the achievements made by the Joint Political Congress as a result of the agitation, mention may be made of the change caused with respect to the recruitment rules. Dr. G. D. Noxe was appointed by the government to prepare rules regarding the recruitment

and he submitted the Public Service Recruitment Rules in March 1935. As per these rules accepted by the government, forty percent of the intermediate section of the public service was set apart for the backward communities. And all the jobs in the lower divisions of the services were required to be given on the population basis to the various communities concerned. The leaders of the Joint Political Congress felt that their organization need include other communities like the Nāyars and make the organization a political party. The State Congress was the outcome of it.

The Divān Rajagopalacāri in one of his speeches spoke about the achievements of the S.N.D.P. Yogam:

> Your Yogam has done very good work indeed. Its religious, social, educational and economic activities are bearing fruit. Your communities in British Malabar, in Cochin and in Travancore have learnt to co-operate effectively for their common good, and thanks to their leaders, you have learnt discipline . . . You have so many as eighty local Samajams. You own as many as fiftynine temples and mutts in different parts of the West coast and more are in course of construction. Active steps are being taken to abolish meaningless and wasteful ceremonies. Education is receiving continuous attention . . . In these and many other respects, your community is reaping the benefit of that awakened life which will always be associated with the labours of your Guru.[60]

The fact that Kerala society underwent a tremendous transformation largely at the initiative of the Īlavas since the turn of this century is undeniable. A community which was confined to the shame of untouchability until the early decades of this century came into the

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[60] T. K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p. LVI.

forefront in putting up a heroic fight for basic human rights. Today this community has risen to the position of being a force to be reckoned with in Kerala's public affairs. In building up an organization like the S.N.D.P. the spirit of unity was inculcated amongst the members of the Īḻava community. In establishing a large number of educational institutions S.N.D.P. helped to impart modern education to members of the community. Further the organization fought for social equality, redressed the grievances of the community and bargained for its economic and political rights.

An Overview:

In the earlier section it was shown how the coming of the British and their introduction of English education brought about a radical social change in Kerala. When people like Dr. Palpu received higher education and travelled outside the State, they felt the need for a social and religious reformation within society, especially among the Īḻavas. Their religious leader, Narayana Guru believed that caste distinction had no basis in actuality. While leaders like Vivekananda and Gandhi held on to the ideal of Varnaśramadharma, Narayana Guru simply affirmed the truth that 'there is only one caste' which is mankind. As V. T. Samuel comments: "The Brahman needs equating with the Pariah so that 'human-ness' may appear as a simple truth which is both actual and real, both existing and subsisting."[61] Śrī Narayana

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[61] V. T. Samuel, One Caste, One Religion, One God, 1977, p. 97.

Guru in his work 'Jāti-Mīmāmsa' emphatically said that mankind is one and the divisions based on heredity and ancestry are false. "Every human being is a member of One Jāti or species without superiority, inferiority, hierarchy or heredity."[62]

The poet Kumaran Āśān attempted to bring social awakening among the people through his literary compositions. It is with social content and reformist spirit that he presented his works like Karuna, Candālabhiksuki and Duravasta. Even though the society in which he lived was marked by mutual hatred and antagonistic relations, he advocated 'love' as the path finder to social solidarity and integration. Āśān stood for the equality of men and believed that this was possible by the practice of 'loving one another'.

> One whose heart is given to love can find no difference in beings. Equality in the order of existence, distributed by love, will be sufficient guaranty for the continuance of humanity.[63]

Dr. Palpu was the pioneer in organizing the Īlavas under one banner. From a loose, disorganized array of individuals scattered all over Kerala with their own peculiar kinds of customs and groupisms, Dr. Palpu attempted to create a solid and organized mass of people. The Travancore (Malayāli) Memorial submitted in 1891 was the first direct constitutional protest of the people against the discriminatory

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[62] ibid., p. 102.

[63] T. K. Ravindran, Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p. XXXIX.

rule. Following this, Dr. Palpu organized the Īḻavas further and prepared a petition of their own called the 'Ezhava Memorial'. He submitted this to the Mahārāja on September 3, 1896 with the signatures of thirteen thousand one hundred and seventysix Īḻavas. This organized movement paved the way for the formation of the S.N.D.P. Yogam and its subsequent achievements.

Āśān attempted social change by the direct process of propaganda. This he accomplished through his speeches and petitions in the Legislative Assembly. He fought for the economic, educational and social rights of the Īḻavas and other less privileged people. As Āśān aroused the political consciousness among the Īḻavas, they realized that for the removal of their social disabilities, they needed to exercise their political rights. Through the efforts of the elite members of the community like Dr. Palpu, Narayana Guru and Kumaran Āśān and through the organization S.N.D.P., the Īḻavas made a discovery of their own inner strength. A sense of self-respect and identity strengthened their organization and Īḻavas started playing a greater and more significant role in the politics of Kerala.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN KERALA AND THE AWAKENED ĪḶAVAS

Modern Kerala is reaping the fruits of the religious and social renaissance produced by the great spiritual leader Śrī. Narayana Guru and his associates. The transformation Guru effected was astonishing because, inspite of the temptation to adopt a stance of militant conflict against the upper strata which had imposed very serious social disabilities on the Īḷava community, he stressed the unifying power of religion. He rejected the distinctions of caste and religion and fought all through his life for a unity based on equality, mutual respect and love.

All the religious and ritual reforms of the Īḷavas that have been effected in recent years have its source in their great Guru. Śrī Narayana Svāmi embodied all their aspirations, gave directions to all their activities for self improvement and coordinated their efforts. He did not destroy the old institutions, but constructed a new superstructure on the existing foundations.

> Religion has been the greatest of all integrating forces in social life and Śrī Narayana's reforms which welded the Iravas into one powerful community were all through religion.[1]

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[1] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 151.

The temples consecrated by the Svāmi were built and dedicated to the gods of the Hindu pantheon. These temples not only provided places of worship for Īlavas but also satisfied their craving to possess houses of worship of their own. The construction of the temple was made possible by the better economic position of the Īlavas and by the enthusiasm and co-operative spirit generated among them by Svāmi.

Narayana Guru felt the need to establish a Saṁnyasi-sangham (a congregation of dedicated Saṁnyasis) to carry out his religious ideals. He started the 'Śrī Narayana Sangham' in 1928 at Śivagiri in Varkala. A year after its inception Guru died, but the Sangham continued to propagate the reforms Guru advocated. The Sangham claims that it preserves and transmits the teachings of the Guru in the following ways:

(1) Through occasional publication of the various works of the Guru with commentaries and translations;
(2) through the training of Sanyasin disciples at Brahma Vidyalaya in Sivagiri for the carrying on of the Guru's message;
(3) by continued support of educational institutions;
(4) by conducting religious meetings, officiating at prayers, puja, sraddha and homam;
(5) by continuing to consecrate new temples;
(6) by conducting 'Sree Narayana Dharma Mimamsa Parishath' (lectures on the Dharma of Sree Narayana) and an annual conference of all religions at the Advaita Ashram at Alwaye;
(7) by promptly celebrating the birth and samadhi of Sree Narayana Guru and by proper arrangements for the annual pilgrimage by devotees to Sivagiri and
(8) by the proper care of the sick and poor through medical institutions and homes for the destitute.[2]

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[2]V. T. Samuel, One Caste, One Religion, One God, 1977, pp. 169 - 170.

Change in Hereditary Occupations

With the religious reformation brought by Narayana Guru and with the new awakening of the Īḻava community the practice of hereditary occupation is fast changing. Tandān, who traditionally administered the caste law has already lost his position. The communal labour organized by the Tandān for the temples has become a mere relic of the past. Some families who have been doing it, continue to do it only out of religious sentiment. The younger generation of the families of Tandān's themselves no longer insist on receiving the customary gifts, on being consulted on marriage questions, nor do they take interest in the adjudication of offences against caste. Vatti was the assistant to Tandān and a priest and barber to the Īḻavas of a Tara. Under the influence of Narayana Guru, the advanced sections of the Īḻavas grew ashamed of the fact that their priest was also a barber. Īḻavas no longer required the service of Vattis in their reformed rituals. The Vattis now attend those reformed rituals as members of the community while the new class of trained priests conduct the rituals.

It was caste, in the Pre-British Kerala, that determined a man's profession, faith, mode of life, marriage etc. In the caste structure, the individual participated only in an infinitesimal sphere of the whole culture. His curiosity and ambition to pry into other spheres and fields than his own, were mercilessly crushed. The British period in Kerala saw a new side of life. By giving the same kind of education and same laws for all, the British paved the way for equality. No longer could a Brāhman prohibit an Īḻava from

studying the Vedas and performing marriages with Brāhmanical rites. The British appointed educated men irrespective of caste in Government service. These changes brought about reactions. A. Aiyappan says:

> The first Izhava to be appointed as a magistrate in Travancore was insulted by his police subordinates. This particular official ended his life by suicide unable to put up with the persecutions of Nairs and Brahmins.[3]

But such instances could not last long. In a law court, all castes of people, who had anything to do there, had no other choice but to rub shoulders during the British administration in Kerala. The judge might be a Tamil Brāhman or a Nāyar or an Īḻava; the subordinate officials were similarly of different castes; so also the members of the bar.

Village Administration

The Tara is no longer a functioning unit in the present-day administrative and political machinery. Since the English took charge of the administration of Malabar, it became imperative that the new taxes should be collected promptly and economically, for which several dēśams were rolled into one amśam and placed in the charge of a headman or adhikāri.

> To carry on the administration and to maintain the army and the civil staff, involved heavy cost to meet which the collection of revenues in the best manner was the first concern of the officers of the company. At first the native chieftains whose territorial claims had been commuted for pensions were appointed as intermediaries between the

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[3] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 47.

> company's Government and the landholders for the collection of revenues.[4]

But later when these functionaries became corrupted, the village Pancāyat system was introduced. The present day councils (village Pancāyat) are radically different from the old Tarakkūttams in that:

a) the members are elected and may be of any caste, not necessarily Nairs, as of old.
b) the functions are extremely limited and do not extend to religion, or caste or any group activities.
c) they cannot raise their own funds, but have to get grants from the governments.
d) they are supervised by Panchayat officers and by local courts.[5]

The Īlavas who were numerous everywhere in Kerala were not considered members of the kūttam. Their chief was consulted only as occasion arose for joint action or in the settlement of disputes. But since the coming of the English, the caste began to break down.

> An Irava, under the Hindu regime could not even dream of becoming a dēśavāri, but under the new dispensation about half a dozen of them became adhikāris in British Malabar District.[6]

Kinship and Family

The administration of law took an entirely new shape throughout Kerala with the coming of the British. The Mysorean wars had weakened the rural government so much that the Nāyar chiefs had given way to State officials in the native States. The presence of the fanatical

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[4] ibid., p. 13.

[5] ibid., p. 21.

[6] ibid., p. 19.

Mohammedans proved another obstacle to the peaceful and orderly conduct of the old form of rural governance. A new police force to replace the Nāyar and Īḻava militia, new judicial officers, trained lawyers, jails and the like appeared in all the three political divisions of Kerala. The civil code of the new courts was Hindu law combined with the customary laws of each caste. Along with these processes of modernization, the Īḻavas were acquiring a new status and better treatment in the society.

Any attempt to bring about the division of a joint family was unheard of in the Pre-British Kerala. All the land was collectively owned and managed by the Kāranavan. Customary law gave the Kāranavan unlimited powers, partition of the family property was not permitted and matrilineal law ignored the father completely except for the purpose of reproduction. In actual practice, the Kāranavans misused their authority and impoverished their heirs. Fathers were anxious to benefit their children. Under the influence of Narayana Guru, the Īḻavas of Travancore established a new convention of dividing a man's self-acquired property equally between his legal and natural heirs. As a result, the control and protection of the wife and children slowly passed from the Kāranavan to the husband and father. The popular clamour for legislation to recognize the claims of the matrilineal wife and children led to the Īḻava Regulation (1925) in Travancore and the Madras Marumakkattāyam Act of 1933 for the Malabar area. The Travancore Regulation (1925) legalised the claims of the wife and children to the whole of a man's self-acquisition, transferred the

guardianship of the children from the Kāranavan to the father, permitted the per capita division of the joint family estate and made provision for divorce with compensation to be paid by the party, whether man or woman, petitioning for divorce. Thus the various progressive legislations has brought about significant changes in the laws of inheritance and succession of the Īlavas.

In the modern set up, the Taravād does not remain a joint family but is divided into separate individual units. The transformation of the society with the introduction of the various legal reforms has given a new place for the unit-family consisting of the father, mother and children. Every Īlava family has experienced the clashing norms between the traditional and the modern. The members of the new generation are on more equal terms with men of superior or inferior castes. Rapid changes are taking place in the set up of the Īlava families. Today if an Īlava boy wants to marry, he does not leave the entire matter to his relatives, but satisfies himself about the girl's personal appearance. A young Īlava does not want his mother to move about with her breasts exposed as she used to do earlier. He wants his wife and sisters to use the modern dress instead of the loin clothes. Changes among the Īlavas in the direction of modernity are continuing at a rapid pace.

Education

Another field in which the Īlavas have come up is education. The first English School in Kerala was started by the Christian Missionaries in 1834. It was taken over by the Mahārāja of Travancore in 1836

to make it a free school. The modern education started catching the interest of the people with the historic proclamation of 1844 by the Mahārāja that for service in public offices preference should be given to those educated in English schools.

Īḻavas were an educationally backward class in the pre-British days. The highest learning that an Īḻava could aspire to then was a few rudimentary knowledge of the vernacular. For a long time the Government schools in the State were also closed to them. The S.N.D.P. Yogam with the constant inspiration from Dr. Palpu, made indefatigable efforts to uplift the Īḻava community educationally. The first attempt of the Yogam in this field was to remove the obstacle for admitting Īḻava to government and government aided schools in Kerala. Both Dr. Palpu and Kumaran Āśān took a leading part in that effort. Later it concentrated its attention on establishing its own educational institutions. By 1972, the Yogam had under its management eleven high schools, three upper primary schools and five lower primary schools. The Īḻava community established its first college at Quilon in 1947. According to the statistics of 1972 they have twelve colleges in the State where more than 8000 Īḻava students are getting their education.

The present system of education consists of primary, secondary, collegiate, technical and professional stages. Primary and lower secondary education has been made compulsory and free education is given up to the eighth standard. The modern educational system contributed greatly to the reduction of 'unapproachability'.

Education in the modern schools led to freer intercourse between the younger generations of the various castes than was possible in the pre-British days. It was not possible to maintain caste regulations there. The teachers and students were of various castes. They had to rub their shoulders in the classroom and play ground. In the class, students discussed the problems of caste and untouchability in vehement terms and tried to understand each other's point of view.

> In schools they developed the sense of equality between man and man irrespective of caste, and a dissatisfaction and revolt against the inequalities of caste.[7]

New norms did clash with the older ones. In the life of an individual himself it meant great disruptive changes:

> At home as a boy, he is as a rule in an element steeped in caste; there he is asked to unlearn several things he learnt at school . . . His father does not put on a shirt, sit on a chair or read English books, but the son does all these and is tempted to regard himself as a superior person. In intercaste relationship he behaves more freely and on more equal terms with men of both superior and inferior castes.[8]

With the growth of education, the minor differences between various castes in dress and fashions and ornaments, in language and pronunciation and in the standard of personal cleanliness, by which anyone's caste could be told at once have disappeared.

By dethroning Sanskrit from its high position and giving its

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[7] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 45.

[8] ibid., p. 132.

place to English, a rift was made between the old and the new kinds of scholarship, but a wide world was opened to the person who knew English. Knowledge which was the monopoly of the Brāhmans passed into the hands of the common people. During British rule, education automatically led to service under the Government. Any government official with his administrative authority was held in high esteem and paid great honours. When educated Īlavas were appointed to responsible administrative posts in British Kerala, men of superior castes served under them and members of the public had to respect and honour them in spite of the lowness of the officer's caste. The custom regarding the use of terms of respect was thus reversed, the Nāyars and Brāhmans using them instead of the Īlava officer. The traditional forms of behaviour became weakened and vestigial in practice.

With the increase in the number of graduates passing out from the colleges every year, the State Government, which is the biggest employer, is facing the problem of unemployment. R. Ramakrishnan Nair says:

> The government of Kerala could provide jobs in government service to not more than four thousand people a year. Scheduled castes throw up 512 graduates a year; Scheduled tribes 48; Ezhava community 2652 and Muslim community 1329 - which means a total of 4541 graduates. Even if the entire jobs in government service is reserved for these four communities that would not suffice to satisfy even the graduates of these communities.[9]

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[9] R. Ramakrishnan Nair, Social Structure and Political Development in Kerala, 1976, p. 32.

However within the last two decades educated members of the Īḻava community have occupied high positions in society - Chief ministers, ministers, judges, heads of government departments, doctors, lawyers, writers, professors, editors, engineers, big businessmen and large estate owners.

Literature

The Missionary teaching and the spread of the English knowledge led to the rapid development of Malayāḻam literature. The first good dictionary of the Malayāḻam language was compiled by a German missionary. The first printing press was introduced in Kerala at Nagarcoil by the London Missionary Service in 1819. The printing of cheap editions of the Hindu sacred books like the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata, made it easy even for the poor people to develop a taste for reading and understanding their religion. Formerly only the rich few had the palm-leaf books which were preserved as heir-looms. The missionary efforts in journalism and political education were imitated by others. Īḻavas also came to have their own communal newspapers. What happened in Malayāḻam literature under the English influence was that poetry began to be made more a criticism of life and a channel for the expression of noble emotions, while the form and technique remained indigenous. The great poet Kumaran Āśān broke off from old poetical traditions of writing on mythical themes and wrote on subjects garnered from his own experience. At the beginning of the present century the Īḻavas had their first newspaper printed in Malabar. This paper 'Mitavādi' (the moderate advocate) did much to shape Īḻava

public opinion. The paper used to contain long discourses on what the Īḻavas should do to improve themselves, long tirades against the atrocities of caste and hearty praise of the British rulers of India. Its vehement criticism of the customary waste of public money in Travancore and Cochin, on giving presents to Brāhmans, and on grand rituals of state made it very unpopular among the high castes. When the nationalist agitation in India took an anti-British turn, this paper used to contain the most unsparing criticism of Gandhi and his followers.

Economy

The economic condition of Īḻavas improved greatly with the spread of a cash economy. It needs to be remembered that the payment of tax in kind continued in Travancore until 1904. The S.N.D.P. Yogam which worked for the economic uplift of its community members organized an industrial exhibition in Quilon to coincide with its second annual general meeting in January 1905. The exhibition had a wide impact. Dozens of exhibits of coconut and other agricultural products were submitted and 3000 Īḻavas, a few from as far north as Cannanore attended the exhibition. The exhibition gave many Īḻavas a sense of pride and wider community feeling.

Īḻavas found their traditional occupations put them much in demand as the akbari revenue and exports of coconut products rose. The growth in demand for coir products in European countries brought prosperity for a good number of Īḻavas. The coir industry gave

employment to a very large number of Īḻavas. The extraction of fibre, preparation of yarn and manufacture of coir ropes were tedious operations. The application of machinery to this industry led to the establishment of factories at Alleppey, Quilon, Colachel and other places. Thus greater opportunities were available for the Īḻavas to prosper economically.

> The opening of factories in urban centres, the increasing migration of population from rural to urban areas and the rapid expansion of the means of communication also helped to usher in an area of social mobility and to mitigate the evils in the traditional Kerala society.[10]

The new economic opportunities gave Īḻavas an important place in society. The economic development of the country also gave them wider scope for the choice of professions. The Travancore census of 1931 lists the following occupations per thousand among the Īḻavas:

Toddy drawers	38
Cultivators, owners & tenants	316
Field labourers and wood cutters	160
Industries (coir yarn)	223
Transport	34
Trade	76
Lawyers, doctors, teachers	13
Domestic servants	12
Others	128 [11]

The reversal of the economic disparity between the traditional and the modern economic set ups among the high caste (Brāhmaṇ) and the untouchable low caste (Īḻava) could be seen from the following data

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[10] A. Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p. 370.

[11] A. Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p. 106.

given by R. Ramakrishnan Nair in 1976:

> In the Ezhava community which is a backward community, there are 7867 households whose annual income exceeds Rs. 8000/-. In the Brahmin community which was considered, the upper most, there are only 6028 families in the state whose annual income is above Rs. 8000/-. Out of the 57,964 Brahmin households in the state 51,936 families are economically backward.[12]

Communal Association

Social integration started with the initiative of Dr. Palpu and the teachings of Śrī Narayana Guru. The improved means of communication, better chances of education and larger economic opportunities helped the spread of new ideas and systems of interaction. These forces undermined the hold of the traditional culture and society as it was organized in relatively autonomous units. These in turn created conditions under which the Īḻava subcaste could be linked together in geographically extended associations. With the formation of the S.N.D.P. the Īḻavas in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar felt a state cohesion. Lloyd I. Rudolph has rightly said:

> Caste associations are para communities that enable members of the castes to pursue social mobility, political power and economic advantage.[13]

Mere birth in the caste was not a sufficient condition for membership in the association. It required a conscious act of

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[12] R. Ramakrishnan Nair, Social Structure and Political Development in Kerala, 1976, p. 32.

[13] Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967. p. 29.

involvement ranging from providing financial support to the S.N.D.P.'s educational, welfare or economic activities, to attending caste association meetings and to voting for candidates supported by the association's leaders. The caste association spoke for a much wider group than its active followers and influenced those who held political powers, to allocate resources, opportunities and honour. It strengthened the mobilization process and extended the loyalties of the members to newer and larger contexts. By appealing to the common identity of caste brethren Īḻavas mobilized horizontal solidarity against the pressures of caste hierarchy. Lloyd I. Rudolph calls this 'horizontal mobilization'. He says:

> Horizontal mobilization involves the marshaling of popular political support by class or community leaders and their specialised organizations . . . Horizontal mobilization of solidarities among class or community equals introduces a new pattern of cleavage by challenging the vertical solidarities and structures of traditional societies.[14]

As the Īḻavas grew stronger through their organization, the S.N.D.P. Yogam, they were no longer satisfied with accepting the slow changes effected by environmental and external forces. They wanted to speed up changes by legislation and by creating public opinion in their favour by propaganda through the press and through conferences and petitioning of the authorities. Īḻavas adopted in this, Gandhiji's method of resistance for the establishment of their civic rights regarding

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[14] ibid., p. 25.

the use of public roads and public places of worship. As the non-intervention policy of the British in socio-religious matters became more marked and the voice of the people grew stronger in local government, it was necessary for the Īḻavas to be more assertive in their demands. They sought the cooperation of Christians, Muslims and even the educated and sympathetic sections of the high castes to fight for their elementary human rights. There was fear especially in the minds of the elderly men that on the withdrawal of the British from a position of supreme authority and the taking of the reins of government by Indians, the positions of the Īḻavas might grow worse. The nationalists therefore were very anxious to show that such suspicion was unfounded. Some of them dropped titles indicating caste and rank, others interdined with Īḻavas and other lower castes. In the movement against the Temple laws, Nāyar leaders and volunteers cooperated and courted jail as members of one fraternity with the Izhavas. The beginning of nationalism in Kerala therefore acted as a re-integrating force. This reintegration was not on the old model of caste, but on the new democratic basis. The national spirit also acted as a new cohesive force in the place of the earlier traditions of village life.

Īḻavas and Kerala Politics

In the politics of Kerala, the Īḻava community and particularly the S.N.D.P. Yogam had their significant share, sometimes very prominent and sometimes less conspicuous. The Yogam gave the lead to

the community in its struggle for social, religious, economic and political equality. Its leadership in the Temple entry agitations and constitutional reforms of the state are significant. The Yogam played a major role in the formation of a triple alliance between the Muslims, Īḻavas and Christians. With the desire of the leaders to include the Nāyar community, the triple alliance was replaced by a political party. The result was the formation of the Travancore State Congress with a Nāyar named Pattom Tanu Pillai as its President. V. K. Velayudhan, the Secretary of the Yogam, and R. Sankar a leader of the Yogam actively participated in the Congress politics. The Divān Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer thought that the new move was directed against him. He tried to win the confidence of the Īḻava leaders and caused a split in the State Congress. A clevage appeared among the Īḻavas also. Some progressive minded youth of the Īḻava community stood with the Congress while the others joined the Socialist and Communist parties which appeared in Kerala around that time.

When independence, and with it universal franchise and self-government came to India, the Īḻavas had already a well-established interest in politics and acted in fairly unified ways with respect to it. The S.N.D.P. Yogam took an active interest in getting adequate seats for Īḻavas in the State legislature and ministry. At the time of the integration of Travancore and Cochin in 1949, the popular ministry was headed by T. K. Narayana Pillai who was then the Chief Minister of Travancore. But when his ministry resigned in February

1951, C. Kesavan, who was once the S.N.D.P. Yogam Secretary, became the Chief Minister.

After the formation of the State of Kerala in 1956 the first general elections to the State Legislature took place in 1957. Īlavas felt then that it was the Communist Party that would cater to their needs of social and economic uplift. So they favoured the Communists in the 1957 elections. Michael St. John says:

> The Izhavas are a politically conscious group, aware of the issues, and not easily swayed by slogans. For this reason they have been willing to support the K.C.P. [Kerala Communist Party] in spite of the Congress orientation of their caste association leaders . . . Thus between the Izhavas and the Communists there has been no fundamental meeting of minds, but rather a fortunate confluence of program and action . . .[15]

So the Communist Party under the Chief Ministership of E.M.S. Namboothiripad came to power on April 5, 1957. But within a very short time the Communist Party disappointed the caste communities and other interest groups. Some of their legislative measures and policies evoked opposition and led to an agitation to overthrow the Communist Government. The S.N.D.P. Yogam supported the liberation struggle of 1959 under the leadership of their secretary R. Sankar. Īlavas supported a coalition ministry that came to power by 1960. In the new ministry, Pattom Tanu Pillai of the Socialist Party became the Chief Minister and R. Sankar of the Congress (Secretary of S.N.D.P.)

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[15]Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition, 1967, p. 21.

became the Deputy Chief Minister. The Congress in 1962 began an effort to free itself from dependence on the leaders of the Nāyar, Christian and Muslim communities by giving greater scope to Īḻava leadership. In order to favour the Īḻavas, the High Command of the Indian National Congress took the initiative to appoint in September 1962 Pattom Tanu Pillai (a Nāyar) as the Governor of Punjab State, thereby giving a chance to the S.N.D.P. leader R. Sankar to become the Chief Minister of Kerala. R. Sankar continued in office till 1964.

Since then Kerala has had seven coalition ministries sworn in at various times. In between, Kerala was also under President's rule many times. Because of the numerical strength [16] of the community most of the political parties, have given adequate representation to the Īḻava community both in the nomination of candidates to the elections and in their ministries. The difficulty Kerala has had in governing itself has been in considerable measure attributable to the existing social conditions. In Kerala, Īḻavas and Scheduled castes constitute roughly 34 percent of the population; Christians 24 percent, Nāyars and Nambūdiri Brāhmans 19 percent and Muslims 20 percent. These religious or caste groups or coalitions of them have tended to shape the party strategy and political behaviour of the state. The role of the Īḻavas

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[16] See K. P. Bhagat's The Kerala Mid Term Election 1960, (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1962, p. 60). "Out of the estimated population of 15,230,000 of 1958 the Ezhavas are reported to be 3,700,000. Ezhavas are the biggest single community in Kerala State."

in shaping the various governments of the State has been very significant, and they continue to be a central political force in Kerala society.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

There are a variety of concepts that are used to characterize the social changes that have been taking place in India since the beginning of this century. The process by which a caste or a group of people move up the social hierarchy by adopting the styles of life associated by tradition with the upper castes is called Sanskritization by M. N. Srinivas. He defines:

> Sanskritization is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, "twice-born" caste.[1]

He adds that such changes are generally followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community.

> Sanskritization is generally accompanied by and often results in, upward mobility for the caste in question; but mobility may also occur without Sanskritization and vice-versa. However, the mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. That is a caste move up, above its neighbours and another comes down, but all this takes place in an essentially stable hierarchical order. The system itself does not change.[2]

The socio-cultural process which Srinivas has in mind is one in

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[1]M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968, p. 6.

[2]ibid., p. 7

which, in a caste based society like India, people of lower castes take over customs, practices and ideas associated with higher castes in an attempt to upgrade their status or certain aspects of their status. Such customs, practices and ideas which the lower castes adopt are often directly or indirectly associated with Sanskrit texts of the Hindu traditions. It may be argued that Srinivas' main purpose in the developed concept of Sanskritization was to draw attention to the special process of social-cultural change going on in a caste-based society in which part of the change process involves lower castes' attempt to upgrade themselves by taking over a way of life derived from prestigious Sanskrit-based traditions. Defining Sanskritization in this way, I want to suggest that this concept is not adequate to interpret the movement we see among the Īḻavas. Even though Śrī Narayana Guru did reform the rituals and religious practices among the Īḻavas in accordance with the Sanskrit texts, the change he envisaged was not confined to Sanskritization. His teaching of 'One Caste, One Religion and One God for Man' was not an effort to rise up in the caste hierarchy but to change. Instead of the Īḻava community trying to adopt the styles of life of the Kṣatrīya or the Brāhman and become one with them, he preached the equality of all men. The movement among the Īḻavas of Kerala was different from Sanskritization.

Srinivas also mentions social changes which he calls 'Westernization'. According to him Westernization refers to changes introduced into Indian society during the British rule which continue

in Independent India. Westernization is an inclusive, complex and many-layered concept. It covers a wide range from western technology at one end to ideas such as the experimental method of modern science and modern historiography at the other. Srinivas observes that Westernization carries with it certain value preferences.

> A most important value, which in turn subsumes several other values, is what may be broadly characterized as humanitarianism, by which is meant an active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex.[3]

Humanitarianism resulted in many administrative measures to found schools and hospitals. The British-Western attack resulted in a reinterpretation of Hinduism at both the ideological and institutional levels. The principle of equality found expression in the abolition of serfdom and in opening public institutions to all irrespective of religion or caste. The introduction of social reforms and the British legal system involved the changing or abolition of certain religious customs. The attack on untouchability which Independent India has launched provides a striking example of such extension.

Westernization was definitely involved in certain ways in the mobility experienced by the Īḻavas. The founding of missionary schools had opened a way for many of the Īḻavas to get educated. These institutions gave educated leaders like Dr. Palpu to the Īḻava community, leaders who in turn initiated steps for the transformation of certain

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[3] ibid., p. 48.

traditional structures. Similarly it was the existance of new opportunities under the British government - educational, economic and political - which led to individual mobility among Īḷavas and brought about an increase in the horizontal solidarity of the community. All these effects of Westernization were, however, only the external catalyst for the progress of the Īḷava community.

Srinivas discusses how even Westernization operated within the caste structure. He says:

> The net result of the Westernization of the Brahmans was that they interposed themselves between the British and the rest of the native population. The result was a new and secular caste system superimposed on the traditional system, in which the British, the new Kshatriyas, stood at the top while the Brahmans occupied the second position, and the others stood at the base of the pyramid.[4]

The result of Westernization was therefore often like Sanskritization in that it involved the use of the same caste structure with a change of position of the caste groups. In this sense "Westernization" like "Sanskritization" remains an inadequate concept to explain the mobility among the Īḷavas.

Owen M. Lynch argues that both Sanskritization and Westernization are of limited utility for the appraisal of social mobility in India. Srinivas himself agrees that Sanskritization and Westernization describe the social changes occurring in modern India only in cultural terms. This is a major handicap as it means these concepts do not explain

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[4]Quoted by Owen M. Lynch in Structure and Change in Society, (Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds.) Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970, p. 209.

social mobility involving structural change. When a caste such as the Īlavas opts for political participation to attain changes, both concepts - Sanskritization and Westernization - fail to explain their mobility. Independent India has provided the caste-communities new political opportunities and communities like the Īlavas can now seek their chosen status as voters by electing and placing their own people in positions of power within the power-structure. Political participation has now become a means to social mobility which differs from both Sanskritization and Westernization and needs to be described in a new conceptual model.

A popular term for the changes brought about in a non-western country by contact, direct or indirect with a western country is "modernization".

> A social order in which the modern goals of equality and individual human dignity co-exist with the traditional populistic goals of community-sharing, collective interdependence and socio-cultural pluralism [5]

is termed 'modernization' by K. Ishwaran. In this sense I consider the mobility among the Īlavas a process of modernization.

In the sociological literature, modernization in developing countries has often been mistakenly used as a synonym for westernization. The two concepts must be clearly separated for the proper understanding of the modernization process. Srinivas in bringing a distinction

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[5] K. Ishwaran, A Populistic Community and Modernization in India, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977, p. 115.

between them says that Westernization is ethically neutral.

> Its [Westernization] use does not carry the implication that it is good or bad, whereas modernization is normally used in the sense that it is good.[6]

People generally think of a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Usually this is thought to entail that modernity is realized when tradition has been destroyed and superseded. Tradition is, however, historical and can be understood as the cumulative and still changing result of patterns carried over from the past. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith says:

> The development of a religious tradition is not only within the realm of the contingent. It is also within the realm of change that not merely is possible but is inherent and inevitable . . . A religious tradition, is the historical construct, in continuous and continuing construction, of those who participate in it.[7]

Modernity is by its nature not a static entity. It is a process.

> Modernity in the world at large is in process of rendering feasible the gradual transformation of human life from what it has been into what we choose to make it.[8]

Tradition and modernity should be seen as continuous rather than as separated by an abyss. They are also internally varied. The internal variations within traditional and modern societies must be carefully examined and seriously understood. The dominant norms and

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[6]M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, 1968, p. 52.

[7]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, New York: Harper and Row, 1978, pp. 164 -165.

[8]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Religious Diversity, New York: Crossroad, 1982, p. 95.

structures within the traditional society often become potentialities for change. The Rudolphs say:

> Those qualities of groups or individuals or structures that produce incongruence and strain in relation to a society's dominant motifs, or those points at which socialization creates friction or conflict rather than integration and control, can become at critical historical moments the sources of incremental or fundamental social change.[9]

Therefore increased attentiveness to the variations and potentialities of traditional society yields insights into the connections between tradition and modernity. It also raises questions about the meaning of modernity.

"Modernity is a quality of acting and choosing, a quality of self-conscious control and direction of one's own destiny",[10] says W. C. Smith. The concept 'modern' involves a sense that history is moving in a particular direction. "Modernity is no longer a goal but a process; no longer something to adopt, but something to participate in".[11] Modernity in the world at large is in the process of rendering feasible the gradual transformation of human life from what it has been into what it could be.

Modernization is an ongoing, historical and comprehensive process arising from the adapting capacity of the existing institutional complex

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[9]Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition, 1967, p. 11.

[10]Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Religious Diversity, 1982, p. 77.

[11]ibid., p. 90.

which also permits the incorporation of things modern along with the preservation of things traditional. In the process of modernization a community becomes conscious of itself and of its process of change. It does not imitate but commits and participates.

The meaning of the modernization process is not given by the direction in which the West is moving. The form of modernization, even when the impact of the West is profound is always determined partly by the ongoing pre-western processes in the local social organizations or structures which did not simply vanish in the wake of the western impact, but took a different shape and incorporated the consequences of the western impact. In the wider process of modernization, westernization is only a particular historical instance. Milton Singer says:

> Modernity is a permanent layer or dimension of indigenous culture and not simply a collection of recent foreign imports or the fashionable life-style of a privileged class. When an innovation has entered this layer, it is no longer associated with strange and foreign groups, nor is it segregated from the rest of the indigenous culture. It may be recognized for its functional or aesthetic value as an innovation and acquire prestige and status on that account.[12]

In the cultural-anthropological study of an interpretation of Indian culture the efforts of Milton Singer[13] and David S. Mandelbaum[14]

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[12]Milton Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, p. 395.

[13]See Milton Singer's book 'When a Great Tradition Modernizes', New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972.

[14]See David S. Mandelbaum's book 'Society in India', Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1970.

stand out. Both reject the 'tradition-modernity dichotomy'. Mandelbaum emphasizes the change-potential of Indian rural society. Singer criticizes the simplistic contrast between the spiritual India and the material west. Both Mandelbaum and Singer conceptualize the continuum in terms of an 'adaptive model of change'. Singer in discussing the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition seeks the frame work of a common Indian civilization in terms of the religious unity exhibited in the continuity of cultural practices in the village and the town. For Mandelbaum the locus of this integrative process lies in the area of an expanding sociological horizon from the family to the nation.

Discussing these theories K. Ishwaran says:

> A crucial theoretical problem in both their conceptualizations is the problem of locating more clearly the modern mechanisms of modernization. Since they both deny that they are deterministic believers in a unilinear evolution, it is inconceivable, on their own terms, that tradition can automatically evolve into a modern system.[15]

Ishwaran tries for clarification by drawing attention to the internal dynamics of a populistic community, which is able to absorb change while preserving its core-values through processes of institutional adaptations. Ishwaran speaks further about the organizing principles of the community which imply a set of internal contradictions:

(i) the local identity versus limited links with the outside world;

(ii) pluralism versus local community-integration;

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[15] K. Ishwaran, A Populistic Community and Modernization in India, 1977, p. 114.

(iii) existance of elite groups and functions versus absence of elitism as an ideology; and

(iv) preservation of core-values versus selective acceptance of change emanating from sources outside the community.[16]

It is these self-contradictions among the principles that constitute the potential for change. The disturbances that arise from the interactions among these principles produce important changes. The communities are capable of absorbing these changes if the core-values are left in-tact.

> Based on tolerance, mutuality, complementarity, these adjustments are manifested in various strategies of adaptation among existing institutions.[17]

What is most readily perceptible is a total community identity in cultural values and aspirations. As Milton Singer says:

> The theory of modernization, will not only go beyond the traditional versus modern dichotomy, but will also transcend the bifurcations between cultural diffusion and cultural evolution and between culture and society . . . It will look at the process of modernization as envisaged by those engaged in it, in their cultural categories, world view, and value system as well as in the objective evidence of behaviour and numerical magnitudes.[18]

As has been observed in the earlier chapters, in the traditional society Īlavas were in a caste structure in which they were considered untouchables. In the earlier periods they had only limited contacts with the outside world. The contacts Kerala had with the European

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[16] ibid., p. 4.

[17] ibid., p. 4.

[18] Milton Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes, 1972, p. 384.

countries in the earlier centuries of the Christian era did not greatly disturb their local identity. But the Mysorean invasion of the Muslims in the later period contributed to the modernization process. The coming of the British gave even greater momentum. The few educated Īḻavas in the missionary schools of Kerala went out to the neighbouring states for higher education. Dr. Palpu studied medicine outside Kerala. Narayana Guru travelled to the neighbouring states of Madras and Mysore and acquired wider knowledge. Kumaran Āśān was sent to Mysore, Madras and Calcutta for his higher education. This helped him to be aware of the modern religious movements like the Brāhmo Samāj and Ārya Samāj. It was these leaders who initiated and worked for the modernization of the Īḻava community.

The social structure of Kerala was segmented and hierarchical in character. The segments within it were rigidly separated by clear cut boundaries and social interaction was extremely limited. Each caste, subcaste and community had developed its distinctive styles of life in the matter of diet, dress, worship, marriage etc. It was easy in the past to maintain social separation and structural distance between castes and communities because the world was fairly static and the pace of change very slow. Social horizons were narrow, the economy was relatively static, population movements were limited and the hold of religion and superstition was strong. Īḻavas themselves were scattered in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore and associated in each place with various cultural groups. This decentralized and divided community was brought together under one banner in the S.N.D.P.

Yogam. The introduction of new ideas and forces helped the mobilization of these minority groups within traditional Kerala society. The formation of the caste association combining the traditional and the modern features, was a transitional phenomena as well as a persistant feature of modernity.

Ignorance and lack of education had earlier prevented the process of modernization in Kerala. The elite group within the Īḻava community consisting of men like Dr. Palpu, Kumaran Āśān and T. K. Madhavan realized that the sources of high status were mainly three: Education, new economic opportunities and political power. These leaders realized clearly that these three were inter-related and that one could not be secured in full measure without the others.

Education was indispensable for obtaining the high categories of posts in the administration and for the effective exercise of political power. Education created an awareness and acceptance among the Īḻavas themselves of a new definition of their status and the means to legitimize it. The notion of individual achievement and its legitimacy had been planted in the Īḻava mind as an awareness of a political alternative form of social structure and social mobility.

Political power was necessary to introduce the principle of caste quotas for jobs in the administration and seats in technological, medical and science courses and later to secure the licenses and permits necessary for trading in a variety of goods and for undertaking other economic enterprises. With the gradual transfer of power from the British to Indians, caste associations like S.N.D.P. Yogam tended

to become political pressure groups to attain greater status and political opportunities.

In the process of modernization the elites in the Īḻava community discovered that there were also a variety of pressures to accept changes emanating from outside the community. Īḻava leaders like C. Krishnan, in the second decade of the century, advocated that Īḻavas follow some other religion like Buddhism or join some modern religious movement like the Brāhmo Samāj, or the Ārya Samāj. Leaders like Kumaran Āśān were, however, very clear in urging the community to preserve the core-values of tradition and to incorporate innovative changes in the social set up only gradually.

The process of modernization in Kerala was gradual and continuous. It was the Mysorean invasions of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan (Muslim rulers) that changed the feudal system of administration and replaced it by a centralised system of government. The Mysorean system of administration was based on relatively progressive ideas. It was on this foundation that the British administrators in turn built up their administrative and political system in Malabar. The coming of the British also enhanced the process of modernization in the neighbouring princely states. Slavery was abolished in Travancore in 1812 and several agrarian reforms were made in Travancore at the time of Ayilyam Tirunal Mahārāja (1860 - 1880).

The religious reforms within the Īḻava community were due to the reformation of Śrī Narayana Guru. Traditionally Īḻavas were worshippers of evil spirits and hero-demons. They had a few temples

of their own, but the temples consecrated to higher gods like Śiva were not accessible to them. Īḻavas were satisfied with crude forms of worship. The service of the temple priests was not available to the low castes. Narayana Guru brought about changes in the traditional practices. He consecrated new temples for Śiva and other 'higher' deities. The consecration of the first such temple at Aruvipuram was a very conscious act and the beginning of a long process. As far as the community was concerned, this was a welcome change. In order to solve the problem of temple priests, he trained Īḻavas as priests and appointed them to the new temples. The Īḻavas gradually became conscious of the implications of these changes taking place in their community and they found most of the changes meaningful and adopted them. Other Īḻavas began to participate in this process by constructing new temples at various places in Kerala. The new temples carried with them modern ideas. Instead of spending money to construct temples in the old style, the new temples were built with spacious rooms where people could congregate to listen to religious discourses. The temples were also opened for all people irrespective of caste. Narayana Guru insisted that money collected in these temples should be utilized for the benefit of the poor. By all these reforms, Narayana Guru helped the Īḻava community adopt practices that were modern, while preserving the core-values of things that are traditional. The Īḻavas were not abandoning their traditional institutions, values and beliefs but rather adapting and restructuring them wherever necessary to maintain and strengthen what they considered the essential core of

tradition.

The general pattern of modernization among the Īlavas could be described as experimentation with and a gradual incorporation of innovative changes into an indigenous culture. This description assumes that the culture is already both 'traditional' and 'modern'. One might formulate this idea as the Rudolphs do and speak of the Īlavas as a case of traditionalizing modernity.

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