RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE ĪLAVAS: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF

THE ĪLAVAS OF SOUTHERN KERALA

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

October 1986

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1986)   McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(Religious Studies)   Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Change and Continuity in the Religious Life
                of the Īḷavas of Southern Kerala

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NUMBER OF PAGES: xvii, 449

ABSTRACT

Of all the Hindu communities in southern Kerala, the Īḻavas are the largest. They were, however, traditionally considered outside the pale of "varṇa" and treated as "untouchables" by the higher castes. A 'man of vision' of this community, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru (1855-1928) introduced religious and social reforms that brought about an awakening among the Īḻavas at the beginning of the twentieth century. The consequent changes among the Īḻavas brought them to an escalating series of confrontations with the upholders of the traditional caste order.

This thesis focuses on the reformation of the Īḻavas and analyses their place and position in the larger social structure. It argues that their reformation can only be understood essentially as a process of "modernization". By modernization is meant an indigenous, historical and ongoing process in which people participate both consciously and critically. The Īḻavas in their awakening have incorporated the values of modernity into their culture without losing the core values of the

tradition. The history of the awakening of the Īlavas is,
therefore, a case study of modernization within the
framework of traditional Hindu society.

In order to make this case study a field was chosen
for research in consideration of maximum suitability. That
field is an area of southern Kerala called Murukkumpula,
not far from Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala. In view of
the stress on change and continuity, which is the theme of
the thesis, the field research has helped to establish that
the modes of change in this particular area can be seen
exhibited in the leadership of an elite; a reorientation
of values; a rationalistic and democratic approach to the
direction of change; an expression of freedom and
responsibility among the members; social mobility based on
equality and overall development and a network of
institutions that sustain and propagate the ideals of the
movement and hold the community together.

PREFACE

This work is a study of the change and continuity
in the religious life of the Īlavas of southern Kerala.
'Sanskritization' and 'Westernization' are the theories
generally used to explain social change in the context of
Indian history and culture. An exploration into the
changes in the life of the Īlavas in a rural area in
southern Kerala, namely Murukkumpula, has led to the
conclusion that both 'Sanskritization' and 'Westernization'
are inadequate to explain fully the changes among them
especially since the turn of this century. The
transformation among them is an indigenous, ongoing process
in which the members of the community participate
consciously. This transformation is viewed in this thesis
essentially as a process of Modernization.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The
first three chapters provide the background to the main
body of the thesis. Accordingly, Chapter I introduces the
basic issues and analyses the import of the theoretical
formulations such as 'Sanskritization', 'Westernization'
and 'Modernization'. Chapters II and III provide the
necessary historical and cultural background of Kerala in
general and of the position of the Īlavas in that society

over the centuries. Particular attention has been paid to
the socio-political conditions in the nineteenth century
against which the awakening of the Īḻavas took place.

Chapter IV deals specifically with particular focus
on the Īḻavas in southern Kerala. In as much as this
awakening was set in motion by Śrī Nārāyana Guru and his
disciples, particularly Kumāran Āśan and Dr. Palpu, special
attention is given (in this Chapter) to their 'life and
work' and to the institutions that they founded.

Chapter V makes the shift from the general to the
specific giving a profile of an area of the State chosen as
most suitable for the thesis, viz. Murukkumpuḻa (not far
from Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala), where the field
research was conducted for fourteen months (June
1984-August 1985). The succeeding chapters deal with the
impact of the work of Nārāyaṇa Guru in various aspects of
the life of the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa under the following
thematic classifications.

Chapter VI looks at the process of change in the
socio-economic life of the Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa. It
underscores the progress made in terms of social and
economic advancement that the community has registered
since the time of the Guru. Chapter VII focuses upon

religion: its position in the domestic life of the Īḻavas
and its institutional ramifications. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru was
a prophet and an advocate of change, who found religion as
a dynamic force that penetrates into the lives of the
people, keeps them together, strengthens their social and
communal bonds, emphasizing the freedom and dignity of the
individual and the sense of responsibility. The SNDP
Yōgam, an institution of the Īḻavas, founded by Nārāyaṇa
Guru and his disciples, acts not only as an agent of change
but also as a control system.

The concluding chapter highlights the points of
change as well as continuity among the Īḻavas of southern
Kerala, in the light of the materials discussed in the
previous chapters. From a theoretical point of view, it is
argued that the pattern of change and continuity is nothing
but a creative collision between the forces of tradition
and those of modernity.

Several people have contributed directly or
indirectly to the completion of this thesis. While only a
few are mentioned, I am deeply thankful to all of them,
particularly to the members of my Church and most of all my
parents.

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MALAYALAM

Vowels and diphthongs[1]

ആ	a		ൠ	ṟ
ആ	ā		ൟ	ḷ
്	ă[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	ററ	ṯṯa[4]				
മ	ma	ല	la				
		ള	ḷa				
		ഴ	ḻa				
		വ	va				

Anusvāra[5]		Visarga		Avagraha	
ം	ṃ	ഃ	ḥ	ഽ	'

[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 ഉ (ൗ), the combination is also transliterated by ă.

[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 ă) ; and
(c) when the following modified consonantal forms are used:

ക	k	ൻ	n	ൎ	l	ർ	r
ൺ	ṇ	ൽ	t	൦	ļ		

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

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

6 This paper is reproduced from the Library of Congress Bulletin, February 1964.

I   INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

        This dissertation is a study of change and

continuity in the religious life of some Īḻavas of southern

Kerala.[1] The main question which this dissertation is

designed to answer is: What are the patterns of change in

the life of this group of Īḻavas since 1900 and what role

did religion play in the transformations observed?

        This dissertation describes the place of the Īḻava

community in the Hindu society of southern Kerala. It also

examines the phases through which the community has passed

since 1900 and the role of religion in each phase. It

discusses the mechanisms of tradition, the forces and

direction of change and how changes are sustained. It will

also attempt to wrestle with the theoretical question as to

what patterns can be observed in the changes within the

Hindu community and in religious communities in general.

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        [1]The Malayalam semivowel ' ഴ ' has no English
equivalent. I am using 'ḻa' to denote it in this
dissertation. For the word Īḻava, others have used words
such as Izhava, Ezhava and Irava. By 'southern Kerala' I
mean the geographical division of the present Kerala State,
generally represented by old Vēṇāṭ of the 10th century,
consisting of the Tāluks of Quilon, Kottārakkara,
Chirayinkiḻ, Nedumangāṭ and Trivandrum.

1. Kerala and Her People

Kerala lies along the coast line of the Arabian Sea
on the southern peninsula of India, surrounded by Tamil
Nāṭu (Madras) in the south and east and Karṇāṭaka on the
north. It has a total area of about 38,863 sq. kms.
forming 1.04 percent of the total area of India.[1] Kerala
was formerly divided into three areas: Travancore, Cochin
and Malabar. The southern part of Kerala with which this
dissertation is concerned formed the old Vēṇāṭ and later
the Travancore State. The central part of Kerala, the old
Cochin State, was independent until Travancore and Cochin
were integrated as one unit on July 1, 1949. Malabar,
which was a part of the Madras Province until 1956, lies
north of Cochin. The reorganization of the States of India
on the basis of spoken language brought the Malayalam
speaking areas of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar into one
single State, Kerala, on November 1, 1956.

Three major religions divide the people - Hinduism,
Christianity and Islam. Twenty five million people living

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[1]Final Population Totals, Census of India 1981,
Series 10, Kerala, Paper 3, 1981, p.3. Also see George,
Simon A., ed., Simons Travel Guide-Kerala. Cochin: Simons
Printers and Publishers,1982, p.31.

MAP I

KERALA

1981

BOUNDARIES:
STATE/U.T. —
DISTRICT —
TALUK —

KASARAGOD

HOSDURG

CANNANORE

TALIPARAMBA

Cannanore

MANANTHODY

WYNAD

TELLICHERRY

MAHE
(PONDICHERRY)

KOZHIKODE
QUILANDY

Sultan's
BATTERY

Calicut

ERNAD

MALAPPURAM
Manjeri

Malappuram

PERINTALMANNA

MANNARGHAT

PALGHAT
PALGHAT
Palghat

OTTAPALAM
TALAPPILLY
Chittur-Thathamangalam

PONNANI

Wadakkancherry
ALATHUR

TRICHUR

CHAVAKAD

Trichur

CHITTUR

INDIA

Irinjalakuda

MUKUNDAPURAM

KUNNATHNAD

Perumbavoor

KODUNGALLUR

KOTHAMANGALAM

COCHIN

ERNAKULAM
DEVICOLAM

Cochin

KUNNATHUNAD

MUVATTUPUZHA

THODUPUZHA

IDUKKI
Idukki
Nedumkandam

METTACHOL
Peeri

UDUMBANCHOLA

SHERTALLAI

KOTTAYAM
Kottayam

AMBALAPUZHA
MEENACHIL

Alleppey
VAIKOM
CHANGANACHERRY
PEERMADE

Mancheda

THIRUVALLA
KANJIRAPPALLY

ALLEPPEY

CHENGANNUR

Harippa

MAVELIKARA
PATHANAMTHITTA

KARTHIKAPPALLY

THIRUVALLA

Adoor

KARUNAGAPPALLY

QUILON
Punalur

KOTTARAKARA

Quilon
PATHANAPURAM

Attingal

TRIVANDRUM

TRIVANDRUM

Neyyattinkara

★ STATE CAPITAL
● DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
○ TALUK HEADQUARTERS

WHEREVER THE NAME OF HEADQUARTERS DIFFERS
FROM THE NAME OF TALUK ITS HEADQUARTERS IS
WRITTEN IN ITALICS

East of Greenwich

MAP 1   ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS

with their tradition, culture, language, hopes and
aspirations constitute the Kerala society.

Table - 1. Major Religions in Kerala and India.[1]

	Total Population	Hindus %	Muslims %	Christians %
Kerala	25,453,680	58.15	21.25	20.56
India	665,287,849	82.64	11.35	2.43

According to the census of 1981, Christians
constitute 20.56 percent of the total population of
Kerala. They hold the tradition that St. Thomas, the
Apostle of Christ, came to Kerala in the first century
A.D. These St. Thomas Christians became prominent in the
field of trade and commerce. The Christians were treated
on a footing of equality with the upper caste Hindus.[2]

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[1]The figures given above are according to the
Census figures of 1981. Household Population by Religion
of Head of Household, Census of India 1981, Series-1,
India, Paper 3 of 1984, p. x-xi.

[2]The Savarnas (the first four castes in the
hierarchy) are generally called upper caste Hindus or

They held considerable areas of land and moved freely among the upper caste Hindus.[1]

Muslims constitute 21.25 percent of the total population of Kerala. It is probable that the Arab traders of the seventh and eighth centuries introduced Islam among the people of Kerala.[2] There is also a tradition that Cēramān Perumāl, the last of the Cēra Emperors of Kerala, became a convert to Islam and propagated that religion in the State. Though Muslims are few in southern Kerala, they are given respectable status by the Hindus.[3] Muslims were primarily interested in trade and commerce. The Mosque is the centre of all social and spiritual activities of the Muslim community. The majority of Muslims in Kerala are

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2 Continued simply Castes. "Christians and Muslims were regarded as Castes too, and they accepted such a status". Srinivas, M.N., Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India, 1952, p.31.

[1] Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1967, p.98.

[2] There has been considerable trade between Arabia and Kerala over the centuries.

[3] A good number of Muslims are in the Malabar area.

Sunnis and their religious observances conform to the Shafi Law.[1]

Hindus form 58.15 percent of the total population of Kerala. The traditional Hindu society was organized around the three great ideal structures: the four castes, the four stages of life and the four ends of mankind. The four castes consisted of the four varṇas or the hierarchy of the castes of Brāhman (priests), Kṣatriya (warriors), Vaiśya (merchants) and Śūdra (labourers). The four stages of life (āśrama) are those of brahmacārya (student), gṛhastha (householder), vānaprastha (forest dweller) and samnyāsa (renunciant). The four ends of human beings are dharma (righteousness), artha (prosperity), kāma (sensuous pleasures) and mokṣa (spiritual liberation). These remain the building blocks of Hindu society.

According to Hinduism, the religious experience of man takes its root in society. The task of man is to take this world seriously, mature here and reach out to the beyond (mokṣa). The 'ends' of humankind as described,

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., Cultural Heritage of Kerala: An Introduction, Cochin: East-West Publications, 1978, p.59.

above, find fulfilment in the individual and are related to his social life. <u>Karma</u>, the moral law of cause and effect by which one reaps what one sows, and <u>saṃsāra</u>, rebirth, combine to teach that the particular caste into which one is born is determined in the present by how one acts. A person has a definite place in the <u>saṃsāra</u> (cosmos). According to the great philosopher, Śankarācārya (eighth century A.D.) this role of man in the <u>saṃsāra</u> (according to his advaitic teaching and <u>māyā</u> concept) is only a stepping stone to the final realization. According to him the means of this spiritual liberation (freedom from the world of <u>avidyā</u>) is wisdom (<u>vidyā</u>). In his religious quest for liberation man takes into account the society about him.

Society is part of the larger order and has two functions: to maintain order in the face of chaos and to provide ways and means for the individual to move forward to the ultimate realization (spiritual liberation) that <u>ātman</u> (individual self) is <u>Brahman</u> (universal self). In Indian society the former is fulfilled by the political order and the latter by the social and moral order.

Traditionally the caste order determined the function of society, the āśrama system provided man with a pattern of development through his life and the 'ends' of man gave him purpose and direction.

The four fold caste division of the Hindu community (mentioned above) as defined by Manu is not prevalent in Kerala.[1] The role of the merchant community is performed largely by Christians and Muslims. In Kerala the Brāhmans, Kṣatriyas and Nāirs are called the caste Hindus (savarṇas). The other Hindus are called the outcastes (avarṇas) or the Backward Communities.

The Brāhmans were traditionally at the apex of the social hierarchy of Kerala. Among them pre-eminence belonged to the Brāhmans of Kerala who were known as Nambūtiris. According to Thurston, the traditional view of a Nambūtiri is:

> His person is holy; his directions
> command; his movements are a procession;

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[1]Manu is the mythical figure believed to have given Dharma Śāstra (ethical codes and caste duties) for the people of India.

his meals nectar; he is the holiest of
human beings, the representative of God on
earth.[1]

Although their numbers were not very great, the Nambūtiris

dominated the social scene. Most of the temples and a

considerable portion of the land formerly belonged to

them. They interpreted the Hindu Scriptures and the Sacred

Law. They had authority over all religious ceremonies and

practices. Some of them became counsellors or ministers in

the State.

The Nambūtiris are patrilineal and followed the

makkattāyam system of inheritance.[2] Until the beginning of

this century only the eldest son was permitted to marry

from the Nambūtiri caste. This resulted in a situation

where a majority of the Brāhman women had to live as

spinsters. The other male members of the family had

liasons (Saṃbandham) with women of the lower castes.[3]

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[1]Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India,
V., Madras: Government Press, 1909. p.160. See also Adrian
C. Mayer., Land and Society in Malabar, London: Oxford
University Press, 1952, p.26.

[2]The system of inheritance from father to son is
called makkattayam.

[3]Sambandham was legally abolished only by the
Nambūtiri Act of 1933. See Peter, Prince H.R.H., A Study of
Polyandry, The Hague: Mouton and Co.,1963, pp.167-168.

As a result, the Brāhman population remained relatively low.

In Kerala, the Kṣatriyas were only a minority and they were generally counted along with the Brāhmans. The Nāirs were considered the Śūdras of Kerala. The traditional functions of the Kṣatriyas were shared by the Nāirs. They were hereditarily regarded as men who fight for the regional leaders. They provided the militia of the State. The frequent wars with the neighbouring Cōla kingdom in the eleventh century brought the Nāirs into prominence. But later on when the war was over the military gymnasiums called Kaḷaris, where boys had military training, had no further function. With the disbanding of the hereditary militia by the British in 1802 the Nāirs turned to agriculture.

The social organization of the Nāirs was based on matrilineal descent (marumakkattāyam system of inheritance) and they lived in a joint-family system with impartible family properties.[1] They were allied by a system of

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[1]Mother had a prominent place in the matrilineal system and her elder brother was called Kāraṇavan. The adult female members were married in sambandham but their husbands did not reside there. Likewise the wives of the male members of Nāir joint family did not stay there.

marriage with the Nambūtiris. According to this system the
Nambūtiri men could have conjugal relationships
(saṃbandhams) with the Nāir women, but the Nāir men could
not with the Nambūtiri women. The Nāir women practised
polyandry with the inheritance of property through the
female line. The visiting husbands undertook no obligation
towards their wives and children.

Although the Nambūtiris had the privilege of
education, when the Government schools were started early
in the nineteenth century the Nambūtiris refused to send
their children to these schools. The Nāirs on the other
hand were quick to get their children educated there (as
were the Christians). The other castes were not permitted
in these government schools.[1] A few educated Nāirs entered
the administration towards the end of the nineteenth
century.

The out-caste groups were considered polluting and
therefore untouchable. Among the untouchable communities
the Īḷavas constituted the uppermost layer and they were

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[1]Even in 1910 there were only 976 Brāhman boys in
the government schools. First time a Brahman girl entered
school was in 1911. See Lemercinier G., _Religion and
Ideology in Kerala_, New Delhi: D.K.Agencies (P) Ltd., 1984,
p.270.

in this sense next below the Nāirs.[1] The Īḻavas were bound

together as a community and differentiated from other caste

groups by their own mode of religious worship and

practice. Since they were segregated from the other

segments of society, they had their own temples and

religious leaders. The well known story of Ārōmal Cēvakar,

a hero of the sixteenth century shows that there were Īḻava

families who had an important role in martial history.[2]

However, the great majority lived as agricultural

labourers, builders, petty traders and bullock-cart

drivers. In the southern areas of Travancore their

occupation was mainly weaving and rearing of coconut

trees. However, some of the Īḻavas were Āyurvedic

physicians who had knowledge of Sanskrit.

The Īḻavas practised a mixed system of inheritance

with some using a matrilineal system like the Nāirs and

others a patrilineal code.[3] The educated and the

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[1]Īḻavas were said to pollute a Nambūtiri from 36
paces and a Nāir from 12. Jeffrey Robin., The Decline of
Nayar Dominance, London: Sussex University Press, 1976,
p.21.

[2]Aiyappan,A., Social Revolution in a Kerala
Village, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965, p.119.

[3]Ilavas of certain areas followed the matrilineal
system of inheritance. Robin Jeffrey notes that the Ilavas
in the areas of Southern Quilon followed a mixed system of
inheritance. Jeffrey, Robin., The Decline of Nayar
Dominance, 1976, p.21.

adventurous among the Iḻavas became in course of time
landlords. In recent times some of the educated Iḻavas go
outside the State seeking employment. In 1970 the Backward
Class Reservation Commission of Kerala reported that the
population of Iḻavas was 4,457,808. This is about 35.15
percent of the Hindu population of Kerala.

At the bottom of Hindu social hierarchy below the
Iḻavas are the communities now generally called Scheduled
Castes and Scheduled Tribes. According to the census
figures of 1981 there are 68 Scheduled Castes and 35
Scheduled Tribes in Kerala. Traditionally, they were the
servants of the higher castes. Although they live in close
interdependence with the higher castes, many areas of life
were considered inaccessible to these people. They used to
live segregated in their own settlements which were often
some distance from the residential quarters of the caste
Hindus. Even more than the Iḻavas these people were
considered untouchable and unapproachable.[1]

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[1]The laws regarding the pollution distance
(unapproachability: one caste must stay away from another,
a system, a unique variant to Kerala) were abolished only
in 1936 in Travancore and 1947 in Cochin.

2. The Īḻava Movement

As mentioned earlier, Īḻavas had been traditionally
considered outcastes. It was on this outcaste status that
all religious, social and economic discrimination against
them was founded. Īḻavas could not enter the temples of
the higher castes or approach anywhere near them because
they were considered to be a source of pollution. The
right to enter the temples, especially those State owned
temples which were supported with tax monies, therefore,
became a central and symbolic concern to them.

The most important of the many courses of action
undertaken by the Īḻava community for the amelioration of
their condition was the one guided by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru
(1856-1928). He broke the monopoly of the Brāhmans with
regard to religious authority when he installed a Śiva
image at Aruvippuram near Trivandrum in 1888. In addition
to his consecration of temples at different parts of
Kerala, Nārāyaṇa Guru advocated several reforms among the
Īḻavas to give them greater respect within the larger
society. His reforms were based on religion. He rejected
the distinctions of caste. He organized the Īḻavas into

the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Paripālana Yōgam (SNDP Yōgam) in
1903. By the turn of this century they had attained a
sufficient level of social consciousness, identity and
ambition, that they could launch large scale agitations for
the removal of inequalities. The continuous effort of the
elite members of the community over the following decades
eventually brought them the status that they have now in
Kerala society. Today the Īḻavas have a significant role
in the politics of Kerala and they hold a key position in
shaping the future of Kerala society.

3. Change and Continuity

This dissertation discusses the response of the
Īḻavas to the challenge of change both in responding to the
reformation of Nārāyaṇa Guru and to the continuing
leadership of the elite members of the community. In
participating in this process of change they did not lose
their identity. They considered the possibility of
becoming Christians or Buddhists, but did not, nor did they
attempt to claim the status of the Nāirs or Brāhmans.
Instead they remained Īḻavas and fought for their freedom
and equality in terms of that identity. For centuries, the

Īḻavas were economically backward, socially outcaste and
politically insignificant. But in the course of the last
few decades, the Īḻavas made history by their progress
economically, socially and politically. In the course of
this overall progress, religion played a vital role in
keeping the community united and clear in its goals.

A society does not accept new norms all of a
sudden. The process is bound to be gradual and usually
takes an even slower pace in rural areas. In Kerala, the
new and old temples of the Īḻavas continue side by side -
one increasing in importance and the other diminishing.
The continuity with the past can be seen today in the
attitudes of the older people who seek to maintain
traditional religious customs and practices. The process
of change is also evident as the young Īḻavas offer
vegetarian food, flowers and incense in their temples even
while the older people continue some form of the
traditional sacrifices.

From the time of Nārāyaṇa Guru, a significant
reformation was taking place among the Ilavas of southern

Kerala. A critical study of this process of change is the purpose of this dissertation.

4. The Field Work

Murukkumpula, a suburban area of Trivandrum District, was selected for field work . A research study was conducted from July 1984 to August 1985. The work was started by contacting the Ward member of the local Panchayat and gathering some initial demographic, economic and social data. Out of the total of 414 families in the Ward, 340 families were interviewed in their residences by means of a set questionnaire. By residing in the Ward for the entire period, I observed the attitudes and opinions regarding religious practices, interpersonal relations, rituals and ceremonies in a variety of ways. To gain an outside perspective, interviews of 23 families in the neighbouring Wards were also conducted.

The traditional social structure of the region was still visible in the old temples, houses, public buildings and geographical arrangement of the area. As a participant observer, I was free to collect data on both the past and present of people living in the area. This has helped me

to analyse in detail the process of change and the forces
of continuity which operate among the Īḻavas in the Ward.

5. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed not only to ask the
residents about the changes in their personal, family and
village life but also to identify the religious, economic,
social and political changes of the area. It included
specific questions designed to identify the changes in
their religious practices and sacraments and to understand
the influence of their caste leaders in bringing about the
social emancipation. The data gathered has helped me to
describe in detail the overall process of change and the
interrelations of the various changes which have taken
place in the lives of the Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa during
this century.

6. Theoretical Considerations

There are a variety of theories that have been used
to characterize the social changes that have been taking
place in India since the beginning of this century. The
best known theory which has been used to explain religious

change in India is 'Sanskritization'. This concept was first used by M.N. Srinivas in his book, <u>Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India</u> (1952). In this book he explained the caste system as a five fold hierarchy with the Brāhmans at the top, followed in order by the Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Śūdras and lastly the Untouchables.[1] In his study of the Coorgs in Mysore he noted that the lower castes, in order to raise their position in the caste hierarchy, adopted customs of the Brāhmans. To denote this process of change Srinivas used the term Sanskritization.

> A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called 'Sanskritization', as certain

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[1] The first three castes Brāhmans (Priestly class), Kṣatriyas (Warrior Class) and Vaiśyas (traders) are called 'twice-born' (dvija) as they alone are entitled to undergo the ceremony of <u>Upanayana</u> which constitutes spiritual rebirth. Traditionally only they were allowed to study the Vedas.

Vedic rites are confined to Brahmins and
the two other twice-born castes.[1]

Here Srinivas defined Sanskritization as the
tendency among the lower castes to imitate the Brāhmanical
customs and manners in order to move higher in the caste
hierarchy. He made his concept more explicit in the
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture he gave during May
1963. He said:

>   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. Generally such
> changes are followed by a claim to a
> higher position in the caste hierarchy
> than that traditionally conceded to the
> claimant caste by the local community.[2]

According to this definition, mobility results in
positional changes without effecting any structural change
to the caste system. He adds:

>   Sanskritization is generally
> accompanied by and often results in, upward

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[1]Srinivas, M.N., Religion and Society among the
Coorgs in   South India, New York: Asia Publishing House,
1952, p.30.

[2]Srinivas, M.N., Social Change in Modern India, Los
Angeles: University of California Press, 1966, p.6.

> mobility for the caste in question; but
> mobility may also occur without Sanskriti-
> zation 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 moves 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.[1]

The socio-cultural process which Srinivas has in
mind is one in 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 the main purpose of Srinivas in using the special
term Sanskritization was to draw attention to the special
process of socio-cultural change which goes on in a
caste-based society in which part of the change involves
lower castes' attempt to upgrade themselves by taking over
a way of life derived from prestigious Sanskrit-based
traditions. This concept is, however, not adequate to

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[1]Metcalf, Thomas R. ed., Modern India - An
Interpretive Anthology, London: The Macmillan co., 1971,
p.114.

interpret fully the movement one finds among the Īḻavas of Kerala.

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.[1]

This humanitarianism has resulted in many administrative efforts to found schools and hospitals. The British-Western initiatives resulted in a reinterpretation

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[1]Srinivas M.N., Social Change in Modern India, 1966, p.48.

of Hinduism at both the ideological and institutional

levels. The principle of equality found expression in the

abolition of caste subordination and in the opening of

public institutions to all irrespective of religion and

caste.

Srinivas, however, discusses how even

Westernization operated within the caste structure. He says:

> The net result of 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 super-
> imposed 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.[1]

The result of Westernization was therefore often like

Sanskritization in that it involved the use of the same

caste structure but brought about a change of position of

the caste groups. In this sense Westernization like

Sanskritization remains an inadequate concept to explain

the mobility of the Īḻavas.

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[1]Srinivas M.N., Caste in Modern India and Other
Essays, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.51.

Owen M. Lynch argues that both Sanskritization and Westernization are of limited utility for the appraisal of social mobility in India.[1] 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 social mobility involving structural change.[2] When a caste such as the Īḷavas questions the very concept of caste hierarchy and opts for political participation to attain a new status, both concepts -Sanskritization and Westernization- fail to explain that mobility.

Milton Singer in his anthropological approach to Indian civilization uses the concept of modernization.[3]

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[1]See Singer, Milton., and Cohn, Bernard.S., eds., Structure and Change in Society, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970, p.209

[2]Social change occurs when there is an alteration in the basic pattern of social organization. See Thomas, Annamma and T.M., Kerala Immigrants in America, Cochin: Simons Printers, 1984, p.12.

[3]See Eisenstadt,S.N.,Modernization: Protest and Change, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc. 1966 and Levy, Marion J., Modernization and the Structure of Societies, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1966. Modernity has a wider connotation than modernization which is generally discussed in economic and political terms.

Using the word 'modernity' to denote the process of change

he states:

> 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.[1]

Modernity indicates linear change or progress: both

spiritual and material. This does not necessarily mean a

change toward the type of society found in advanced

industrial nations. The modern world is a recreation by

men, of that given by nature. In this human act

(recreation) freedom, purpose and spirit go together. In a

living religious tradition, change is inevitable. A change

that affects the tradition in the sense that it entails

modification in terms of a wider perspective can be

regarded as a sign of modernity.[2] According to Ganguly:

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

[2]Ibid., p.404.

> Modernity consists in modifying
> the existing traditions and creating room
> for new and better traditions. In a different
> terminology, modernity helps enrich our
> existing value-orientation in terms of new
> values that assure us of a smooth progress
> towards an image fulfilment.[1]

The concept 'modern' involves a sense that history is moving in a particular direction, but it must be borne in mind that modernity is not a goal but a process in which people participate. It is dynamic and gives meaning to the participants. It transforms human life and society from what it has been to what it could be. Therefore as Wilfred Cantwell Smith says: "Modernity is a quality of acting and choosing, a quality of self-conscious control and direction of one's own destiny".[2]

There is an erroneous notion that tradition and modernity are in opposite camps. The conflict between tradition and modernity is only apparent. They are dialectically related to each other forming the vital

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[1]Ganguly, S.N., Tradition, Modernity and Development, Delhi: MacMillan Company of India, 1977, p.52.

[2]Smith, Wilfred Cantwell., Religious Diversity, New York: Cross road, 1982, p.77.

components of a continuous process.[1] Tradition is not

merely a custom but a pattern of behaviour which is dynamic

and actively upheld with admiration. In this sense,

tradition is living, and serves as the starting point for

modernity.[2] It offers a plan or order in terms of which

one legitimizes one's actions in the middle of situational

flux. According to Ganguly, "A modern man is not without

traditions but on the contrary, a man with richer

traditions".[3] The working of one's creative imagination on

traditions in the evershifting present defines the true

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[1]Milton Singer and David S. Mandelbaum 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. See Milton Singer's book When a Great Tradition Modernizes, 1972, David S. Maudelbaum's Society in India, 1970 and Rudolph, Lloyd.I. and Susanne H., The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

[2]Shah, A.B. and Rao, G.R.M., Tradition and Modernity, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1965, p.16.

[3]Ganguly, S.N., Tradition, Modernity and Development, Delhi: MacMillan Company of India, 1977, p.52.

nature of modernity.[1] In this sense modernity is also living and present in society. It is also transcendent in the sense that it points toward a realization of the future in terms of a new concept of tradition.

The process of change among the Īḻavas of southern Kerala had been gradual. It had an even slower pace in the rural areas of Kerala. This Īḻava Movement was a purposeful reformation of their tradition. It was an experimentation with innovative changes where the individuals exercised freedom and purpose. It was a meaningful incorporation of changes into their indigenous culture. In this reformation there is a process of selection, interpretation and integration going on as will be seen in the following chapters. This process of change among the Īḻavas is an example of what Singer called modernization.

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[1]According to Heesterman, J.C., "Successful modernity does not mean the supersession of tradition or the super imposition on it on a different order". The Inner Conflict of Tradition, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1985, p.25.

II. THE ĪLAVAS OF SOUTHERN KERALA PRIOR TO THE 19TH CENTURY

THE ĪḺAVAS OF SOUTHERN KERALA PRIOR TO THE 19TH CENTURY

Tradition ascribes the origin of caste in Kerala to

Paraśurāma, the reputed leader of the first Brāhman

colony.[1] According to the tradition "the mythical Brāhman

hero Paraśurāma reclaimed the land of Kerala from the

Arabian sea and made a gift of it to the Brāhmans whom he

brought from outside".[2] Each caste in Kerala was

restricted as to its social behaviour and personal style of

life. According to J.H. Hutton:

> ... a caste system is one whereby
> a society is divided up into a number of
> self-contained and completely segregated
> units (castes), the mutual relations
> between which are ritually determined
> in a graded scale.[3]

The pattern of associating certain occupations with

certain castes and of prohibiting inter-marriage and

inter-dining between castes was carefully observed in

Kerala before the nineteenth century. A man born into a

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[1]Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India,
V, 1909, pp.152-154.

[2]Ravindran,T.K., Institution and Movements in
Kerala History, Trivandrum: Charitram Publications, 1978,
p.11.

[3]Hutton, J.H., Caste in India, London: Oxford
University Press, Fourth Edition, 1963, p.50.

caste, regardless of his personal character, remained in
that caste and his pattern of behaviour was predetermined
by society. The individual had no choice with regard to
his function in the world. Hindus of each caste in
southern Kerala lived in complete segregation from other
castes. In addition to the many castes, there was a
bewildering variety of subcastes within each caste, each of
the subcastes having its own rank in the social scale.

For centuries southern Kerala had a set of
customs, traditions and conventions that went under the
name of Maryāda, Ācāra or Mārga. These conventions were
sanctified by the Nambutiris by creating certain legal
myths, the most important of which was the Parasurama
tradition.[1] The Ācāras (practices) and legal codes framed
by these Brahmans had to be observed scrupulously by all
the castes and communities in southern Kerala.[2] These laws
took the form of regulations and practices regarding
untouchability, unapproachability and unperceivability.
Prescriptions set out the 'polluting distance' from each
caste and this legally backed unapproachability constituted

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[1]Ibid., p.112.

[2]Ravidran, T.K., Institutions and Movements in
Kerala History, 1978, p.41.

the most obvious social disability of the lower castes and

the legal framework of social oppression which the

reformers would have to fight.

> Francis Day, writing in 1868,
> says that an Ilavan must keep 30 paces
> from a Brahman and 12 from a Nayar, while
> a Kaniyan [astrologer caste] pollutes a
> Namboodiri Brahman at 24 ft. and a Nayar
> by touch.[1]

This concept of pollution led to peculiar behaviour
patterns.[2] 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
> standardized.[3]

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[1]Quoted by Hutton, J.H., Caste in India, 1963, p.80. Also see Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, V, 1909, p.196.

[2]A vivid picture of the society is given by O.Chandu Menon in his novel Indulekha.

[3]Aiyappan, A., Social Revolution in a Kerala Village, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965, p.85.

The higher caste Hindus could not permit the lower castes
to approach them without feeling themselves polluted.
According to custom, a polluted person had to take a bath
for purification. Those who ignored this tradition were
degraded from their rank and not readmitted to their
group. The higher castes were therefore careful to keep
away from the lower castes.

> 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.[1]

The majority of the outcastes, including the Īḻavas, were
thus driven away from the public roads and public places to
which they had no access in the presence of caste Hindus.

> Over the centuries the rigours
> and rigidities of the caste system became
> etched more and more deeply in the social
> life of Kerala manifesting in the triple
> evils of untouchability, unapproachability

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History,
1967, pp 261

and unseeability perpetuated towards the
lower castes.[1]

1. The Īḻavas of Southern Kerala

Īḻavas are a very wide-spread community on the
Kerala coast. They are distributed over a vast area and
have corresponding cultural differences. The cultural
areas with the local names for the various subgroups can be
tabulated as follows:

a) Northern Matrilineal	(i) Tīyas	North Malabar
b) Central Patrilineal	(ii) Īḻava	South Malabar
	(iii) Taṇṭāns	South Malabar & North Malabar
	(iv) Īḻava Paṇikkars	North Malabar
c) Southern Matrilineal	(v) Cōva	Southern Cochin & North Travancore
	(vi) Īḻava	Travancore

The Īḻavas of southern Kerala (Travancore) are divided into
three subsections called Pāccilli, Pāṇḍi and Malayalam.
The Pāccilli Īḻavas live in an area called Pāccalur south

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of Trivandrum. The Pāṇḍis are largely found in Trivandrum and Chirayinkil tāluks.[1] The Malayalam Īḻavas are found scattered over southern Kerala and are divided into four exogamous groups named Muṭṭillam, Paḷḷichal, Mayyanāṭṭi and Chōḷi.[2] The Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa are Malayalam Īḻavas.

Historians of Kerala are finding it difficult to trace the origin of the Īḻava community of southern Kerala as there are no valid historical records referring to them until about the 9th century A.D. The etymology of the word 'Īḻava' seems to indicate that they were immigrants from Śrī Laṅkā.[3] 'Īḻavan' signifies one that belongs to Īḻam' which is the ancient name of 'Śrī Laṅkā'. Jaffna is especially known by the name of 'Īḻam' and from that place the Īḻavas are believed to have originally proceeded to the Kerala coast. According to Thurston, the Īḻavas are supposed to derive their caste name from Īḻa dvīpa (Īḻa island) or Sinhala dvīpa, both denoting Śrī Laṅkā. The

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[1]Thurston,E., Caste and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.394.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Iyer, Anantha Krishna., The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, Madras: Government of Cochin, 1909, p.277.

Madras Census report of 1871 also supports this
assumption.[1] One legend says:

> 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.[2]

Another myth is found recorded in the Mackenzie

Collection of manuscripts in the Madras Oriental

Manuscripts Library. The purport of this myth is to exalt

the Īlavas by giving them a divine origin from the God Śiva

and Gāndharva women.

> The nymphs were bathing in a stream
> one winter morning and Siva enamoured by the
> bathers' charm enticed them by transforming
> himself in a fire. They came and sat around
> the fire to warm themselves and the repro-
> ductive fire of 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

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[1] Thurston, E., _Castes and Tribes of Southern India_,
VII, 1909, p.38.

[2] Aiyappan, A., _Iravas and Culture Change_, Madras:
Bulletin of Madras Government Museum, 1945, p.16.

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.[1]

L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer has another version:

In a Tamil puranic work, there
is the mention of the name of a king
Illa of Ceylon, who went to Chidambaram,
where a religious discussion took place
between the Buddhist priests and the
Saivite devotee Manichiavachakar in the
presence of king Illa and Chola and that
finally king Illa was converted to the
Saivite faith. His descendants
are known as the 'Illavans'...[2]

Thurston indicates that in the nineteenth century State

Legislation of Travancore kept the Īḻavas in a position of

social inferiority and treated them as unlettered and

uncultured.[3]

The planting of coconut and the manufacture of

various articles from it had been the monopoly of Īḻavas

from ancient times.

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[1]Ibid., p.17.

[2]Iyer, Anantha Krishna. L.K., The Cochin Tribes and
Castes, I, 1909, p.279.

[3]Thurston, E., Caste and Tribes of Southern India,
VII, 1909, p.38

> 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.[1]

With the advance of culture, many Īḻavas gave up the occupation of extracting liquor from the coconut palm. From early times, agriculture remained a prominent profession among them. There were several wealthy and influential landlords in that community and a fair percentage remained agricultural labourers. There were weavers in the southern region who produced several kinds of cloth and made mats, tiles and ropes with remarkable skill. There were several Sanskrit scholars some of whom specialized in medicine and astrology. One of the native physicians, Iṭṭi-Achutan, assisted in the composition of the Dutch botanical monumental work in twelve volumes (1608-1703) called the Hortus Malabaricus.[2]

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[1] Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.393.

[2] Woodcock, George., Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast, London: Faber and Faber, 1967, p.163.

Īlavas were also employed as soldiers along with
Nāirs by the rulers of Kerala in the middle ages. They
were given titles such as Chānnān and Panikkan. The grant
of 824 A.D mentions that Īlavas had headmen. Historical
records mention that the King of Purakkat had Īlava forces
under him.[1]

> Even so late as the days of
> Maharaja Rama Varma, who died in 973 M.E.
> [1797 A.D.] large numbers of Izhavas were
> employed as soldiers of the state, if we
> may believe the account of Friar Bartolomeo
> [Voyage to the East Indies] who is
> generally a very accurate writer.[2]

In southern Travancore Īlavas used to divide themselves
into two groups during the Ōnam festival (in September) and
exercised the war lessons they learnt in kalaris or
military academies. According to Thurston any young man
who did not participate in that camp exercise was led in a
procession thrice around the village and transported to the
sea-coast.[3] He also noted that in a room of the ancient

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[1]Ibid., Chānnān and Panikkan are titles conferred
upon distinguished members of the Īlavas as a family honour
by some of the ancient sovereigns of Travancore.

[2]Ibid., p.394.

[3]Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India,
II,1909,p.397

prominent families of Īḻavas antique weapons and images of tutelary divinities were carefully preserved.

A distinguishing feature of the social organization of Kerala until recent times was the presence of both the makkattāyam and the marumakkattāyam system of inheritance among certain castes and communities. Among the Īḻavas south of Quilon in southern Kerala, a mixture of these two systems was used. According to this mixed mode, one's own children were not left absolutely destitute.

> The issues of parents governed by
> different systems of law are entitled to
> their father's property in accordance with
> the rules of makkattayam and to the property
> of the mother's taravad in accordance with
> the law of marumakkattayam.[1]

2. Religion in the Family

Traditionally the marriage of Īḻava girls consisted of two distinct rights, one before they attained puberty, called tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam (auspicious event of tāli tying) and the other generally after puberty called puṭavakoṭa

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[1] Iyer, Anantha Krishna, L.K., The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, 1909. p.302.

(giving the cloth).[1] The boy who tied the tāli could be any one but the future husband had to give a cloth in a formal ceremony in order to complete the rite of marriage. Traditionally the bride would be either the maternal uncle's or paternal aunt's daughter. Customarily, there was also a ceremony for the wedded couple entering the house of the bridegroom. In all cases, unlike Nāirs and Brāhmans, the Īḻava husband took his wife home and she stayed with him there. In some parts of southern Kerala a man could marry his deceased brother's wife. Fraternal polyandry (several brothers having a single woman) was practiced by some Īḻavas. There were ceremonies called Tiraṇtukuḷi (puberty-rite) when a girl attained puberty and Puḷikuṭi (tasting tamarind juice) when a girl became pregnant.[2]

In the former times, when death occurred in a family, only the eldest male member was cremated and others were buried. When a member died there was a ceremony

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[1]These ceremonies are explained in chapter VII.

[2]These ceremonies are explained later.

involving the placing of three handfuls of rice in the mouth of the corpse called <u>vaikkari</u>. Every relative had to throw an unbleached cloth (kōṭi) over the corpse. The death pollution (<u>pula</u>) was traditionally observed for fifteen days after which the family members were purified by the priest of the Īḷavas.

A woman was under pollution after giving birth to a child, during menstruation and after a death of a member of her family. The pollution was removed at the end of a prescribed period by receiving a clean cloth from the washer-woman and giving in exchange her own cloth to be washed. If this was not done, she remained an out-caste.

The headmen of the Īḷava caste who were called Chānnāns and Paṇikkans were invested with these titles by the Sovereign of the State. The limits of their jurisdiction were generally fixed in the Charters received from their rulers and their authority remained supreme in all social matters. Caste offences were brought to their attention by the village barber or the washerman. If on enquiry an offence was proved, a fine was imposed on the offender. If the offence was grave, a feast was given by the offender to all the villagers. In case the offender

failed to satisfy, all the services of the village priest, washerman, and barber were refused and the offender became ostracised from society.

3. Temple Worship

The Īḻava temples were generally low, thatched buildings. They included a front porch, a good deal of wooden railing and carving, an enclosure wall and a grove. Members of their own caste served as priests in their temples. The deity usually worshipped was Kāḷi, who was believed to help them in their military undertakings. Koṭuṅgallūr Bhagavati was the customary cult object of the caste and was zealously adored by the Īḻavas. A grand festival called <u>Kumbham Bharaṇi</u> was held in March when they offered roosters to Bhagavati and asked for immunity from disease.[1] Īḻava women conducted a ceremony called <u>Dēśakuruti</u>. For this women fasted and took food to the temple. After the sacrifice of a goat or rooster by the priest, the women made the offering of the food to the deity. The Īḻava concept of the supernatural often embraced the spirits of ancestors. Although the Īḻavas

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[1]<u>Ibid</u>., p.238.

could not enter the temples of the higher castes, they

worshipped the deities standing outside the temples and

leaving their offerings there.

They worshipped Śāstā (a hill deity) along with the

higher castes.[1] It was popularly believed that Śāstā went

with sword in his hand over hills and dales to clear the

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[1]Śāstā or Ayyappan is worshipped by all castes in
Kerala. He is more revered and feared by the lower castes
in rural parts. He is believed to be born as a result of
the union of Hari and Hara. It is popularly believed that
he rides with sword in his hand over hills and dales to
clear the country of all obnoxious spirits. There is
hardly any place in the rural parts of southern Kerala
where a shrine is not seen dedicated to the worship of
Śāstā.

The temple at Śabarimala is considered very sacred
and all Hindus of Kerala are fond of making a yearly
pilgrimage. These pilgrims undertake certain austerities
for forty one days and prefer to wear blue or black
clothes. As a culmination of their vṛta, the devotees
wearing a Tulsi or Rudrākṣa garland begin their pilgrimage
carrying a cotton bag (with two compartments) called
Irumuṭi. The pilgrims, with Irumuṭi on their head cover
the entire distance shouting 'Svāmiye Śaranam Ayyappa'.
They climb the steep and slippery mountain of Nilgiris of
the Western Ghats, popularly known as Śabarimala. The
temple is at a moderately high level in the thick forest
and pilgrims climb the eighteen steep granite steps to
reach the temple and to offer their oblations. All the
Hindus, including the Īḻavas, consider the pilgrimage
sacred and believe that such worship averts all diseases,
drives away all demons and helps the yearly monsoons.

See Payyappan, Lord Ayyappan, Bombay: Bharatiya
Vidya Bhavan, 1973, p.48ff and Iyer, Anantha Krishna L.K.,
The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, 1909, p.313.

country of all obnoxious spirits. The Īlavas like other

Hindus conducted yearly pilgrimages by foot to Śāśtā

(Ayyappan) in Śabarimala (a mountain on the Western Ghats)

after observing forty one days of Vṛta (penance).

Tūkkam (garuṭa tūkkam or kite-swinging) was another

propitiatory ceremony that they performed in fulfilment of

a vow to obtain some favour of the deity Kāḷi.

> The performer of the ceremony
> should bathe early in the morning, and
> be in a state of preparation either for
> an year or for forty one days by
> worshipping the deity Bhagavati. He must
> strictly abstain from meat, all kinds
> of intoxicating liquors and association
> with women.[1]

During the morning hours, the man under vow, dressed

himself in a garment tucked into the waist band, rubbed his

body with oil and was shampooed particularly on the back, a

portion of the flesh in the middle of which was stretched

for the insertion of a hook. This tūkkam was performed in

front of Kāḷi. For this ceremony, a kind of car, resting

on two axles provided with four wheels was used. A strong

rope attached to a beam was connected with the hook which

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[1] Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.402.

passed through the flesh of the back. Over the beam there
was a kūtāram (tent) inside which two or three persons
could swing at a time.

> For kite swinging, the performer
> has his face painted green. He has to
> put on artificial lips and wings in
> imitation of those of the kite, and
> wears long locks of hair like those of
> an actor in a Kathakali. As he swings,
> the car is taken three, five, seven, nine
> or eleven times round the temple.[1]

Pillayetuttu-Tūkkam was a kind of swinging with a
child by the swinger in fulfilment of a vow. The child was
first taken to the temple authorities. The child was then
handed over to the swinger, who carried the child as he
went round the temple. During the festival, all those who
participated in the tūkkam were fed in the temple.

The Ilavas of Travancore paid homage to a spirit
called Kāyalil Daivam or the deity of the backwaters.
Serpent-worship was also common among the Ilavas of
southern Kerala. Carved granite stones representing the
figures of hooded serpents were seen in the groves.

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[1]Ibid., p.403.

>   Leprosy, itch, barreness of women,
> death of children, frequent appearance of
> snakes in gardens, and all other calamities
> are believed to be brought about by, and
> set down to, the anger of the serpents.[1]

The dead ancestor was supposed to become a deified spirit to protect the living members of the family. Iḷavas invoked the aid of their ancestors by offerings in times of sickness and other calamities. Neglect in the performance of the regular ancestral rites was supposed to invite all sorts of miseries on the members of the family.

>   It is also believed that the order
> of the demons were formerly human souls,
> to which proper funeral rites had not been
> given after burial, and hence they are
> supposed to wreak vengeance on the living.
> The spirits of men or women, who die of
> cholera, small-pox, child-birth, or who
> die by committing suicide, wreak vengeance
> on the living and cause misfortunes
> (pretha badha) to their families, and
> these spirits are always looked upon
> with fear.[2]

The Iḷavas performed Śrāddha regularly by giving offerings to the departed spirits of their ancestors.

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[1] Iyer, Anantha Krishna. L.K., The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, 1909, p.321.

[2] Ibid., pp.319-320.

> In every house a room containing
> a few images of their ancestors is set
> apart for such religious purposes.
> [Sraddha]. Once every year, they perform
> the Sraddha at which boiled rice, plantain
> fruits, coconuts, and parched rice [malar],
> are served on a plantain leaf with a lamp
> lighted in front of it, and they pray, "May
> ye, ancestors, take this and protect us."
> Saying this, they close the room and all
> come out, with the belief that the spirits
> would come and take them. After some time,
> they open the door and distribute the
> offerings among the inmates of the house.[1]

It was believed that one who gave to the deceased ancestors
the regular offerings followed by worship to the greater
deities was rewarded by merit and happiness.

Certain Īḷava houses had a southern room erected
mainly to perpetuate the memory of some deceased member of
the family. A pīṭha or seat, a conch, a cane and a small
bag containing ashes were kept there. It was kept
scrupulously free from pollution and worship was offered on
fixed days to the ancestors.

Some of the minor demons whom the Īḷavas worshipped
were Mātan, Maṛuta and Rakṣas. Certain other local deities
were also worshipped according to the local traditions.

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[1] Ibid., p.320. Śrāddha is a ceremony in honour and
for the benefit of the dead relatives.

The priest, who was also the barber, and his wife play an important role in all the ceremonies performed by the caste-men. This priest was called Ambaṭṭan in southern Kerala.

4. Privileges Denied

Īḻavas were considered as a polluting caste and were kept away from all public places and temples where the upper castes had access. As a result the Īḻavas had a low social status and most of them remained poorly educated until the middle of the 19th century.

In the traditional classification of the castes, the Īḻavas were included at the top of the polluting castes.

> ... 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
> four fold caste system; and measures were
> taken to maintain the appropriate degree
> of social distance.[1]

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[1]Ayyappan, A., A Social Revolution in a Kerala Village, 1965, p.121.

The Īḷavas were thus regarded as polluting the Nāirs and other higher castes.

> 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 Ilava
> could come up to the outergate.[1]

Īḷavas were relegated to the lower positions in society and subjected to gross social disabilities. The higher castes treated them contemptuously and owned them in a kind of servitude.

> Very often, being the managers
> and tax-collectors of temples and Brahmin
> landlords, they (Nairs) were arrogant,
> proud and oppressive to the lower class
> including the Izhavas.[2]

The Nāirs had even the right to kill Īḷavas.

> 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.[3]

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

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

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

Īḻavas did not have freedom of their own and the caste

structure did not give them the dignity of their persons.

Īḻavas were not permitted to enter within a native court of

justice as they might pollute the judges, who were members

of the high castes. The Nāirs were the paid advocates of

Īḻavas in these courts of justice.[1] Social justice was

thus denied to the Īḻavas.

Until 1865 neither the males nor the females of

the Īḻava community were permitted to wear any garment

above the waist. Īḻava women were not allowed to wear

clothes extending below the knees. The high caste men

regarded it an insult to them if the Īḻava women covered up

their breasts.[2] The proper salutation from a female of the

lower rank to persons of higher rank was to uncover the

bosom. Higher caste men took it for granted that women of

their community as well as those of the lower castes were

created for their enjoyment.[3] The social system did not

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[1]Iyer, Anantha Krishna., The Cochin Tribes and
Castes, I, 1909, p.339.

[2]It is interesting to note that each man of the
lower caste had to pay a tax for the hair he grew on his
head and each woman for her breasts. Ravindran T.K., Asan
and Social Revolution in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala
Historical Society, 1972, p.VIII.

[3]To show the inhumanity, an instance has been cited
which describes how an Ilava lady in Shertalai, unable to

give the Īḷavas a sense of self-dignity. The Īḷavas had

very little chance to participate in improving their social

conditions.

Malayalam, the language of Kerala, had a rich

vocabulary of terms of respect which were to be used by

members of the inferior caste when addressing members of a

superior caste in conversation, in letters and even in

documents. While addressing another person, caste

honorifics were to be used, not personal names. An Īḷava

was expected to address a man of a higher caste as Taṃpurān

(My Lord) while he was addressed by men of higher castes in

servile expresssions such as eṭā and nī. An Īḷava

addressed a caste-woman as Tampurāṭṭi (My Lady) while he

referred to himself as aṭiyan (servant). When an Īḷava

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.

> They [Īḷava] are obliged to call
> their children "calves", their silver
> "copper", and their paddy "chaff" ...when
> speaking he must place the hand over the

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3 Continued
stand the humiliation and rapacity of the
higher caste tax collector, cut off one of her breasts and
presented it to him. ibid., p.LXXXVII.

mouth, lest the breath should go forth and
pollute the person whom he is addressing.[1]

The Īḻavas were not allowed to pass through the roads near
the temples of the high castes for fear of pollution.
Members of the lower castes had to work without pay for the
palace. Repairs of the road and other jobs were done by
them on demand.

Before the dawn of this century, the Īḻavas were
scattered and there was little social unity among them.
(Each village was segregated from the other). This lack of
unity among Īḻavas effectively prevented any effort on
their part toward upward social mobility. The Īḻavas were
generally in a low economic position, and they were held
down because of certain economic disadvantages.
Politically, Īḻavas did not count. They had no access to
the royal courts. They were part of the depressed classes,
the down-trodden, the inarticulate, illiterate and
voiceless mass. The family organization and the system of
inheritance among the Īḻavas also were not conducive to the
growth of strong family bonds or of individual initiative.
There were no unified views of marital relationship. Some
people practiced polygamy, while others observed
polyandry. Child marriage was common. No rigorous morals

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[1] Hutton, J.H., _Caste in India_, 1963, pp.86-87.

were insisted on in regard to sexual relations. The Īḷavas were often victims of sexual exploitation by the caste Hindus. They were normally Hindus, but could not participate with other caste Hindus in religious functions. They were cast away for fear of pollution. They were not allowed in public places and were not given admission to educational institutions.

Thus the Īḷavas did not enjoy individual freedom, economic stability, social equality, leadership, political involvement or organizational strength. A lack of incentives, educational opportunities and spiritual awakening prevailed. Also, in the realm of religious practices there was lack of care, and there was hardly any provision for any kind of reformation. Outcaste status and untouchability prevailed and several privileges were denied to Īḷavas in the name of religion. They faced many barriers to finding a new selfhood and development of any kind. They wanted a liberation from the social and religious structures that enslaved and humiliated them. The Īḷava awakening of the 19th century was primarily a religious awakening and it was eventually through religion that they were motivated to work for their social emancipation. To understand this awakening we will look into the historical developments and social awakenings of southern Kerala in the next chapter.

III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SOCIAL

AWAKENING OF SOUTHERN KERALA

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SOCIAL AWAKENING

OF SOUTHERN KERALA

Kerala, on account of its position in the extreme south of the Indian peninsula and the fact that it was separated from the rest of India by the Western Ghats, remained relatively undisturbed by the political strife that the rest of India was going through over the centuries. This isolation enabled southern Kerala to maintain a tradition of Hindu rulers who modelled their government on the Hindu religious tradition. The kings adherred to the injunction of the Dharma-Śāśtrās in devising rules for the efficient working of the administrative machinery, and the people willingly accepted the existing order and looked up to their king as the Dharma-pālaka, the protector of Dharma.[1] The maintenance of law and order and the protection of religious and social values depended on how well this balance was kept and how well the government and the governed carried out their respective responsibilities. The dynamic operation of this

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[1]Koshy, M.J., Genesis of Political Consciousness in Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1972, p.1.

process marks the history of Kerala from its ancient period to modern times.

1. Ancient Period

Ancient Kerala had contact with the countries of the outside world from the earliest times. These early contacts, dating from the Third Millennium B.C. or earlier, with foreign people such as the Arabs, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Israelites, the Greeks, the Romans and the Chinese began with the trade in Kerala's pepper, cinnamon and other spices.[1] The foreign contacts also led to the introduction of religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The formative epoch of Kerala history was the Sangam age which comprised the first five centuries of the Christian Era. Kerala during this period formed part of the larger unit of Tamiḻakam now known as Tamil Nāṭu dominated by Dravidian people and their culture. According to the Tamil works of the Sangam age, Kerala was

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History, Kottayam: National Book Store, 1967, p.78.

a small kingdom inhabited by the Keraḷaputrās (sons of
Kerala) known as Cēramāns with its capital at Koṭuṅgallūr.[1]

In the early Sangam age three powers ruled Kerala:
The Āys in the south, the rulers of Eḻimala (Mount Eḻi) in
the north and the Cēras in the region lying in between.
The land was divided into five divisions (from south to
north) of Vēṇāṭ, Kuṭṭanāṭ, Kūṭanāṭ, Puḷināṭ and Karkanāṭ.
This dissertation is concerned with the area of Vēṇāṭ. The
Āys continued as the dominant power in southern Kerala up
to the beginning of the 10th century A.D. even though their
kingdom of Vēṇāṭ remained a small principality. After the
death of Vikramāditya Varaguṇa (885-925 A.D.) the Āys lost
the status of a separate dynasty and Vēṇāṭ became part of
the Cēra Empire.

In the social organization of the Cēras, the
function of protection occupied a central position. They
were obliged to maintain vigilance in order to defend their
trading centres and their sources of supply against their
neighbours, the Cōlas and the Pāṇḍyans. Trade goods

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[1]Ayyar, K.V.K., A Short History of Kerala,
Ernakulam: Pai and Company, 1966, p.17.

were abundant in the jungle and the local clans were
organized for gathering and hunting. The regulation of
proper trading of the gathered goods and the protection of
the territory was the political concern of the Cēras. The
Cēras had control over the sea until the 6th Century A.D.

Each clan in Kerala enjoyed considerable
independence and provided a certain number of men to
reinforce the Cēra army whenever military expeditions were
being undertaken.[1]

In the matter of internal administration it was the
function of the clan chief to deal with questions involving
the whole group, such as the regulation of kinship
relations, the organization of festivals and the resolution
of conflicts. The land was held in common and the men who
made use of it gave a fixed payment in kind to the
Chieftain and to the King. The kings of Travancore were
the lineal descendants of a Hindu dynasty to Cēra kings.

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[1]In the Cēra empire the army was the hereditary
preserve of certain families. The ancient Kerala society
granted highest honour to the warriors who died in battle
and the mothers were not hesitant to see their sons die in
battle. See Lemercinier, Genevieve., Religion and Ideology
in Kerala, 1984, p.76.

In the religious field harmony and understanding
generally prevailed among the followers of different
religious faiths in Kerala. The Cēra dynasty of Hindu
kings were distinguished by their deeds of humanity and
service.[1] According to Krishna Iyer, the ancient people of
Kerala understood 'earth-deity' as a female spirit and
believed that after each harvest, the earth became
exhausted and she must be periodically refreshed with
blood.[2] According to Sangam literature, the ancient people
of Kerala believed in spirits and propitiated certain
female blood thirsty spirits.[3] Propitiations were
congregational and by such acts people restored confidence
at times of crises. Krishna Iyer mentions that ancestor
worship, serpent worship (snake worship) and Śāstā worship
were common among the people of Kerala from very early
times.[4] The social life of the people was centred around
religious institutions and their religious practices gave
them a sense of identity.

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[1] Iyer, L.A.K., Kerala and Her People, 1961, p.12.

[2] Ibid., p.134.

[3] Lemercinier, Genevieve., Religion and Ideology in
Kerala, 1984, p.77.

[4] Ibid., pp. 138-142.

Muttollāyiram (meaning three times nine hundred), a
Tamil work composed about 800 A.D. tells us about the
Kulaśēkharas (sometimes called 'Second Cera Empire') who
ruled most of Kerala from 800 to 1102 A.D. with its capital
at Kotungallūr (Tiruvanchikulam).[1] In the Kulaśēkhara
Empire the central power was confined to the sovereign, the
Perumāl. He ensured the protective function by the
maintenance of an army deployed over the entire territory.

Under the Kulasekharas matters of local interest
and those pertaining to the day to day life of the people
were regulated by assemblies called Kūttams. The entire
territory was divided into Nāt, Dēśam and Tara (Kara).
Tara formed the smallest unit of administration. The
Tarakūttam (present panchayat) was formed by the elders
(Kāranavar) of the extended families (Taravāts) who met to
decide upon matters of local interest. A Dēśam (number of
villages) represented a unit of military organization above
the Tara. Each Dēśam had a chief called Dēśavāli to govern
it and an assembly called Dēśakūttam.[2] Nāt consisted of

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History,
1967, p.138.

[2]Namboodiripad, E.M.S., Kerala - Yesterday, Today
and Tomorrow, Calcutta: National Books Agency, 1967, p.57.

several Dēśams governed by a chieftain appointed by the emperor (Perumāḷ) called Nāṭuvāli. The Nāṭṭukūṭṭam consisted of the representatives of several Dēśams. A royal representative called Koyiladhikārikaḷ controlled the Nāṭuvāḷis. These officials were political leaders, military chiefs and judicial officers. Thus this social system gave rise to a pyramidal structure of individualized relationships on the higher levels and a group character at the base.

Historians differ as to when the Brāhmans settled in Kerala. However, it is certain that Brāhmans were present in Kerala before the Kulaśēkhara period (800-1102 A.D.).[1] The immigrant Brāhmans in addition to their religious activities attached themselves to the political power as royal counsellors, ambassadors and ministers. Under the cover of the Paraśurāma tradition, they assumed greater privileges and higher social status.[2]

The vast majority of the ancient temples that one sees in Kerala today had their origin during the

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[1]Gough, Kathleen and Schneider, David M., eds., Matrilineal Kinship, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961, p.303.

[2]Ibid., p.306.

Kulaśēkhara period. The protection of these temples was
the joint task of the State and the local community.
Temples in those days served as centres of religious and
cultural activities and as places of learning. All social
and religious activities were conducted in the temple
precincts. Attached to the temples were schools where
pupils learnt everything from the alphabets to theology,
philosophy and ethics.

Religious practices were part and parcel of the
life of the native people and they derived from them
meaning for their daily activities. The people of ancient
Kerala, as mentioned earlier, worshipped gods and spirits
inhabiting trees, rivers and hills. They erected memorial
stones to the departed and offered worship at them. In
temples they propitiated gods and localized spirits with
offerings of meat and toddy. Koṟṟavai or Bhagavati, a war
goddess was their favorite deity. The slow aryanization
process did not replace all the indigenous religious
practices; instead it allowed the continuation of certain
traditional practices (viz., the snake worship and Śāśtā
worhsip) along with the introduction of some new ones.
Āryan deities became popular and their images were

installed in the temples side by side with the deities of the natives.

The Āryan religious practices received a new momentum during the Kulaśēkhara age due to the leadership of Śrī Śankarācāryā (780-820 A.D.) of Kāladi, in central Kerala. The teachings of this advaita philosopher provided an intellectual basis for Hinduism both in Kerala and all over India. The observance of the caste system and the astrological system became prevalent as part of the Āryanization process.

The central religious thought became the relationship between the Supernatural (Brahman), the social system (Samsāra with the caste divisions) and the person (ātman) in both his social and individual dimensions. The Ultimate realization (Mokṣa or liberation) had been understood as obtained by respect for an ethical code, the Dharma (Principle of cosmic, social and individual order), which varied for the different social (caste) groups. Hence to observe it (Karma) meant the submission of every man not only to the restrictions imposed by his own caste group but also to the social order of which he felt himself a part. The system also conceptualized and legitimized the

practices of ritual purity on two distinctive cognitive levels; an external one (physical, material and environmental cleanliness) and an internal one (that of mind, word and actions - piety and purity of thought). Thus the religious system that gave a collective identity to the people during the Cēra period developed further with Āryanization during the Kulaśēkhara period and led to the formation of a highly stratified society. The phenomenon of ritual purity classified the society into distinct groups and kept each group apart from the other by the notion of pollution distance.

One significant event of the Kulaśēkhara period was the Cēra-Cōḷa war of the eleventh century. This war that continued for over a century weakened the central power in Kerala. It involved the whole society in the fighting and even the Vedic schools attached to the larger temples were transferred into military academies (Kaḷaris). The prolonged war brought about significant changes in society.

One of those changes was the establishment of Kaḷaris all over the territory.[1] Several groups, including

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

Nāirs and Īḻavas, took to the sword and some joined the
suicide-squads (Cāver). Cāvers were special units of the
armed forces who had banished all fear of death from their
minds and were ready to fight for victory unto death. It
was the Cāver army that finally drove out the Cōḻa forces
from the Kulasekhara empire.

Another development was the marumakkattāyam
(matrilineal) system taking the place of the makkattāyam
(patrilineal) system of inheritance. The men who spent
their lives on the battlefields and could not attend to the
management of their households, handed over that
responsibility to the women who started to own and manage
the properties. The patrilineal system of inheritance lost
its significance among the Nāirs (warriors of Kerala) and
the matrilineal mode became the recognized pattern.

A third development was the rise of the Janmi
system. During the war period several families disposed of
their lands in the form of a 'grant to the deity of the
temple'. This relieved such families from their commitment
to pay one fifth of their harvest to the political
authority (1/10 to the Nāṭuvāḻi and 1/10 to the Dēśavāḻi).
Instead they had to pay only 1/8th to the temple. The land
that was attached to the temple was not looted by the enemy

forces. These factors motivated the people to donate their land to the temple. But when the donors failed to make their regular contributions to the temple, the temple council exercised the right to take over the lands. The Brāhmans due to their connection to the temple managed to become the 'Board of Trustees' controlling the temple lands. The trusteeship of Brāhmans became hereditary and those who enjoyed the Janman right (hereditary right) were called Janmis.[1] The Brāhmans took advantage of this position and influenced kings and chieftains to make further gifts of land to temples. As a result of this the ancient custom of paying part of the harvest to the political authority vanished and the kings, deprived of their revenues, instituted a series of taxes.

The Cēra-Cōḷa war led to the breakup of the Kulaśēkhara empire.[2] Kerala lost its political unity and a number of independent principalities (numbering forty three kingdoms) assumed power. Religion that was central to the life of the people and stratified the society was institutionalized under the caste structure. Brāhmans

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

[2]Eapen, K.V., A Study of Kerala History, Kottayam: Kollett Publication, 1983, p.129.

because of their ritual purity, education, management of temples and temple properties and as advisors to the kings assumed the highest status in society. They leased the temple property to the Nāirs who became their servants. Nāirs (servants of Brahmans) were treated as Śūdras in the social hierarchy. The Nāirs in turn employed the Īḷavas and Pulayas to tend the coconut trees, pluck the coconuts, manufacture the toddy and cultivate the lands. Īḷavas and other groups who manufactured toddy and tilled the ground were treated as ritually impure and the outcastes in society. They were also kept away from the temple premises of Sanskritic deities where Brahmans conducted worship (pūjā).

2. Medieval Period

The absence of a royal authority was the main characteristic of Kerala polity in the fifteenth century. The whole area was divided into a number of small principalities. Among them royal powers were assumed only by three kings; those of Cannanore, Calicut (both places in Malabar) and Vēṇāṭ.[1] In 1498, Vasco da Gama discovered a

[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History, 1967, p.136.

new sea route to India and landed at Calicut. In the south, Vēṇāṭ was eager to have trade with the Portuguese and the Queen of Quilon (southern Kerala) invited Vasco da Gama to open a factory there. A factory was built in 1505. The life-style and attitude of the Portuguese infuriated the local people and they destroyed the factory at Quilon.[1] In 1516 a new treaty was made between the Portuguese and the Queen of Quilon. This paved the way for the missionary work of Francis Xavier and other Jesuit missionaries.[2]

Francis Xavier arrived in India in 1541 and he received permission from the king of Vēṇāṭ to preach Christianity among the Mukkuvas (the lower caste fishermen) and to build Churches for them.[3] By 1542 he baptized several thousand people. More Jesuit missionaries reached the shore during the years 1545-1548. Cochin became a Bishopric by 1557 and all converts to the Latin rite came under the jurisdiction of this diocese.

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[1]Panikkar K.M., A History of Kerala, 1959, p.86.

[2]George, Mark Moraes., A History of Christianity in India, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1964, p.141.

[3]Panikkar,K.M., A History of Kerala, 1959, p.147.

Latin Christians were not the first Christians in Kerala. There already existed a group of Christians called St. Thomas Christians who traced their beginnings to the Apostle Thomas in the first century.[1] The Portuguese on their arrival in Kerala, considered it their duty to bring the St. Thomas Christians under the supermacy of the Pope of Rome and to replace the Syrian Liturgy with the Latin one. This event is significant because the St. Thomas Christians shared the common feeling of the natives of Kerala in resenting the intervention of an external force on matters of religious practice. The St.Thomas Christians did not yield to the wishes of the Portuguese and continued to be self-governing in internal matters and to follow the Syrian liturgy.

On 26th January 1599 Archbishop Alexis de Menesis arrived at Cochin and bribing the King, pressed him to use all his temporal authority to make the Christian

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[1]These St. Thomas Christians were assigned an important place in the economic and social life of the land and were treated on a footing of equality with the high caste Hindus. (See Perumal J.C. ed., Christianity in India, Alleppy: Bakasham Publications, 1972, pp.34-35.) Christianity was seen as neither threatening nor undermining the caste system of Kerala, but rather working within it. (Duncan B. Forrester., Caste and Christianity, 1980, p.14.)

community bend to the wishes of Rome. Thereafter he

convened a Synod at Diamper (Udayamperūr) in 1599 and made

the Christians part of the Roman Catholic Church.[1] A

section of the St. Thomas Christians, under the leadership

of their Archdeacon refused to abide by the decisions of

the Synod and they later reestablished their independence

in 1653 by the oath of the Coonen Cross (bent Cross) at

Mattāncherry near Cochin. The St. Thomas Christians thus

set a pattern of how an Indian religious community would

respond to an external intervention in religious practice.

A similar pattern can be seen in the response of the Hindus

to the persecution they had at the hands of the Portuguese.

The Portuguese harassed those who did not profess

the Roman Catholic faith. Albuquerque (1509-1515) gave

away Hindu women taken prisoners to Portuguese men in

marriage.[2] The Portuguese occasionally plundered Hindu

temples and broke the idols into small pieces.[3] As the

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[1]Metropolitan, Alexander Mar Thoma. The Mar Thoma Church - Heritage and Mission, Tiruvalla: Mar Thoma Church, 1985, p.8.

[2]Panikkar K.M., A History of Kerala, 1959, p.109.

[3]K.M. Panikkar reports on their attack on the temple at Thevalakkara near Quilon. See Panikkar K.M., A History of Kerala, 1959, p.109.

Hindus were harassed they revolted and attacked the
Portuguese at the expense of their life. Religiously, the
Hindus turned to their personal gods in ardent devotion
(bhakti). In the literary works of the period, bhakti
emerged as the all embracing theme.[1]

Cultural contact was not uncommon in Kerala, for
there were several countries which established trade
relationships with this land from time immemorial. The
people of southern Kerala who were familiar with such
cultural contact were hospitable and tolerated other
religious practices. The growth of the Syrian Christian
community in this region and the process of Āryanization
were the results of such a spirit of toleration and
accommodation. At the same time they exhibited a spirit of
independence and freedom of worship. While the Jesuit
missionaries came to Kerala, the caste hierarchy with its
division of castes and outcastes (untouchables) was strong.
The people who belonged to the category of outcastes like
the Īlavas were denied several privileges. They had to get

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[1]Puntānam Nambūtiri (1547-1640) wrote Gñānappāna,
Śrī Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛtam and Śāntanagōpālan. Melpattūr Nārāyaṇa
Bhattatiri (1560-1646) wrote Nārāyaṇīyam in Sanskrit
dealing with the major incidents in the Bhagavata Purāṇam.
See Panikkar K.M., A History of Kerala, 1959, p.408.

permission and pay a tax if they wanted to roof their
houses with tiles (instead of thatching with coconut
leaves) or go out wearing jewelry. It was in this state of
subjugation that some of the lower castes listened to the
words of the Jesuit missionaries. Generally those who found
freedom and brotherhood in the mission compounds embraced
Christianity. Those Hindus who adhered to the traditional
beliefs and practices resisted the Jesuit message, but
fortified their Hindu religious tradition by developing
bhakti or devotional practices.

By the seventeenth century, the Dutch challenged
the monopoly of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean. The
English also soon arrived on the scene and in 1644 they
obtained permission from the king of Vēṇāṭ to build a
factory at Viḻiñjam. Later, in 1684 they built a fort and
opened a military store at Anjengo, a place north of
Murukkumpuḻa. The local Nāir chiefs were provoked by the
behaviour of the English which led to a revolt in 1721. It
lasted for about six months and the English subdued it by
reinforcing their army from Tellicherry.

Śrī Padmanābha Svāmi Temple, Trivandrum is an old
and famous Vaiṣṇava temple in southern Kerala where the

kings of Travancore continue to worship. During the medieval period its management was vested in the Eṭṭarayōgam, a committee of eight trustees or Uralạrs.[1] The Yōgam of the Padmanabha Swāmi Temple divided the temple lands into eight sections and placed them under the charge of Nāir nobles who were to collect and administer the revenues. These noble men called Eṭṭuviṭṭil Piḷḷamār (Nāirs of eight houses) had men under them who were trained in the Kaḷaris.[2] They had political power only in their own regions while all the religious authority continued to be exercised by a group of Brāhmans called the Yōgam. The King did not have much authority either in the country side or in the administration of the temple. The Eṭṭuvīṭṭil Piḷḷamār combined with the Yōgam held most of the power and sometimes posed a serious menace to the authority of the King. This complex system is an example

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[1]By a settlement made in 1050 A.D., the government of the Śri Padmanābha Temple at Trivandrum which owned most of the lands in the country was handed over to a council consisting of eight hereditary Brāhman priests and the king. The king, however, was to have only half a vote. This ecclesiastical commission was given full authority to collect the revenues and administer them. Panikkar K.M., A History of Kerala, 1959, p.226.

[2]The Eṭṭuvīṭṭil Piḷḷamār belonged to eight different villages, viz. Kuḷathūr, Kazhakkūṭṭam. Chempazhanti, Kūdamon, Paḷḷichal, Veṅggannūr, Rāmanāmatham and Marthāṇdam.

of how a religious group combined with an aristocratic social power can threaten the political force of a sovereign.

When Marttānda Varma ascended the Travancore throne in 1729 according to the prevailing matrilineal system of succession, Padmanābhan Tampi and Rāman Tampi, the sons of the previous king put forward their claim to the throne according to the patrilineal system of inheritance. They got support from the Piḷḷamār (Nāir nobles) and the Yōgakkār (Brāhmans). In 1730 Marttānda Varma took vigorous action against them and both the Tampis were caught and executed.[1] All the rebel leaders were captured subsequently, four Nambūtiri priests among them were banished (for to kill Brāhmans was considered a grave sin) and forty two Piḷḷamār were put to death. These steps taken by the king constituted a heavy blow to the whole Janmi system of land control and to the dominant caste hierarchy in Travancore. Marttānda Varma began a new era of strong and centralized administration under the aegis of the ruling sovereign.

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[1]C.V. Raman wrote his historical novel Marthānda Varma about this situation. It describes how the Piḷḷamār oppressed the royal authority. This was also a time when there were other clashes between the matrilineal and patrilineal systems of inheritance.

However, being a devout Hindu, Marttāṇḍa Varma
dedicated his kingdom to Śrī Padmanābha (Viṣṇu), the deity
of Śrī Padmanābha Temple, and assumed the title Śrī
Padmanābha Dāsā in 1750. He started the practice of
placing his sword in front of the deity at an auspicious
hour and receiving it back consecrated. He also paid
attention to the repair of old temples and building
Ūttupuras (feeding houses) to feed the Brāhmans in his
kingdom.

After crushing the forces of feudalism, Marttāṇḍa
Varma turned his mind to the expansion of his kingdom. He
soon extended it up to Puṟakkāṭ and Vadakkumkūr in the
north annexing eleven small kingdoms. Every landholder in
the State was given a paṭṭa (an official document) with
specification of the land tax to be paid. Custom houses
called Chowkies were established to collect excise and
custom duties. The government monopolised the trade.
Backwaters were linked by canals for the quick movement of
goods.

The revolt of Padmanābhan Tampi and Rāman Tampi
against Marttāṇḍa Varma reveal the fact that in the

eighteenth century younger members of the Hindu families
were often not happy with the matrilineal system of
inheritance. The alliance of the Piḷḷamār and the Yōgakkār
with the Tampis also indicates that religious groups who
had power and authority over the temple wanted to acquire
political power as well. Marttāṇda Varma who considered it
his duty (dharma) to bring social and political order in
the region crushed this attempt. At the same time he
respected the religious order and acknowledged that
political power was vested in him by the deity of the land
(Padmanābha). Therefore he called himself the servant
(dāsā) of the deity. He respected Brāhmans and built free
feeding houses for them. He was interested in the welfare
of his people and so he improved the transportation
facilities and increased the trade. During the period of
Marttāṇda Varma religion continued to be inseparable from
the social, economic and political life of the people.

His successors, Dharma Rājā (1758-1798) and Swāti
Tirunāḷ (1829-1847) attempted to bring about changes and
reforms for the welfare of the subjects they ruled. The
period under Kārttika Tirunāḷ Rāma Varma, popularly known
as Dharma Rājā witnessed the invasion of Kerala by the
Sultans of Mysore, Hyder Ali and Tippu. Travancore turned

down demands that it acknowledge the supremacy of Mysore
rulers. At the same time Dharma Rājā gave refuge to a
large number of princes, Brāhmans, Nāirs and Īḻavas who
fled from Malabar in the wake of the Mysore invasions. He
opened a network of canals and roads within the State and
developed Varkala and Trivandrum with additional commercial
facilities. The Mysorean attempts for about a quarter of a
century to establish hegemony over Kerala necessitated that
Dharma Rājā sign treaties with the British in 1795 and
1805. As a result Col. Maccaulay was appointed as the
first British Resident in Travancore. His function as
Resident was to see that everything necessary was done to
guarantee the collection of the State revenues.

The participation of the British in the internal
administration of Travancore incited resentment in many
corners. Vēlu Tampi, the chief Executive under the King
(called Daḻava or Divān) was not happy with the British
officials who attempted to achieve control over different
regions of southern Kerala. When the resident interfered
actively in the internal administration of Travancore, he
resented it. Setting up his office at Kuṇṭara, Vēlu Tampi,
issued his 'Kuṇṭara Proclamation' on January 11, 1809
exhorting the natives to rally under his banner against the

foreigners.[1] The people responded enthusistically and a battle was fought at Quilon. The British troops destroyed Daḷava's house and killed many of his supporters. The King sued for peace and issued orders to arrest the Daḷava. Vēlu Tampi realizing this, committed suicide to save his honour.

Vēlu Tampi's revolt indicated the desire of the people to have freedom and a rightful share in the administration of the region. The Kuṇṭara Proclamation made it clear that the people were hesitant about the British having a voice in the internal government. The people were also afraid that their religion was in danger because of the possible dominance of the British. Therefore they considered it their dharma to fight against the British dominance.

The regency of Gouri Pārvati Bāi (1815-1829) saw the introduction of several reforms intended to establish social freedom and civic equality. She allowed the Nāirs, Īḷavas and other lower castes to wear gold and silver jewelry without any payment to the State. By a royal proclamation she permitted all people to have tiled roofs for their houses. She also made a grant to the Seminary of

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[1]Sankarankutty Nair, T.P., A Tragic Decade in Kerala History, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1977, pp.64, 110, 111.

the St. Thomas Christians founded at Kottayam in 1815. She welcomed the Christian missionaries from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and encouraged them to work with the St. Thomas Christians.

The British Resident, Col. Munro, was very keen to reform the St. Thomas Church by bringing back its principles of faith and practice which prevailed before the arrival of the Portuguese. He therefore directed the missionaries Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker, who came to Kerala between 1816 and 1819, to stay with the St. Thomas leaders at Kottayam. They stayed there and helped those traditional Christians in the training of the clergy of the church and translated the Bible into Malayalam in 1829.[1] The new set of missionaries, Rev. Joseph Peet, and the Rev. W.J. Woodcock suggested certain reforms in the church to the then Bishop Mar Dionysius IV. Even though he treated the missionaries with respect, he was not willing to act on their suggestions. On January 16, 1836 he convened a synod of the Church at Mavelikkara and drew up a document popularly known as Paṭiyōla according to which all connections with the CMS missionaries were cut and the independence of the Church reaffirmed.

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[1]Latourette, K.S., Christianity in a Revolutinary Age, 19th Century, Vol.3, New York: Harper and Row, 1961, p.408.

However, the availability of the Bible in Malayalam
and the teaching of the missionaries awakened a few St.
Thomas Church members to reform. One of them was
Palakunnattu Abraham Malpan (1796-1845) who revised the
liturgy, translated it into Malayalam and used it to
celebrate Holy Communion in his Parish at Maramon in
1837.[1] A schism with the more traditional leaders was
inevitable and the reformed Church, identified as the 'Mar
Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar', was formed.

The St. Thomas Christians formed a class by
themselves in the traditional society of Kerala. They held
an important place in the economic sphere and were the
principal traders and planters. They honoured the caste
structure of Kerala society and lived within it for
centuries. The reformation of the St. Thomas Christians
therefore meant only a movement within one particular class
of society. It did not endanger the traditional caste
structure, but fit in with the pulse of the society of
Kerala in that it checked the interference of the
missionaries. It also welcomed change within that limited
context by bringing educational and liturgical reform to
the Church.

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[1]Neil, Stephen., The Story of the Christian Chruch
in India and Pakistan, p.82.

Following the separation from the St. Thomas
Christians, the CMS missionaries started to work among the
non-Christians. The LMS (London Missionary Society)
missionaries were already working among the lower castes
since 1806 in the southern regions of Travancore. Both the
LMS and CMS missionaries started several schools and
hospitals at different parts of southern Kerala. Swāti
Tirunāḷ (1829-1847), King of Travancore, opened an English
school at Trivandrum in 1834 and made it a free school.
Later Utram Tirunāḷ Marttāṇda Varma (1847-1860) opened a
school for girls at Trivandrum. The work of the
missionaries and the spread of education helped to create
an interest in radical religious and social reform among
the Hindus in Kerala. One radical reform centered on what
was called the 'Upper Cloth Controversy'. Until that time
as a sign of respect for the superiors, the lower caste
women in Travancore were not allowed to wear anything above
their waist. Even Nāir women who had the right to cover
the bosoms on occasions were expected by custom, to remove
that covering in the presence of a member of a higher
caste. Controversy over this custom was started as early
as 1814, especially in the areas where the missionaries
worked. This controversy lasted about half a century. On
July 26, 1859 the following proclamation was made in
Travancore by the King:

> ... we hereby proclaim that there
> is no objection... to Shanar women of all
> creeds dressing in coarse cloth and tying
> themselves around with it as the Mukku-
> vathigals [ladies of the fishing caste]
> do or to their covering their bosoms in
> any manner whatever, but not like women
> of higher castes.[1]

Another proclamation of 1865 granted the same right to all the lower castes. This struggle over the 'upper cloth' involved much public agitation on both sides and reflected more wide spread changes taking place within the traditional caste structure. In the Nādār or Shānar areas at the southern tip of Kerala it involved conversions to Christianity, but elsewhere where there were fewer conversions it still involved a greater social recognition for the lower castes including the Īḻavas. From that time onwards the lower castes were counted in the affairs of the society and in the administration of the State. The communal feelings became more evident among people and each caste or community came to represent a pressure group in the political life of Kerala. Organized agitation became a means to demand the legitimate rights of different groups.

Around 1850 there was a decline in the trade in pepper and other spices and therefore the English encouraged the natives to replace their spice plantations

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[1]Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala 1850-1936, 1984, p.92.

with coconut and other palm trees. Great Britain was also
developing the edible oil industry around this period.
During this time the Īḷavas took an interest in
specializing in the processing of coconut products such as
fibre and coir. Utram Tirunāḷ opened a factory for the
manufacture of coir at Alleppey in 1859.

Inspite of the work of the missionaries there were
no large scale conversions among the Īḷavas during this
period. Īḷavas lived in the same areas as the highly
respected St. Thomas Christians and the Īḷava converts had
expected that they might get the same privileges as the St.
Thomas Christians. The Nāirs and the St. Thomas Christians
were, however, not in favour of a movement in this
direction. Hence, although some leaders considered it the
Īḷavas in general realized that conversion would not serve
as a direct means of social emancipation. However, in the
mass movements of other communities they observed a new
found unity and learned the lesson that it would take an
organized effort to determine their own future. In
addition, they found a new spirit of freedom and
independence in the reform movement that had sprung up
among the St. Thomas Christians in 1836.

3. Era of Social Awakening and Mass Movements

Uninterrupted pattern of reform in the history of
the Travancore State continued during the reigns of Āyilyam
Tirunāḷ (1860-1880), Śrī Mūlam Tirunāḷ Rāma Varma
(1885-1924), Sētu Lakshmi Bāi (1924-1931) and Śrī Chittira
Tiruñaḷ Balarāma Varma (1931-1956). During this period
educational facilities increased with the opening of more
schools and colleges. Transportation facilities were
increased by the opening of the Varkala Tunnel in 1875 and
the rail route to Madras from Trivandrum in 1918. Several
development projects were launched with the formation of
village Panchayats in 1925. Sētu Lakshmi Bāi legally
abolished the animal sacrifices in temples and made the
makkattāyam system the only legal form of inheritance by a
regulation in 1925. It was Śrī Mūlam Tirunāḷ who
inaugurated the Legislative Council in 1888 and the Śrī
Mūlam Assembly in 1904. Śrī Chittira Tirunāḷ reconstituted
the Legislature and introduced several administrative
social reforms. All these reforms and development projects
proved to be of advantage primarily for the advanced
section of society. Education, however, brought with it
higher expectations for all. Educated people soon resented
living under both an autocratic form of government and a
rigid caste hierarchy.

The awakening of the Īḷava community began with the life and work of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru (1856-1928). He started his reform movement by consecrating a Śiva Temple at Aruvippuṟam in 1888. By this action he questioned the religious monopoly of the Brāhmans and indicated that Īḷavas, like Nāirs and Brāhmans, have equal rights to own temples and to worship the Sanskritic deities. Nārāyaṇa Guru had the support of other Īḷava leaders such as Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān in the propagation of the reforms he initiated and in organizing the Īḷavas on the State level. As a result of his initiative the Īḷava organization – Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Paripālana Yōgam (SNDP Yogam) – was formed in 1903. The emancipation of the Īḷavas is dealt with in the following chapters, but before proceeding with that discussion here we will briefly look at the parallel awakenings of the Nāirs and Pulayas in order to get a glimpse of the environment of social awakening in which the Īḷava movement developed.

There was a decline in the social status of Nāirs from the time of Marttāṇḍa Varma. During his reign Marttāṇḍa Varma removed Nāir nobles from many responsible positions in the government and brought Brāhmans from outside the State to take over most of the higher government posts. Later many British Residents, who also

were not happy with the Nāir community's independence, brought Brāhmans from other parts of India and offered them high level government employment in Kerala. The Nāir community argued that they (sons of the soil) were denied a proper share in the administration of the State.

It was Chaṭṭambi Svāmikaḷ (1854-1924) who provided the spiritual foundation for the social and political struggles of the Nāirs.[1] Being the son of a Brāhman born to a Nāir woman, Chaṭṭambi Svāmikaḷ realized that the Brāhmans ultimately stood in the way of the progress of the Nāirs. He challenged the 'Paraśurāma tradition' dearly held by the Brāhmans and argued that the whole of Kerala really belonged to the Nāirs.[2] He questioned the traditionally accepted religious superiority of the Brāhmans. He pointed out that there were many occasions in the Hindu tradition when Śūdras are said to have learned the Vedic scriptures. Therefore he exhorted the Nāirs to learn the Vedās and insisted that every person should have the freedom to grow in spiritual life.

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[1]See Sukumaran Nair, G., Chattambi Swamikal, Cochin: Kerala History Association, 1982.

[2]He argues this in his work Pracheena Malayalam.

A general awakening among the Nāirs gradually
picked up momentum late in the nineteenth century. Many of
them got educated and applied for employment in the State.
They still had difficulty in getting higher posts in
government. A new phase in their struggle dawned with
their decision in 1891 under the leadership of G.
Paramēśvaran Piḷḷai to represent their grievances directly
to the King of Travancore through the 'Malayāḷi
Memorial'.[1] At this point they also had the support of the
Īḻava community under the leadership of Dr. Palpu.

The memorial pointed out the injustice of the
government in excluding the natives of southern Kerala
from appointments in the higher grades of government
service. It demanded an impartial appointment of the
natives to the level of service for which they were
qualified by their education, ability and integrity. The
work of carrying on the social awakening begun among the
Nāirs in the late nineteenth century was taken up by the
Nāir Service Society (NSS) when it was formed in 1914.[2]

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[1]Mankekar D.R., The Red Riddle of Kerala, 1965,
p.68.

[2]Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History,
1967, p.372.

It was Ayyan Kāḷi (1863-1941) who fought for the rights of the lowest untouchable caste, the Pulayas.[1] Realizing the importance of education for the social advancement of his people, Ayyan Kāḷi opened a school at Venganur near Trivandrum in 1904. Though this was in accordance with the provision of the government legislation of 1904, there was severe opposition from the higher castes and therefore the school did not enjoy a long life. In 1907 Ayyan Kāḷi organized the Pulayas under the banner of the Sādhu Paripālana Saṃgham. He instructed his men to refrain from working for the Nāir landlords until they permitted the lower caste children to enter those schools for which the government had already granted permission. This resulted in a riot in 1914. Ayyan Kāḷi was nominated to the Śri Mūlam Popular Assembly in 1912. He served the assembly continuously for 28 years. His main concerns in the assembly were education, employment and land for the lower caste people. As a result the government gradually grew more lenient toward the requests of the lower castes. With the help of the government they received fee concessions in schools from 1924, more possiblities of employment in government service from 1929, and house sites or small scale farms after 1925.

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[1]Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala: 1850-1936, 1984, p.266f.

The initiative for intensified political change in
Kerala increased with the institution of a Legislative
Council by Śrī Mūlam Tirunāl in 1888 in an effort to secure
for the government the advice of representatives of the
people. This was precisely the time when the Īḻavas were
being awakened by their spiritual leader Nārāyaṇa Guru.
The Nāirs who had became conscious of the decline in their
social status had taken the initiative to unite the natives
of Travancore in submitting, as mentioned earlier, the
Malayāḷi Memorial in 1891. Realizing, however, that this
petition was going to help only the Nāir community, the
Īḻavas submitted another memorandum called the Īḻava
Memorial in 1896. Śrī Mūlam Tiruñaḷ Rama Varma constituted
the Śrī Mūlam Popular Assembly in 1904 with the purpose of
giving more participation for the people of Travancore in
the administration of the State. The franchize was,
however, based on land tenure and therefore the privilege
was primarily of advantage of the Nāir community. Soon
resentment started to build against this Nāir monopoly of
the new political opportunities.

The dawn of this century witnessed the formation of
a number of communal associations. In 1903 the Īḻavas
organized the SNDP Yōgam, in 1907 Ayyan Kāḷi formed the

Sādhu Paripālana Saṃgham of the Pulayas, and in 1914 Nāirs
formed the NSS. During the 1920s the forces of communalism
were growing and even though there were some common
agitations that brought the communities together each
communal group tried to be independent and sought necessary
Legislative measures for its own betterment. Awakened by
the teachings of Chaṭṭambi Svāmikaḷ, the Nāirs longed to
put an end to the joint family system and their loose
system of marriage. By 1919 changing the law of
inheritance became a matter of serious concern among
Nāirs. The subject came up for discussion in the Śrī Mūlam
Popular Assembly in 1920. After much deliberations a
regulation in favour of individual partition and the
adoption of the makkattāyam system of inheritance was
passed in 1925.[1]

Another form of social restlessness that was
evident in the social and political scene of Kerala at the
beginning of the century was the one popularly known as the
'Temple Entry Agitation'. As early as 1920 the Īḻava
representative Kuñju Paṇikkar demanded in the Assembly that
the Īḻavas must be permitted to worship in all Hindu

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[1]The Nair Regulation of Malabar was passed only in
1933.

temples.[1] Along with this there were public agitations such as the Vaikkam Satyāgraha in 1924 and the Guruvāyūr Satyāgraha in 1931 demanding the right of the lower castes to enter and worship in all public temples including the important temples at Vaikkam and Guruvāyūr. As a result of these agitations several Iḻavas were imprisoned. The death of Iḻava leaders such as Dr. Palpu (1924), Kumāran Āśān (1924) and Nārāyaṇa Guru (1928) created a gap in the socio-religious life of the Iḻavas. The agitations at the same time attracted the attention of national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi.[2] Gandhi, however, held an ambiguous position for he supported the caste structure and could not advocate equality and complete elimination of caste hierarchy even though he favoured temple entry. Meanwhile, different religious groups such as Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs were working to convert the lower castes of Kerala, and at one point the Iḻavas considered the possibility of mass conversion. The Travancore government appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of

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[1]Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala 1850-1936, 1984, p.404.

[2]In 1925 Gandhiji visited Vaikkam and worked out a compromise by which all the roads in the area were thrown open except for a small stretch outside the temple itself. Woodcock, George., Kerala-A Portrait of the Malabar Coast, 1967, p.237.

V.S. Subramania Iyer to submit a report on the issue of
Temple Entry. The report of the committee submitted to the
King pointed out that among the savarna or upper caste
Hindus there was both opposition and a strong feeling of
support for temple entry.[1] Realizing that the traditional
hold of Hindus on the State government would weaken if the
numerically large Īḻava community embraced some other
religion, the then Mahārājā Chittira Tirunāḷ declared the
Temple Entry Proclamation in 1936. This Proclamation
provided the Īḻavas and other lower castes with some of the
honour and self-respect they sought when it gave them the
right to worship in all Hindu temples of the State.

4. Political Development in the 20th Century

We saw earlier that Śrī Mūlam Tirunāḷ instituted a
Legislative Council in 1888. This Legislative Council was
reformed several times in the following decades. Still
there was no adequate representation of minorities like
Īḻavas, Muslims and Christians which would require a major
reformation of the legislature with a wider franchise. In

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[1]Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and
People: Movements in Kerala 1850-1936, 1984, p.374. The
Temple Entry Act of Cochin was passed only in 1947.

1932 Śrī Chittira Tirunāḷ abolished the Legislative Council and created instead a bicameral legislature with the Śrī Mūlam Assembly as the lower and the Śrī Chittira State Council as the upper houses respectively. The aggrieved communities consisting of Īḷavas, Muslims and Christians, who were still not happy with the Legislative reforms of 1932, submitted separate resolutions to the King offering their suggestions for constitutional reform based on caste and population. The representatives of these communities met at the London Mission Society Hall, Trivandrum on January 25, 1933 and accepted a resolution to abstain from the legislatures envisaged in the Reforms of 1932. This event is popularly known as the 'Abstention (Nivarttana) Movement'. [1]

An organization called the Joint Political Congress (Samyukta Rāṣṭrīya Samiti-1932) was formed from this movement and it exhorted the voters to abstain from voting in the elections held under the new scheme. One of its leaders C.Kēśavan, an Īḷava, was arrested in June 1935 following a speech he made at Kozhencheri near Tiruvalla. He was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment. On the eve of his arrest C.Kēśavan issued a statement to the press.

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey of Kerala History, 1967,p.347.

> ...In these trouble days of
> political growth, the burden of fighting
> leadership has fallen on my unworthy
> shoulders. There has emerged out of it
> the new found and precious friendship of
> the Ezhavas, Muslims and Christians and
> all the disenfrachised communities of the
> State; a friendship which will permanently
> endure and shape the democracy of the
> future. I long for the day when the shadow
> of caste Hindu monopoly is destroyed and it
> will be possible to welcome the Nayars to
> the brotherhood of equality in work,
> suffering and triumph. I want you to regard
> my arrest as a resounding victory or a
> presage of the coming of the day when true
> equality will prevail among all the subjects
> of His Highness the Maharaja...[1]

Subsequently the Government widened the franchise by reducing the property qualifications. Ilavas were given eight seats while Muslims and Latin Christians were given three seats each. The changes in the electoral law were formally announced in August 1936 and the elections were held in April-May 1937. The candidates put up by the Joint Political Congress came out successful from a large number of constituencies and T.M. Varghese (St. Thomas Christian) was elected as the Deputy President of the Sri Mulam Assembly. But when he accorded a warm welcome to C. Kēśavan, who was released from prison, he was removed from office by a non-confidence motion of the Assembly at the instance of the Divān.

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[1] Koshy, M.J., Constitutionalism in Travancore and Cochin, 1972, p.117-118.

With the subsequent desire of the leaders of the
Joint Political Congress to include the Nāir Community, the
triple alliance was replaced by a political party, the
Travancore State Congress' in 1936. The aim of the new
organization was the achievement of full responsible
government for the people of southern Kerala. The Divan
C.P. Rāmasvāmi Iyer, a Brāhman from outside Kerala, was
against this move. There developed a series of agitations
and demonstrations which lasted for about a decade.[1]
Several people courted arrest. Following the Second World
War a majority of the people underwent a period of stress
and strain. The Communist Party grew during this period.
The people at Alleppey undertook a mass agitation and
demanded an immediate end to the autocratic rule of the
Divān. On September 26, 1946 the Divān assumed the supreme
command of the police and declared martial law in
Alleppey. This resulted in the 'Bloodshed at
Punnapra-Vayalār' and several hundred persons lost their
lives. On July 25, 1947 when the Divān was attending a
function in the Svāti Tirunāḷ Academy of Music at
Trivandrum an unsuccessful attempt was made on his life.
C.P. Rāmasvāmi Iyer resigned from office and left Kerala
on August 19, 1947.

[1]Woodcock, George., Kerala - A Portrait of the
Malabar Coast, 1967, p.238-239.

On March 24, 1948 the first popular Ministry of
Travancore consisting of members such as Paṭṭam A. Tāṇu
Pillai (a Nāir), C. Kēśavan (an Īḻava) and T.M. Varghese
was installed in office. On January 1, 1949 integration of
the Travancore and Cochin took place under a new Ministry
headed by T.K. Nārāyaṇa Pillai. The State of Kerala
formally came into existence on November 1, 1956 with a
Governor as the head of the State and a popular ministry
chosen by the assembly.

The early decades of the 20th century were marked
for all of India by the Freedom Struggle. While the Indian
National Congress was busy with the struggle for freedom,
the people of southern Kerala were engaged in an effort to
democratize the local government and to secure a fair
representation in it for all religious communities. When
Independence and with it universal franchise and
self-government came to India, the Īḻavas and other
communities of Southern Kerala had already a
well-established interest in politics. Kerala has had 19
ministries since 1948. The frequent change of ministries
can be in considerable measure attributed to the caste
loyalties, communal interest and secular ideology of the
people. In Kerala, Īḻavas and Scheduled Castes constitute
roughly 34 percent of the population, Christians

24 percent, Nāirs and Brāhmans 19 percent and Muslims 20 percent.[1] These religious and caste groups or coalitions of them have tended to shape the party strategy and the political behaviour of the State. Because of the numerical strength of the Īḷavas each of the political parties have given adequate representation to them both in the nomination of candidates and in the ministries. The role of the Īḷavas in shaping the various governments of the State has been very significant and they continue to be a central political force in Kerala society.

5. An Overview

Until the mid-twentieth century, Kerala was ruled by kings who were devout Hindus. They modelled their government according to the injunctions of the Hindu religious tradition. Maintaining law and order and upholding the religious values were seen by them as the dharma of the State. Any external intervention, either from European powers or from outside officials (non-Keralites) was treated as a threat to the existing religious order.

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[1]"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." See Bhagat, K.P., The Kerala Mid Term Election 1960, Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1962, p.60.

In the confrontation with the Portuguese and the English there were attraction and repulsion. Some of the lower castes of Hindu society found freedom, security and economic benefit in the mission compound and embraced Christianity. As seen in the Kuṇṭara Proclamation of Vēlu Tampi (1809) and in the agitations at Quilon (1505) and Angengo (1721) the natives of Kerala questioned the dominance of the European powers in the internal affairs of the land. In the religious field, Hindus and Christians started reforming their religion asserting independence and cultivating more <u>bhakti</u> practices.

In the twentieth century, to check the external intervention in the internal administration of Kerala, the various communities rallied together in the State Congress and struggled for a responsible government. Once a measure of unity was achieved and a democratic government came to power, communal interests developed and became visible in the formation of the various ministries. Initially, the Communist Party with its secular ideologies threatened the system of communal interests. Since 1969, a section of the Communist Party also honours the communal values of the people.

Caste distinctions became prevalent with the Āryanization process in Kerala. Brāhmans followed by Nāirs assumed greater status and position during the period of the Cēra-Cōḷa war and they came to enjoy many privileges at the expense of others. It was only by the middle of the nineteenth century that the Īḻavas and the lower castes became conscious of their strength. Conversion was not a major factor in the quest of the Īḻavas for religious and social freedom. While remaining Hindu-Īḻavas, they sought ways and means for their emancipation. On their own they welcomed change within the continuity of their communal tradition.

Caste distinctions in ancient days were a way to maintain social harmony and to bring about participation in the total administration. Each caste was assigned a particular role to play. The 'part' remained significant to the 'whole' and vice versa. Agitations started to arise when a 'part' was neglected by the 'whole' and the 'whole' by the 'part'. The history of Kerala shows that in spite of disturbances, the Hindu community tried to keep this balance through a spirit of accommodation and reformation. The Īḻava community when it awakened in the latter half of the nineteenth century went a bit further in propagating its ideal of 'One Caste'. The next chapter looks at the awakening of the Īḻavas of southern Kerala.

IV. NĀRĀYAṆA GURU AND THE AWAKENING OF THE ĪḶAVAS

NĀRĀYAṆA GURU AND THE AWAKENING OF THE ĪḺAVAS

Southern Kerala witnessed a social revolution of great magnitude in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Brahmo Samāj, Ārya Samāj and Prārthana Samāj reform movements in other parts of India counted on the British government to push for changes and were not necessarily involved in creating friction in society. In southern Kerala, the case was different. The orthodox Hindu kings of southern Kerala, under the direction of the Nāir Divāns and the priestly Nambūtiri advisors, were not prepared to allow even a slight change in the recognized traditions. On the other hand, the native rulers considered it their sacred duty to protect the rights and privileges of the savarṇas (the higher castes). Any attempt on the part of the avarṇas (the lower castes) to question the existing order was looked upon as treason and put down with a heavy hand. It was against this background that the reformers of southern Kerala had to work. This chapter will discuss the revolution set in motion by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān and the resultant progressive developments in southern Kerala during this century.

In the nineteenth century, the prevailing idea
among the high castes was that the Īḻavas should continue
as outcastes and satisfy themselves with their traditional
occupations such as toddy-tapping, farming and weaving. A
great transformation was, however, gradually taking place
within the Īḻava community. Some educated and progressive
minded Īḻavas took a fresh look at their community and
began to urge social reforms. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, the
acknowledged spiritual leader of the community, awakened
the Īḻavas, and his disciple, Kumāran Āśān, gave
intellectual and institutional form to the movement. Dr.
Palpu, who was in government medical service outside
Kerala, supported these two and worked for the social
emancipation of the Īḻavas. The efforts of these men had a
significant impact upon the intellectual horizon and social
life of Kerala.

1. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru (1856-1928)

Śrī Nārāyaṇa was born at Chempaḻanti, a village
about 15 kms. south-east of Murukkumpuḻa, as a son of Māṭan
Āśān and Kuṭṭy Amma in the year 1856.[1] He was educated in

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[1]See Plate No.1 and 2. The Īḻavas celebrate his
birthday, September 9th, as Guru Jayanti. This day is a
holiday for Kerala State.

Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit. Though he started his
career as a school teacher by starting small vernacular
schools, he left home before his father died in 1884 to
wander as a Samnyāsi. During this period he met Ayyāvu his
master of spiritual exercises. Nārāyaṇa Guru proceeded to
Maruthuamala, a place south of Trivandrum, for
meditations. After engaging in austerities and meditation
for a few years, he dedicated himself to a far-reaching
social revolution. He used his spiritual attainments for
the creation of a new humanity and a new social order. He
discarded everything that offended the dignity of man and
freedom of the individual and tried to give the lower
castes a sense of direction and self-respect.[1]

From his childhood, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru abhorred the
caste system and mingled freely with the Pulaya (an
untouchable caste lower than Īḷavas) 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 anyone.

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

Emphasizing the fundamental oneness and equality of

mankind, Nārāyaṇa Guru took as his motto: "One caste, One

religion, One God for man."[1]

Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru realized that the contemporary

society was suffering from three ills:

> The first and foremost was that
> vast masses of people were weighed down
> by ignorance, superstitions and cultural
> backwardness which made them meekly submit
> to 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.[2]

Nārāyaṇa Guru who devoted his life for the upliftment of

the millions of downgraded people of Kerala felt the need

to put into practice the idealistic and pragmatic religious

philosophy of Hinduism.

(a) Teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru

Subscribing to the Advaita philosophy of Śrī

Śankarācārya, Nārāyaṇa Guru carried it to its logical

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[1] Narayanan, M.G.S., ed., Historical Studies in
Kerala, Calicut: University of Calicut, 1976, p.53.

[2] Ibid., p.52.

conclusion. Acceptance of the non-duality of the individual self (ātman) and the divine self (Brahman), according to him, naturally led to the assertion of the non-duality of individual selves. He thus gave a new interpretation of ancient Hindu religious thought and attempted to make it applicable to the whole world in the given historical context. He was convinced of the equality of all beings:

> One Caste, One Religion, One God for man
> One Womb, One form, difference here is none.[1]

Based on these teachings, he taught people the meaninglessness of caste and pointed out that caste observances serve as stumbling blocks for their progress. He 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.[2]

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[1]Narayana Guru, Jati Nirnayam, 11th ed., (Sri Narayana Guru Deva Kritikal) Varkala 1983, p.132. (Translated)

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

Nārāyaṇa Guru was convinced that the existence of caste was
due to ignorance (avidyā) and spiritual enlightment
(wisdom-vidyā) was required to liberate (mokṣa) people from
the illusory notion (māyā) that caste differentiation was
essential.

(i) One Caste:

Nārāyaṇa Guru was well aware of the traditional
injunctions of the caste system. Through his career as an
Īḷava he learned first hand the immediate consequences of
the caste system and the desperate desire of millions of
people to win freedom from caste. In his wandering life,
he mingled and lived with the downtrodden masses. He
visited the huts of the untouchables and partook of their
meals. He raised himself from the bondage of caste. He
wrote in 1916:

> Some of you still think I belong
> to this community or that creed. It is
> now years since I have given up such
> distinctions. I have also arranged that
> those who join the order at my Asram shall
> have no such distinctions.[1]

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[1]Kesavan Vaidyar, C.R., ed., Vivekodayam: Sri
Narayana Guru International Year Souvenir, 1978, p.1.
(Translated).

He took an uncompromising stand against caste. He wrote in

Jāti Nirṇayam (A critique of caste)

> Within a species, is it not,
> that offspring truly 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 the difference then in caste
> as between man and man.[1]

He taught people that terms like "Brāhman" and "Pariah"

only confused the true-reality of human nature. Selecting

two sages Parāsara and Vyāsa of unquestionable status but

of mixed origin, he exposed the meaninglessness of the

repudiation of caste distinctions on the basis of birth.[2]

He proclaimed the idea of 'Universal Brotherhood'

in the injunction, "Ask not, speak not, think not of

caste."[3] This was a practical step he suggested to remove

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[1]Ravidran, T.K., Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p.XLIX.

[2]See Nataraja Guru, The Word of the Guru: Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru, 2nd Edition. Ernakulam: Paico Publishing House, 1968, p.290.

[3]Ravindran, T.K., Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p.XLIX. Nārāyaṇa Guru once remarked that if a man's caste cannot be determined by seeing a person, there is no meaning in attributing him a caste. Caste differentiation, he said, is man made.

the notion of caste from the lives and minds of people. He exhorted his followers to mingle with the lower caste people and treat them as equals. He asked them to open their schools and temples to the lower caste people. He also gave new names to several of the low caste children.

In his teaching on 'One Caste' Nārāyaṇa Guru differed from many of the socio-religious reformers. While people like Svāmi Dayānanda, Vivekānanda and Gandhi held on to the caste ideal of Varṇāśramadharma while calling for reform, Nārāyaṇa Guru held the idea that 'there is only one caste and that is humanity'. The caste system in his eyes was perpetuating misery among one section of society. The Guru criticized the time-honoured belief in caste as a divinely ordained institution. He said that the caste structure was contrary to the very spirit of advaita. He attempted to clear away the social notions of inequality and hierarchy altogether.

(ii) One Religion

During the youth of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, the Īḷavas were primarily worshippers of local (usually female) deities. They had little contact with the Sanskritic

traditions taught by the Brāhmans of Kerala. During this period, the kings and the Brāhmanical hierarchy of southern Kerala were predominantly Vaiṣṇavites. The Śrī Padmanābha Temple at Trivandrum held a very prestigious position. During his student life and later in his wanderings, Nārāyaṇa Guru came in contact with a much wider sampling of temple deities and showed a liking for Śaivite worship.[1]

He developed a liberal attitude towards religions while firmly standing within the Hindu tradition. He neither established a new religion nor identified himself with any particular form of Hinduism. Instead, he reinterpreted the values of his own religious tradition by utilizing the popular imagery, language and form of worship. He did not break off from the tradition but he changed its values in major ways.

> 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 a greater measure of dignity. To them
> and to others he said that there is only
> 'One Religion' for man.[2]

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[1] Most of the temples he consecrated were Śiva Temples.

[2] Samuel, V.T., One Caste, One Religion, One God, 1977, p.122.

Nārāyaṇa Guru did not develop a deep theoretical
knowledge of other religions, but he moved about with
people of other faiths and got acquainted with the
practical teachings of other religions. He discouraged the
rivalries and disagreements between followers of different
religions. He did not condemn other religious views.
According to him the goal of every religion was the same
and hence there was only one religion. He did not want man
to be tied to any particular religious tradition. He
emphasized the need for an openness on the part of every
person to learn from other religious traditions. He lived
during the period when the mass movements to Christianity
were taking place, but he took an interest in Christianity
only to find ideas he might respect. In Christianity he
did not appreciate proselytization.[1] According to Nārāyaṇa
Guru, all religions satisfy the needs or quench the thirst
of those who seek the truth. He taught that those who
actively engage themselves in attacking other religions
hurt the cause of their own religion.

> To vanquish (a religion) by
> fighting is not possible; no religion
> can be abolished by mutual attack;
> the opponent of another faith not
> remembering this and persisting in his
> fight, his own doom, shall he in vain
> fight for, beware![2]

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[1] Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and
People's Mass Movements in Kerala, 1850-1935, 1984, p.252.

[2] Narayana Guru, Atmopadesa-Satakam, Trans.
Nataraja Guru, 1969, p.157.

Nārāyaṇa Guru recognized the separate existence of religions. According to him, the goal of any religion is the attainment of perpetual happiness or the highest bliss. His teaching on religion was not an attempt to uphold one particular religion and reject others or to say that one is a good substitute for another. He was not attempting a synthesis by taking all the good values from diverse creeds.[1] But he believed that all religions grow and change. While Svāmi Vivekānanda, the Apostle of Rāmakrishna Mission advocated advaita as the religion that can save both East and West, Nārāyaṇa Guru never mentioned Hinduism, Vedānta or any other religion as the salvation of all mankind.[2] Instead he took account of the practical differences in religions. In March 1924, he convened a meeting of the representatives of various religions at his Advaita Asram at Alwaye. There he made it clear that the purpose of the meeting was not to debate but to know and let others know the teachings of the different religions. He enouraged the study of other religions.

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[1]Nārāyaṇa Guru did not have extensive religious visions like Śrī Rāma Krishna; nor did he attempt to go through the religious experiences in other traditions.

[2]Svāmi Vivekānanda visited Kerala in 1892. He once spoke: "The salvation of Europe depends on a rationalistic religion---such a religion exists, it is the absolute, of the impersonal God: The only religion that can have any hold on intellectual people". Rolland, Romain, Prophets of the New India, 1930, p.544.

For Nārāyaṇa Guru, man was more important than
religion. He never wanted man to be enslaved by any
particular religious tradition. He declared: "Whatever be
his religion, man should be good".[1]

(iii) One God

Nārāyaṇa Guru did not write any exegetical
commentaries on the Upaniṣads, the Brahma Sūtra, or the
Bhagavad Gītā. But his short poems reflected his
understanding of advaita and its relevance in the spiritual
quest of the common man. In Daiva Dasakam he pointed out
the transcendence and imminence of the Ultimate Reality.
In this devotional hymn he underlined the Oneness of the
Reality seen in diversified forms:

> You are the creature, Creator,
> and the medium of creation. You are
> God and the efficient cause of creation.
> You are Maya, magician and the enjoyer.
> You are the remover of Maya and the
> giver of freedom. You are the truth,
> knowledge and happiness. You alone are
> the present, past and future. You are
> not different even from the spoken word,
> when we consider it.[2]

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

[2]Narayana Guru. Daiva Dasakam, 11th ed., (Varkala,
Sri Narayana Guru Deva Kritikal, 1983), pp. 156-157
(Translated).

Nārāyaṇa Guru attempted to demonstrate the relevance of
Vedānta in the life of the ordinary people.[1] He combined
the theoretical advaita with the bhakti practice of loving
service. He exhorted the people to discriminate reality
from unreality instead of discriminating man from man,
religion from religion and god from god. He taught that
"God is the Universal Reality behind the world, all life is
His life and all activity is His."[2] Thus in the
reformation of religion that Nārāyaṇa Guru attempted there
was considerable continuity with the advaita of the Hindu
Religious Tradition. Nevertheless, he interpreted those
ideas so as to encourage the modernizing process.

Like Rājā Rāmmōhan Roy, Nārāyaṇa Guru also had to
confront the monotheistic emphasis of the Christian
missionaries. Nevertheless, it was clear that in his mind
Hinduism was sufficient for the spiritual quest of all
Hindus. Nārāyaṇa Guru's teaching of 'One Caste, One
Religion and One God for man' provided the Īḷavas with an

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[1]He combined the Advaita Vedanta theory of the
oneness of Brahman (ekātmavāda) with the theistic vedānta
practice of love and service---[He] taught that we should
serve man as man because he belongs to one humanity (jāti
or caste) And because we also acknowledge that Ātman, the
reality in man, is non-different from Brahman. See Samuel,
V.T., One Caste, One Religion, One God, 1977, p.152.

[2]Ibid., p.153.

answer which was based on a spiritual foundation within the
fold of Hinduism and which at the same time supported
their struggle for emancipation.

(b)   Consecration of Temples

Nārāyaṇa Guru realized that the key to the
emancipation of the less privileged castes was to break the
religious monopoly of the Brāhmans. Although the Īḷavas
did have temples to their own deities, they did not have
temples consecrated to Śiva and other Vedic deities. So
Śrī Nārāyaṇa, a low caste Hindu himself, installed a Śiva
idol at Aruvippuram near Trivandrum in 1888.[1] In the
temple he inscribed:

> This is the ideal house
> Where all live in full fraternity
> Without distinction of caste or
> prejudice of creed.[2]

In those days the consecration of a Hindu temple was the
exclusive monopoly of the Brāhmans. As a step in the
direction of revolting against the Brāhman supremacy in the

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[1]Aruvippuram is 43 kms. south of Murukkumpuḷa and
(19 kms. south of Trivandrum). See Plate No.3.

[2]Priyadarsan, G., Ed., SNDP Yōgam Platinum Jubilee
Souvenir, Quilon: Jubilee Celebration Committee, 1978,
p.15.

sphere of religion, and a blow against the age old tradition of not permitting lower class Hindus to enter and worship in temples, Nārāyana Guru acted quite contrary to the previous practice in establishing the temple at Aruvippuram. What he did there was to show that a man of an untouchable caste could not only make offerings to the deity but could also consecrate the deity. This deviation from traditional practice did not go unprotested. A Brāhman among the infuriated section of the Orthodox Hindus questioned Nārāyana Guru on the propriety of his action. He answered: "I installed not a Brahmin Siva, but an Izhava Siva."[1] By this action, Nārāyana Guru revealed to the public the hollowness of caste distinctions.

Later Nārāyana 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 Īlavas were trained to serve as priests in the temples he consecrated. He allowed Pulayas and other low caste people to worship in these temples. He did, however, stop the traditional low caste practice of worship with meat and liquor, and like Chattampi Svāmikal exhorted the people to stop the practice of animal sacrifice in all

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

temples. "Illumination in the hearts of deities - that was Swami's concept about the purpose of temples."[1] So he installed a lamp when he consecrated a temple at Kāramukku in 1920. He desired to inculcate virtues in the life of people and therefore he inscribed the words 'Truth, Duty, Compassion and Peace' when he consecrated a temple at Murukkumpula in 1921. It was a 'mirror' with the words 'OM' inscribed on it, that Guru installed in a temple at Kalavankōnam near Alleppy in 1927. At the Advaita Āśram Alwaye, instead of establishing a temple he made other arrangements for conducting prayers and reading scriptural texts.

Nārāyana Guru brought an awareness of human rights to the outcastes and exhorted them to practice social brotherhood among all sections of society. He accepted the doctrine of advaita but tried to translate this doctrine into action. "The essential difference between Shankara and Shree Narayana Guru lies in their application of advaita to the realm of practical life".[2] This is reflected in his teachings as well as his consecration of temples. In the temple consecrations he began with

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[1] Ibid., p.86.

[2] Tirunileth, K.R., ed., Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati Shastyabdapoorthi, 1983, p.21.

personal gods such as Śiva and Subramaṇya, gradually moved towards an emphasis of the worship of virtues, and finally arrived at the contemplation of the self (ātman) as Brahman. That is to say, from the material plane, he moved on to the spiritual plane and arrived at the realization of ātman as Brahman (Aham Brahmāsmi).

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

> 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.[1]

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

Nārāyaṇa Guru stressed the need for personal hygiene and cleanliness of the surroundings. 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. He preferred good gardens around the temple where people could sit and relax. He conceived of temples as centres of enlightenment and development.

The consecration of spiritual centres like temples honoured the inherent religious forces among the common mass. It also brought them together. He realized that without these efforts there could be no uplift of the lower classes of Kerala. As a further step to break the monopoly of Brāhmans he popularized Sanskrit and English education among the lower castes. In 1914 he opened an Advaita Āśram at Alwaye and in 1915 he opened a Sanskrit school there and laid down that admission to this school be open to all who are interested in learning Sanskrit irrespective of caste or creed. He also started schools at Aruvippuṟam and Varkala.

(c)   Social Concerns of Nārāyaṇa Guru

Īḷavas generally engaged in their traditional profession of toddy-tapping, and spent much of their hard

earned money for liquor. Nārāyaṇa Guru realized that breaking this tradition was essential for the upliftment of the community. He exhorted: "Liquor is poison - don't produce it, don't vend it, don't consume it."[1]

Polygamy and polyandry were being practiced in some places of southern Kerala. Nārāyaṇa Guru spoke against it and exhorted the people to stop free indulgence in such practices. He spoke on the responsibilities involved in married life. He said in 1908 that legal provision should be made to give to the wedded wife and children the right to a portion of a man's individual earnings.[2]

The Guru spoke on the benefits of education and wanted both men and women to get educated. While education leads to higher standards, industry helps development. So he recommended the involvement of Īlavas in various trades and industry. In both education and industry he persuaded the rich to help the poor. He encouraged Īlavas to organize and bring about the regeneration of man and society. He repeatedly said: "Strength through organization; freedom through education."[3]

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[1] Sanoo, M.K., Narayana Guru, 1978, p.114.

[2] Ibid., p.103.

[3] Ibid., p.60.

Nārāyaṇa Guru wanted to reform certain religious customs and practices.[1] He travelled from place to place speaking on these matters from 1905 to 1918. To make them effective he wrote letters to several local chiefs. He published his guidelines on the reformed practice of marriage in an Īḻava magazine called Vivēkōdayam. Inspite of all these measures some people feared social criticism and some looked for an authority with which they could over-ride the existing customs. For this purpose, Nārāyaṇa Guru went to some houses and publically asked Īḻavas to follow the new procedure.

The Guru was devoted to the upliftment of the downtrodden people to higher levels of humanism. He opposed the practice of determining the status of man by his caste, religion, race or class. He believed that beneath these superficial differences there is a stratum of noble humanity. He wanted to create opportunities to awaken this innate humanity. He wanted religion to serve this purpose. And to this end he consecrated temples and said that they should be educational centres. In 1917 he said:

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[1]These are mentioned in a later chapter.

> People should be enlightened
> through education. Enlightenment is
> emancipation. When enlightened they
> would become aware that caste and
> creed were but robes and that beneath
> them all men were the same.[1]

2. Dr. Palpu and the Īlava Memorial

Dr. Palpu, was born in 1863 in an Īlava family of

Nedungȫ in Trivandrum. He, being an outcaste, was denied

admission to the College in Kerala, even though he was

fully qualified. Undaunted by this discouragement, Palpu

went to Madras and qualified himself in the field of

medicine. He came back to southern Kerala and tried in

vain for a job. He then went to Mysore and served as

Health Officer and Director of the Lymph Institute.[2]

Dr. Palpu, the first doctor of medicine among the

Īlava Caste, showed a readiness to work for the upliftment

of his own community and other depressed classes. He

thought that their main handicap was the lack of

educational facilities. The Government of southern Kerala

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[1] Sanoo, M.K., _Narayana Guru_, 1978, p.97.

[2] That he was drawing about Rs.1,000.00 per mensem
as salary in those days is an indication of his status.
But still he was ill-treated by the caste-minded hierarchy
in his own State. See George, K.M., _Kumaran Asan_, New
Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1972, p.16.

even denied Īḻavas admission in government schools and
barred their entry into service in many government
departments.

When a movement was started under the leadership
of Nāirs such as G.P. Piḷḷai and K.P. Śankara Menon to
demand recognition of the rights of all citizens to enter
government service, Dr. Palpu joined hands with them. The
resentment was against the policy of the government in
importing persons from outside to hold the most important
posts in public service even when persons with similar
qualifications were available inside the State. Later from
Mysore, he submitted a Memorial on May 13, 1895 to the
Divān of Travancore, Col. Munro, highlighting the
grievances of the Īḻava community. 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 Mahārājā. But most of the Īḻavas were

reluctant to sign the petition because of fear and reluctance to change the tradition. With much effort he collected signatures from 13,176 Īḻavas and presented a mammoth petition to Śrī Mūlam Tirunāḷ Mahārājā, called the 'Īḻava Memorial', in 1896.

The petition 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:

> Public service, which it must be admitted, is the strongest incentive to education in this country, is entirely denied to them [Īḻava] in Travancore, and to this day the Government has not shown any encouragement worth the name to an educated Tiya [Īḻava], 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 argued 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...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.[1]

The petition reflected the utter helplessness of the

petitioners. The reply of the government to the

petitioners was as follows:

> 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.[2]

Dr. Palpu realized that these provisions were not

adequate. With the help and co-operation of progressive

minded people such as G.P. Pillai, Dr. Palpu made an effort

to make the entire country aware of the injustice to which

the community was being subjected. All these attempts did

not have much immediate effect. Around this time Dr. Palpu

met Svāmi Vivekānanda at Mysore and held long discussions

on the condition of the Īlavas of southern Kerala. After

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[1]Koshy, M.J., Genesis of Political Consciousness in Kerala, 1972, pp. 190-199.

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

that he thought of directing the Īḻava activity on the lines of religious revivalism and reformation. In Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, Dr. Palpu soon found an ideal complement.

> The coming together of Narayana
> Guru and Dr.Palpu was indeed a great
> augury for the whole community - a
> combination of energy and sobriety,
> of drive and maturity. They supple-
> mented and complemented each other in a
> magnificent way. Kumaran Asan came to
> share the concern of these two in a very
> intimate and significant way.[1]

3. Kumāran Āśān (1873-1924)

Kumāran was born at Kāyikkara, a small village about 24 kms. north of Murukkumpuḻa, as a son of Nārāyaṇa and Kāḷiyamma on April 12, 1873. He was eighteen when he first met Nārāyaṇa Guru. Their association was a turning point in Kumāran's life and he became a disciple of Nārāyaṇa Svāmi. Nārāyaṇa Guru sent Kumāran to Bangalore for higher education. Dr. Palpu exerted some influence to get Kumāran admitted to Śrī Chāmarājendra Sanskrit College, Bangalore. After his three years of study, Kumāran went to Madras and studied Sanskrit under a private tutor. It was difficult for him, being a low caste, to get admission at Madras Sanskrit College. Then he proceeded to Calcutta

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[1] George, K.M., Kumaran Asan, 1972, p.16.

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, Kumāran came back to Trivandrum in 1900.

Kumāran settled down at Aruvippuram where he started a Sanskrit School and taught the young aspirants. He felt deeply the humiliation his community had to suffer and wanted to dedicate his whole life, his thought, word and deed, to its emancipation.

The religious and social activities among the Īlavas organized under the leadership of Nārāyaṇa Guru had increased considerably by then. The leaders realized that a small organizational set up had to be streamlined and activities further expanded, and for that the primary step was to register the body as a society. Thus in 1903 the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Paripālana Yōgam (SNDP) was registered as a society to foster the religious, social and educational well being of the Īlavas.[1] Kumāran Āśān was

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[1]Nārāyaṇa Guru was the life-President and Dr. Palpu the Vice-President of the SNDP Yōgam. Koshy, M.J., Last Days of Monarchy in Kerala, 1973, p.267.

called to work as its General Secretary. He devoted his time and energy to the SNDP Yōgam and worked there for about sixteen years (until 1919).[1] To propagate the ideals of the SNDP Yōgam, Kumāran started a monthly journal called Vivēkōdayam, which soon became an influential magazine. The first issue was published in April 1904.[2]

(a) The Literary Works

Kumāran Āśān understood that a change of heart was essential for a change of the environment, politically, economically and culturally. Poetry was the medium he 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. His literary creations effected a tremendous transformation in the intellectual horizon of Kerala. "No poet had ever shaken the conscience of Kerala as much as Asan did."[3] Āśān was honoured as a

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[1]He had to tour throughout the length and breadth of Kerala and organize and establish branches of the society, make speeches, settle disputes, represent the central office without much assistance. He had to awaken the masses who were steeped in ignorance and were not quite conscious of the rights denied to them. ibid., p.22.

[2]Vivekōdayam soon came to be referred as the 'Īḷava Gazette'.

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

distinguished Indian poet by the Prince of Wales who visited Madras and presented Āsãn with a silk shawl and gold bracelet in January 1922.

The influence of age-old tradition and its consequences on human life were well portrayed in his poems Naḷini (1911) and Līlã (1914). The poem 'Thoughts of a Thiyya Boy' which he wrote later depicted the disabilities suffered by the Īḷava community. He 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.[1]

This poem was a document that demanded just and equitable treatment and restoration of the inalienable civil rights which had been withheld from the Īḷavas for the single 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.

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[1]Ibid., p. 238.

Kumāran Aśān wrote his <u>Duravastha</u> (The Wretched
State) after the Moplah Revolt of Malabar in 1921.[1]
Through this literary piece he criticized the state of
contemporary Hindu society. He gave an exhortation for
regeneration through internal strength. The poet was
exhorting the members of the higher castes to take the
initiative to give to the lower castes what they deserve.
He wrote in <u>Duravastha</u>:[2]

> 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 severed selves,

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[1]It is a series of twenty two riots that took place
between Muslims and Hindus during the period from 1836 to
1856. "The common feature of these riots was that a
Mappila or group of Mappilas [Muslims] would murder Hindu
Janmis and desecrate Hindu temples" Menon, A. Sreedhara.,
<u>A Survey of Kerala History</u>, 1967, p.337.

[2]<u>Duravastha</u> is the story of Savitri: Savitri is
the daughter of a rich Brahman. The mutineers loot her
home and kill her parents. She manages to escape and finds
refuge in the humble dwelling of Chāthan, an outcaste
labourer. The single illiterate Chāthan cares for the
refugee with the devotion due to a goddess. Sāvitri learns
to admire the guileless ways of Chāthan. 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 Brāhman 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. By the contact with a
Harijan, the Brāhman maiden has lost her caste and will not
be accepted back in her home even though the disturbance is
over and peace has been restored. This is the <u>Duravastha</u> –
the wretched condition.

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.[1]

Addressing the votaries of Hindu tradition the poet warned:

Change you the laws yourselves, or else,
The laws will change you indeed.[2]

These words of the poet sowed the seed of deep social reform and spread the idea that caste distinction was inhuman and unnecessary. The poem had its effect on the minds of the people. The resurgent forces of progress and nationalism started the 'Vaikkam Satyāgrahā', the struggle to establish the right of the depressed classes to use the road adjacent to the Vaikkam Temple, just a year after the publication of Duravastha.

Āśān's Caṇḍālabhikṣuki further highlighted the cruelty of caste and the denial of justice. The story was taken from a Buddhist legend. The Candala woman Matangi offered water to a thirsty Bhiksu, Ānanda, which he happily

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[1] Ibid., p.267.

[2] George, K.M., Kumaran Asan, 1972, p.58.

accepted and was satisfied. This created a new stir in her
heart. So she went the next morning to the vihāra
(monastery) where she was accepted as a disciple by the
Buddha. The King's protest made the Buddha preach to him
the foolishness of the caste system:

> Is caste found in the blood
> or is it in the bone or the marrow?
> Is the chandala woman's body
> infertile to the Brahmin's seed?[1]

He questioned the superiority of the Brāhman caste when he
wrote:

> Is the holy sandal mark on the forehead
> Or the sacred thread or the tuft of hair
> On the pate a natural legacy in birth?[2]

The poet was certain that each individual given an
opportunity would evolve to higher standards of life by his
own impetus. He said in Caṇḍālabhikṣuki:

> The gentle Pulaya is not wild weed
> Sprouting from the foot of the paddy
> plant

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[1] Ibid., pp.60-61.

[2] Govindan, M., Poetry and Renaissance, 1974, p.357.

> Surely it shall yield golden sheaves
>   of grain
> Given an equal opportunity.[1]

He wanted the people to come out of their own self-made
prisons of prejudice and 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."[2]

Āśān favoured 'love' as the means of promoting
peace and justice, social, political and economic ideals
among all people. This ideal in his poetry assumed larger
dimensions. In Caṇḍālabhikṣuki, the Buddha advises the King
to instruct the people to rise above caste and foster love.

> The world dawns from love
> And flourishes with love
> Love itself is the might of the world
> Love brings happiness to all
> Love is the life itself, sir
> And its negation is death.[3]

The love he advocated was a positive state of doing good
even to the enemy and evil-doer. In collective life he

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[1]Ibid., p.359.

[2]Ravindran, T.K., Asan and Social Revolution in
Kerala, 1972, p.XLV

[3]George, K.M., Kumaran Asan, 1972, p.61.

used the concept of love for more useful practical purposes.

Kumāran Āśān was a revolutionary poet. He took an uncompromising stand in the social revolution he advocated in poems like Duravastha and Caṇḍālabhikṣuki. He stood for change. Yet traditional values like equality, freedom, truth and love were dear to him.

(b) Āśān and the Śrī Mūlam Popular Assembly

It was through the Śrī Mūlam Popular Assembly instituted in 1904 that Kumāran Āśān's social and political action gave new hope to the Īḻavas and other lower castes. Āśān was nominated as the Īḻava member to the second session of the Assembly in 1905. As a member, he spoke for the cause of the Īḻavas and other suffering lower castes. It was a time when the government was eager to look after the interests and guard the privileges of the superior castes.

On February 15, 1911 Kumāran Āśān joined the discussion of the Assembly on the need to start local industries and to encourage technical studies. He asked the government to develop the staple industries of the

state such as coir-yarn, copra and weaving and to train
young men by sending them to Europe and America.

> He pointed out that, as the Ezhava
> community had much interest in the above
> industries, it would be desirable to send
> some young men from that community to
> foreign countries to undergo training.[1]

Āsān spoke on the desirability of admitting the
Īlavas, Kaṇiyans, Syrian Christians and men of other
communities into Sanskrit and Āyurvedic Schools.[2] Speaking
on the educational disabilities of Īlavas in general, he
said that if an accurate and exhaustive list of schools
into which admission was refused to Īlavas be called for
from the Director of Public Instruction, the government
could realize the enormity of the injustice done to the
community, which in numerical strength and wealth was not
by any means a negligible factor in the State. On February
22, 1915 he asked that a special enquiry be instituted to

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[1]Ravindran, T.K., Asan and social Revolution in
Kerala, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Soceity, 1972, p.3.

[2]He said in the assembly session on February 19,
1913: The Ezhava had a special aptitude for medicine. For
the study of medicine, proficiency in the Sanskrit language
and literature was essential, as the Ayurvedic medical
treatises were all written in Sanskrit... The Ezhava youths
had to go to Madras and Calcutta for studying Ayurvedic
medicine. ibid., pp. 14-16.

probe into the matter. He also spoke on the desirability of admitting Īlava girls into all the Girls' Schools of the State.[1]

The Īlava students were not given admission to the hostel attached to the Mahārājā's College, Trivandrum. Āśān spoke about it in the Assembly on February 28, 1916. He pointed out that Īlava students were unable to procure decent accommodation elsewhere in Trivandrum. On March 10, 1921 he spoke in the Assembly on fee concessions at the school.[2]

The lower castes had no chance of getting enough members elected from the open constituencies to the Assembly. The Īlavas who were about 26 lakhs people were not adequately represented. On March 4, 1912 he spoke:

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[1]Lastly he requested that the Girls' schools of the State, now closed to the Ezhava girls, should be thrown open to them as early as possible and that lists of the Girls' Schools should be published in the gazette from time to time for the information of the Ezhavas.' ibid., p.16. 'He said that it was pitiable to observe that only 1 percent among Ilava women were literate.' Priyadarsanan, G., Kumaran Asante Prajasabha Prasangangal, Kottayam, National Book Stall, 1982, p.15.

[2]Ravindran, T.K., Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala, 1972, p.39.

> The chance of more members
> from this community being elected
> under the present system of election
> was remote, as would be evident from
> the fact, till now, Karunagapally
> [North of Murukkumpula] was the only
> taluk from which an Ezhava was elected.[1]

Āsān urged the desirability of the government laying down some definite standard by which nomination might be made from the Īlava community every year.

The government of southern Kerala upheld the principles of pollution and untouchability which stood in the way of the large majority of the people enjoying civic rights. Āsān fought relentlessly against this injustice. On February 28, 1914 he spoke on the reluctance of the government to employ more Īlavas in the Public Services.

The custom of Tīntal (pollution by distance) remained an institution, though with less severity, in all walks of life in southern Kerala in the early decades of this century. Sign-boards (Tīntal palakas) were put up on certain areas, especially near the temples prohibiting the lower castes from entering there. On March 3, 1920 Āsān

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[1]Ibid., p.48.

appealed to the government to take immediate remedial measures and grant them access at least to the outer walls of the temples.

Kumāran Āsān presented the need for passing a law regarding the marriage and succession of Īḻavas at the Travancore Legislative Council. The government appointed a committee and the Īḻava Bill came up for discussion at the Council. After necessary deliberations the Īḻava Bill was passed in 1925. The SNDP Yōgam played a major role in developing a common view among the various sections of the community and helping to enforce the new rules regarding marriage, succession and partition of property.

4. Institutions and Movements

(a) The SNDP Yōgam

It was under the inspiration of Nārāyaṇa Guru that the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Paripālana Yōgam' came into existence on May 15, 1903. This organization became a great force in the consolidation of the scattered and dissipated Īḻava community and in the work of its social and economic emancipation. The by-laws indicate that its (SNDP Yōgam's) main object was to promote and to encourage

religious and secular education and industrious habits among the Īḷava community. 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. Now it functions with its headquarters at Quilon.

Nārāyaṇa Guru was the President of the organization for 25 years until his samādhi (death). In 1905 he 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 about religion and morality 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...
>
> (a) Religion:
>
> (i) Reject superstitions and rituals with
>   animal sacrifices and the like meant to
>   propitiate evil spirits.
>
> (ii) Speak about the superiority of worship
>   done in the best form and also about the
>   Saguna and Nirguna aspects of pure Hindu
>   Philosophy.

(iii) Intelligently induce people to build
temples or monasteries in the required
places. (De-crying other religions
should never be done).

(b) Morality:

(i) Speak about truth, cleanliness, fear
of unrighteousness, theisms, unity.

(ii) Speak about avoiding meaningless and
harmful customs and adoptions of nobler
codes of conduct in tune with the times
(as enunciated by Swami) and guide the
people onto these lines.

Apart from these general instructions he laid down two

special rules the speakers were to observe:

(a) 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.

(b) 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.[1]

In 1908 Nārāyaṇa Guru wrote to the secretary of the

SNDP Yōgam:

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[1]Sanoo, M.K., _Narayana Guru_, 1978, pp. 97-98.

> 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.[1]

In the initial stages Dr. Palpu was a powerful force. He exhorted the Īlavas that the annual meetings of the Yōgam should include a separate meeting for the Īlava women. Accordingly, with the help of his aged mother, he organized such a meeting in 1903 itself.[2] He took great interest in organizing an industrial exhibition at Quilon in 1905. This exhibition had a great impact. Dozens of exhibits of coconut and other agricultural products were exhibited and a large number attended the function. This exhibition gave Īlavas a sense of pride and a wider community feeling.

Kumāran Āśan served the SNDP Yōgam as its general secretary for fifteen years. Āśan worked with a sense of dedication and within a few years the Yōgam registered an over-all development. Branches of the Yōgam were organized

[1] Ibid., p.102.

[2] Velayudhan, P.S., SNDP Yogam Charitram, 1978, p.105.

from one end of southern Kerala to the other.[1] As the

Īḷavas grew stronger through their organization, they were

no longer satisfied with accepting the slow changes

effected by environmental and external forces. They wanted

to speed up change by legislation and by creating public

opinion in their favour by propaganda through the press and

through conferences and petitioning of the authorities.

For a long time the government schools in the State were

closed to Īḷavas. The SNDP Yōgam with the constant

inspiration from Dr. Palpu and untiring work by Kumāran

Āśān made indefatigable efforts to uplift their community

educationally. The first attempt of the Yōgam in this

field was to remove the obstacle for admitting Īḷavas to

government and government aided schools in the State.

Later it concentrated its attention on establishing its own

educational institutions.

Because of the social injustices accorded to the

Īḷavas, there was some interest among them in embracing

some other religion. An Īḷava leader C. Krishnan even

advocated that the community as a whole should leave

Hinduism and accept Buddhism to get rid of the caste

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[1] The SNDP Yōgam had its branch office at
Chiṛayinkil in 1904.

barriers.   In this state of tension and uncertainty, Āśān
gave the Presidential address of the Yōgam 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 Moksa, 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
> distintegration 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...[1]

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

Kumāran Āśān explained further the position of the SNDP
Yōgam through the paper Mitavādi.[1]

>The SNDP Yogam is a body
>functioning under a definite programme
>to promote the wellbeing of the Thiyya
>[Īlava] community. One of its main
>targets 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
>SNDP Yogam is based on this ideal of His
>Holiness. Between this and the Buddhist
>religion there are some essential
>variations... 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 limelight. 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...

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[1]See the booklet on Mathaparivarthana Rasavadam,
(Thonnakkal, Sarada Book Depot, 1933.)

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 meets out
such wounderful 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 man like Raja Ram Mohan Roy
and patronised by saints like
Dr. Rabindranath Tagore and has in
its fold followers who are leading
stars in the political attention of
some of our own men? ... 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...[1]

These words of Kumāran Āśān reveal that discussions

on the mass conversion of Īḻavas to another religion came

up repeatedly in the meetings of SNDP Yōgam. Evidently the

leaders listened to such discussions and guided the people

to understand that it was reformation of their religion and

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[1]Govindan, M., _Poetry and Renaissance_, 1974, pp.
377-383.

not conversion to another religion that was necessary. Evaluating the reform movements such as Brahmo Samāj and Ārya Samāj and learning the contributions of religious leaders such as Śankara, Rāmānuja and Chaitanyā, Kumāran Āśān emphasized that they should stick on to the religious reform initiated by their religious leader, Nārāyaṇa Guru. Thus the decision Īḷavas made to remain Hindus was conscious and the discussion was carried out in a democratic manner.

On July 20, 1919 N. Kumāran became the General Secretary of the SNDP Yōgam. On May 13, 1920 the annual meeting of the Yōgam passed the following resolution proposed by T.K. Mādhavan and supported by T.K. Nārāyaṇan.

> Resolved to ask the government to grant to all Hindus, irrespective of caste, entry to all public temples.[1]

In the following year, the Yōgam resolved:

> None of the Ilavas would co-operate in any manner till the right of entry is granted, with those temples where it is not offered now.[2]

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[1]Velayudhan, P.S., SNDP Yoga Charitram, 1978, p.202. (Translated).

[2]Ibid., p.203. (Translated).

This resolution proposed by K.P. Kayyālakkal and passed by the Yōgam seriously affected the income of the Dēvasvam or high caste temples. Following this, two Ilavas made an attempt to enter the temple at Kaṭakkāvūr, north of Murukkumpuḻa. The court punished them for polluting the temple premises.[1]

An agitation called the 'Vaikkam Satyāgrahā' 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, the roads were open for those untouchable castes who had been converted to Christianity or Islam. T.K. Mādhavan, a brilliant leader of the Yōgam 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. Mādhavan succeeded in getting the all out support of the Nāir Service Society (NSS) and the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi

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[1]Ibid., p.212.

for the agitations. Mannatt Padmanābhan, leader of the NSS
organized a (savarṇa jātha) procession of the caste Hindus
who supported the agitation. They went to Trivandrum and
submitted their demand before the Regent Sētu Lakshmi
Bhai. The agitation was called off in 1925. Subsequently
the approach roads to all temples in southern Kerala were
thrown open to all Hindus in 1928. 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 Mahārājā on November 12, 1936.

Still another significant achievement of the Yōgam
was securing communal representation in the State
Legislature. Though a legislative council was created in
1888, not even one Īḻava member was elected to the
legislative body for a very long time. The SNDP Yōgam
asked the government several times for reservation of seats
in the Legislature. The franchise was based on property
qualifications. The Nāirs continued to have the 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 electorates. 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 the 'Joint Political Congress'. The three communities boycotted the elections to the legislature.[1] On August 17, 1936 the government issued a press communique according to which eight seats in the Lower House and two seats in the Upper House were reserved for Īḻavas. In the 1937 elections, SNDP Yōgam contested and secured all the seats, and for the first time elected Īḻava members entered the Legislative Body.

Another field to which the SNDP Yōgam 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 Yōgam raised its voice. Dr. G.D. Noxe was appointed by the government to prepare rules regarding recruitment. He submitted the Public Service Recruitment Rules in March 1935. According to those rules forty percent of the

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[1]Ibid., pp.291-294.

intermediate section of the public service was set apart for the backward communities (including Īḻavas) and all the jobs in the lower divisions of the services were required to be given on a population basis to the various communities concerned.

The SNDP Yōgam was successful in starting several educational institutions.[1] It opened schools at Aruvippuṟam and Varkala during the first decade of the century. There was an increased interest among the Īḻavas to start more educational institutions and to have the SNDP Yōgam run them when R. Śankar was General Secretary in the 1940s. On November 25, 1945, at the annual meeting, the Yōgam decided to start a first grade college at Quilon. The college started functioning from 1948. On August 18, 1952 a trust by name 'Śrī Nārāyaṇa Trust' was formed for the management of the Educational Institutions of the Īḻava community.

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[1] Nārāyaṇa Guru was a school teacher of Īḻavas at Anjengo, a place north of Murukkumpuḻa. Kumāran Āśān, on his return from Calcutta in 1900 A.D., started a Sanskrit school at Aruvippuṟam for the Īḻavas and others. Dr. Palpu was also interested in starting educational institutions for the Īḻavas.

Table:2 Gazetted Officers in Government Service as on 1929

Community	Population	No.of Officers
Tamil Brahmans	45,868	509
Nairs	6,90,495	469
Christians	11,72,934	413
Ilavas	6,67,935	32
Muslims	2,61,367	14

According to the statistics collected in 1985 the
Iḻavas have 14 colleges in Kerala. The Śrī Nārāyaṇa Trust
has 2 High Schools, 1 Training School, 14 Colleges, 1
Training College, 1 Poly Technic, 2 Industrial Training
Colleges, 4 College Hostels and 1 Hospital.[1] The
educational institutions include the colleges at
Chempaḻanti and Śivagiri started in 1964.

(b) Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Saṃgham

Nārāyaṇa Guru felt the need to establish a
Samnyāsi-Saṃgham (an organization of dedicated ascetics)

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[1]Letter from the SNDP Yōgam Secretary, A.S. Pratap
Singh, dated December 7, 1985.

to carry out his religious ideals. In 1928 he started the
'Śrī Nārāyaṇa Saṃgham' at Śivagiri in Varkala. One of his
early Saṃnyāsis at Śivagiri belonged to the Nāir caste.
(Satyavṛta). In his centre at Varkala, Guru also had
inmates from the lower castes.[1]

A year after the inception of this Saṃgham Guru
died, but the Saṃgham continued to propagate the reforms of
the Guru. Now there are 90 Saṃnyāsis in the organization,
and the Saṃgham owns 15 religious institutions. It has 300
'Guru Dharma Pracharana Sabhas'.[2] Today the Saṃgham is
very active as a religious organization fully dedicated to
the ideal of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru.

(c) The Śivagiri Pilgrimage

Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru encouraged the Īḻavas to conduct
an annual pilgrimage to Śivagiri Varkala shortly before his

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[1]Samuel V.T., One Caste, One Religion, One God,
1977, p.94.

[2]Letter from Swāmi Samprasādānanda, Sri Narayana
Dharma Saṃgham, dated December 12, 1985.

death in 1928.[1] He suggested the dates be December 31 and

January 1.[2] He asked the pilgrims to observe a ten-day

austerity based on the five principles: Purity of Body,

Word, Mind, Food and Deed and to go to Sivagiri in yellow

dress. He further directed the devotees to organize

discourses at Sivagiri during these days for the pilgrims

to learn more about 'Education, Cleanliness, Piety,

Organization, Agriculture, Trade, Handicrafts and

Technology.

Every year this pilgrimage attracts people from far

and wide.[3] The Sāradā Temple and the Nārāyaṇa Guru Samādhi

Mandir, provide facilities for religious worship. During

the pilgrimage days study classes on the ideals of the Guru

are especially arranged at the school called

Brahma-Vidyālaya. The pilgrimage includes programmes such

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[1]Elavumthitta Rāghavan, who attended the first
pilgrimage to Sivagiri was present at the pilgrimage
convention in 1984, while the field-study was conducted.

[2]Priyadarsanan,G.,ed.,Sivagiri Theerthadana Kanaka
Jubilee Samaranika, Varkala:Jubilee Celebration
Committee,1984,p.13.

[3]Kerala Kaumudi (Newspaper) December 31, 1984,
reported that people were present from Karnāṭaka and Tamil
Nāṭu, the neighbouring states.

as the 'Procession of the Pilgrims' meeting for the propagation of Guru Dharma, separate meetings for women, poets and youths; and an Ecumenical Meeting with the participation of various religious leaders.[1]

(d) Śrī Nārāyaṇa Gurukulam

Some of the followers of Nārāyaṇa Guru believed that the idea of founding Gurukula (boarding school) type educational institutions in different parts of Kerala was dear to the Guru. In 1949 Nataraja Guru, the son of Dr. Palpu and a scholar, founded this movement after the death of Nārāyaṇa Guru. Its headquarters is in Śrī Nivāsapuram, Varkala, two miles from the Samnyāsa-Saṃgham at Śivagiri. Its primary aim is to educate young children in the Gurukula tradition and to interpret and propagate the philosophical teachings of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru.

Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati succeeded Natarāja Guru and is carrying out the task of interpreting Nārāyaṇa Guru's teachings through his discourses and writings. He

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[1]The Kerala Governor, P. Ramachandran inaugurated the convention on December 30, 1984 at 10 a.m. Bhargavi Thankappan presided over the meeting for women. Philipose Mar Theophilus, bishop of St.Thomas Christians, inaugurated the Ecumenical Meeting.

is also the Director of an institute called the 'East-West University of Brahmavidya' founded at Varkala in the year 1963.[1] The Gurukula has regular religious instruction hours in the morning and evening for the inmates. It also provides training for five years to students of age 10 and above in the fields of printing, short-hand, typing, weaving, carpentry and farming. Children are encouraged to study in the nearby school and college managed by the Īḻavas.[2] At present the Gurukula has 14 centers in India and 12 in other countries.[3]

(e) Śrī Nārāyaṇa Cultural Mission

In order to propagate the ideals of Nārāyaṇa Guru and to interpret them in modern terms at different parts of the world, an organization by the name 'Śrī Nārāyaṇa

[1]Tirunilath, K.R., ed., Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati-Shastyabdapoorthi, Cochin: Souvenir Committee, 1983, p.101.

[2]The 35th Annual Convention of the Gurukula and the 22nd Anniversary of the Brahmavidya University were celebrated at Śrinivāsapuram from December 26, 1984 to January 1, 1985. On New Year's Day (1985), a novice was admitted to the Gurukula and Muni Nārāyaṇa Prasād was given Saṃnyāsa by Nitya Chaitanya Yati. See Plate No.4.

[3]Prospectus, East-West University of Brahmavidya, Varkala: University Publication, 1982, p.56.

Cultural Mission' was founded at Alwaye in 1975. K.K.
Visvanathan is its president and M.K. Sanoo its secretary.
Adhering to the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru it aims at
propagating the 'One Caste' ideal through community centres
at various places and uplifting the down-trodden and the
helpless by running social service organizations such as
orphanages and destitute homes. It has several branches in
Kerala and four outside the State.[1] It runs libraries and
schools. It has a quarterly publication by the name 'Śrī
Nārāyaṇa Dharma'.[2]

5. An Assessment

All the modern socio-religious movements in Kerala
had their beginning while the European powers were in the
coast. The missionaries introduced English education first
among the St. Thomas Christians and later among the
underprivileged sections of Hindu society. The new system
of education created an awareness among people about their
position in society and the need for improvement. The

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[1]Outside Kerala it has branches at Madras, Bombay,
Bangalore and Ahmedabad. Initial steps have been taken to
have centres at more places.

[2]Kesavan Vaidyar, C.R., ed., Vivekodayam: Sri
Narayana International Year Souvenir, Irinjalakuda: 1978,
p.194.

first awakening was among the St. Thomas Christians. The
work of the LMS and CMS missionaries among the Hindus
motivated the socio-religious movements of the modern era.
It evoked in them an awareness of their position in the
caste-ridden society and a desire for improvement. The
missionaries mingled with the lower castes and propagated
the Christian doctrines such as brotherhood of man and
fatherhood of God. This gave the natives a new experience
and opened new perspectives on social emancipation.[1]

The traditional social structure in Kerala granted
greater privileges to the higher castes at the expense of
the lower ones. Ilavas were the first lower caste to fight
for privileges. As they became conscious about their
rights, they organized themselves under their own caste
leaders and sought for their emancipation. They sought
ways and means to rise above ignorance and economic
backwardness.

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[1]There was hardly any social movement without a
religious aspect nor any religious movement without the
social aspect during the 19th century in Kerala.
Gladstone, J.W., Protestant Christianity and People's
Movements in Kerala 1850-1934, 1984, p.416.

The able leadership of Nārāyaṇa Guru, Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān helped the Īḻavas to improve their condition through their organization, the SNDP Yōgam. The consecration of temples, change in certain religious and social practices along with the religious renewal, improvement in education, opportunities for better employment and encouragement to trade and industry enabled the Īḻavas to struggle for their own betterment. They accepted the teachings of their Guru that Mankind is One and caste divisions are unnecessary. This was by no means a 'break away' from their cultural and traditional 'roots'. It was not a search for a new and different identity but a struggle to find meaning in their own identity as Īḻavas among the Hindus of Southern Kerala. The Īḻava movement expressed their concern for the people of other castes. The reformation among the St. Thomas Christians and the missionary work of the nineteenth century were catalysts that helped the awakening of the Īḻavas. But the reformation remained indigenous and leaders sprang up from within the Īḻava community. The movement among Īḻavas was a reformation within the social structure of the caste. Īḻavas remained as Īḻavas after their awakening but there occurred a major change in their

condition and social status. The movement wiped out the
discriminations and inequalities that prevailed in the
society, and the savarna-avarna distinction became much
less conspicuous.

The religious reformation of Nārāyana Guru differed
from modern religious movements in other parts of India.
In northern India, all the reformers of religion and
prophets of renaissance emanated from the higher castes.
The Brahmo Samāj, Ārya Samāj and Prārthana Samāj were all
movements that arose from the upper castes. No elite of
the upper castes in southern Kerala worked to ameliorate
the condition of their lower caste brethern. Nārāyana Guru
came up from an untouchable caste. He never had an English
education. He did not travel to European countries. His
teachings and religious reforms were beneficial not only to
Īlavas but also to other communities. They evoked an
awakening among all communities. The organization of the
SNDP Yōgam (1903) encouraged Ayyan Kāli to form the 'Sādhu
Paripalana Samgham' (1907) for the Harijans and Mannattu
Padmanabhan to organize the 'Nāir Service Society' (1914)
for the Nāirs. Very often these leaders were in sympathy
with each other as was exemplified by the friendship

between Chaṭṭampi Svāmikal and Nārāyaṇa Guru as well as
between Ayyan Kāḷi and Nārāyaṇa Guru. They thus became
aware of the needs of others even though their approaches
were different. Ayyan Kāḷi gave more significance to the
social emancipation of the Harijans than to their religious
awakening. Chaṭṭampi Svāmikaḷ took an uncomprising
attitude against the Christian missionary movements and the
domination of the Brāhmans. Nārāyaṇa Guru stood for the
socio-religious emancipation of the Īḻavas and adopted a
liberal attitude toward other religions. Thus the various
caste movements fortified communalism, but honoured the
spirit of co-existence.

Nārāyaṇa Guru restated the fundamental principles
and concepts of the Hindu religion. He installed a
Śivaliṅgam and a mirror in the temples he consecrated in
order to show the right of the Īḻavas to worship Sanskritic
deities as well as modern and popular symbols. He trained
Ilavas as priests and appointed them in temples, thereby
proclaiming that not only Brāhmans but also Īḻavas could
minister in temples. There was thus both change as well as
continuity in the reformation initiated by Nārāyaṇa Guru.

Dr. Palpu emphasized the freedom of the individual

and struggled to attain the rights of the community by
social and political means; Nārāyaṇa Guru and Kumāran Āśān
attempted the same through spiritual means such as
regeneration of the person, cultivation of new virtues and
provision of a helpful environment. The moral
responsibility Āśān felt for the unprivileged mass
strengthened him to speak for justice in the legislative
bodies of the State where he had membership. Together
these three (Nārāyaṇa Guru, Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān)
attempted the creation of a 'new man' and a 'new society'.

Today, Nārāyaṇa Guru is associated with various
other institutions also. Some of them are the Śiva Temple
at Aruvippuṟam, Samādhi Mandir at Śivagiri, Advaita Āśram
at Alwaye and Sri Nārāyaṇa Gurukulam at Chempalanti. There
are also various associations such as the 'Sri Nārāyaṇa
Saṃgham', the 'Śrī Nārāyaṇa Gurukulam' and the 'Śrī Nārāyaṇa
Cultural Mission' to propagate the ideals of Nārāyaṇa
Guru. The annual pilgrimage to Sivagiri and the
celebration of 'Guru Jayanti' and 'Guru Samadhi' served as
an anchorage to uphold the spirit of the Īḻava movement. A
recent development is the deification of Nārāyaṇa Guru by
establishing 'Guru sculptures' or shrines at various
prominent places in the State and the conduct of regular

'Guru Pūjā' at them. Cassette tapes containing hymns in praise of Nārāyaṇa Guru and Kīrtans (devotional hymns) of his teachings are also popular in the State. Efforts are now in progress to bring out two films depicting the life and work of the Guru. The charisma of Nārāyaṇa Guru continues to bind the Īlavas together, and under this canopy the local SNDP units and the various Īlava associations continue to flourish. A detailed study of the process of change in the life of ordinary Īlavas in a rural area of Kerala will be taken up in the following chapters in order to trace the impact of his work.

V. A PROFILE OF MURUKKUMPULA

A PROFILE OF MURUKKUMPULA

       The question of how patterns of continuity and
change interact in the cultures of the Īlavas in rural
southern Kerala will now be taken up by selecting one
village in the area called Murukkumpula. The following
section begins the study by presenting a profile of the
place.

              1.   The Place: Murukkumpula

       Murukkumpula lies at a distance of 22 kms. north of
Trivandrum on the east bank of Kathinamkulam lake which is
part of a system of backwaters linked to the Arabian Sea.
This place appears to be an extended garden of coconut
trees with patches of rice-fields in some low-lying areas.
The soil is sandy and is good for coconut plantations. The
base economy of this place is dependent on the coconut tree
cultivated primarily by the Īlava community, and the fish
from the lake and the sea traditionally caught by what is
now the Latin Christian community.

       Murukkumpula was well-known in the last century for
its katavu (Ferry) which was used for trade. (See Plate
No.5 and 6). Before railway and road transport became

Map: 2   Map of Southern Kerala
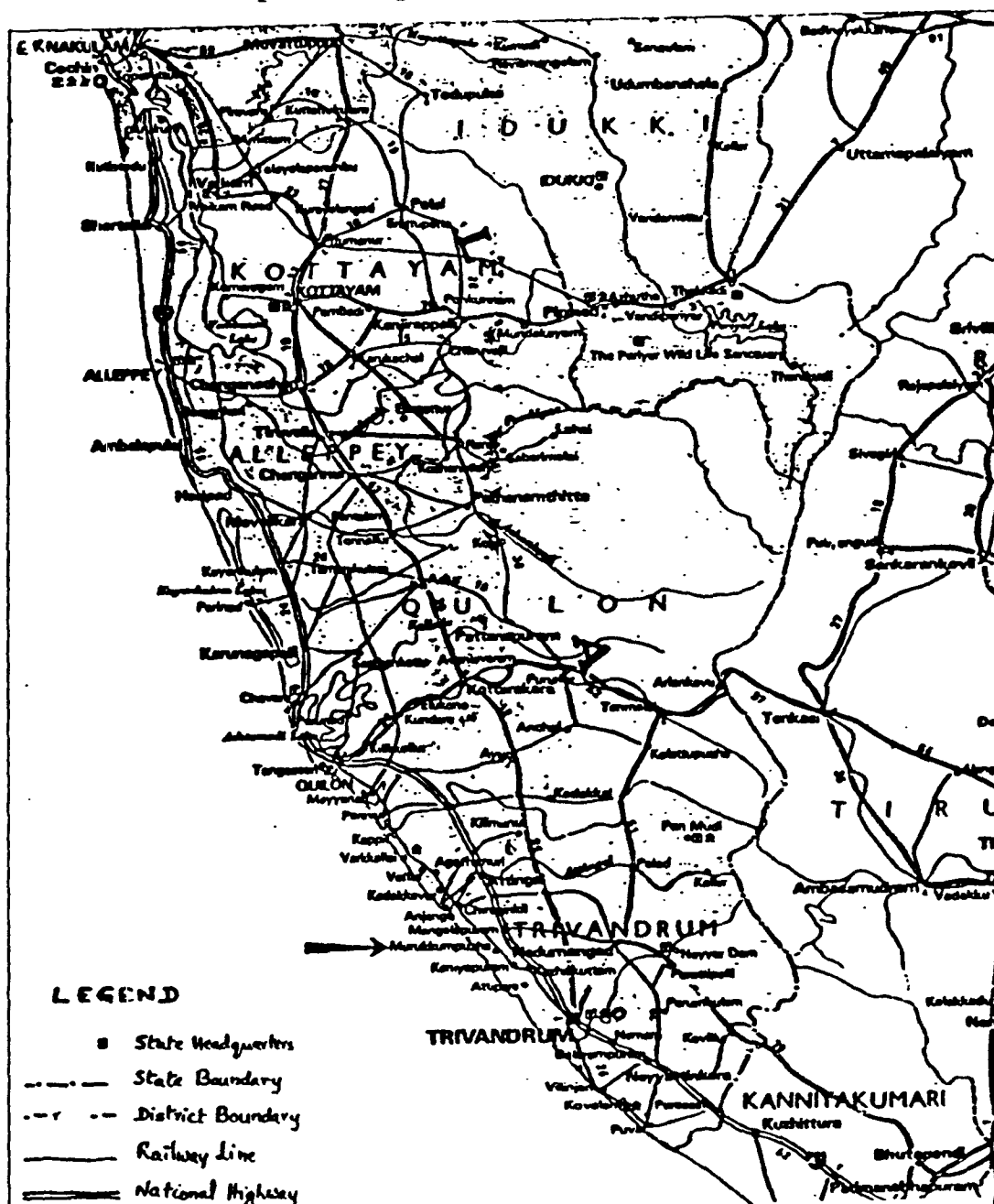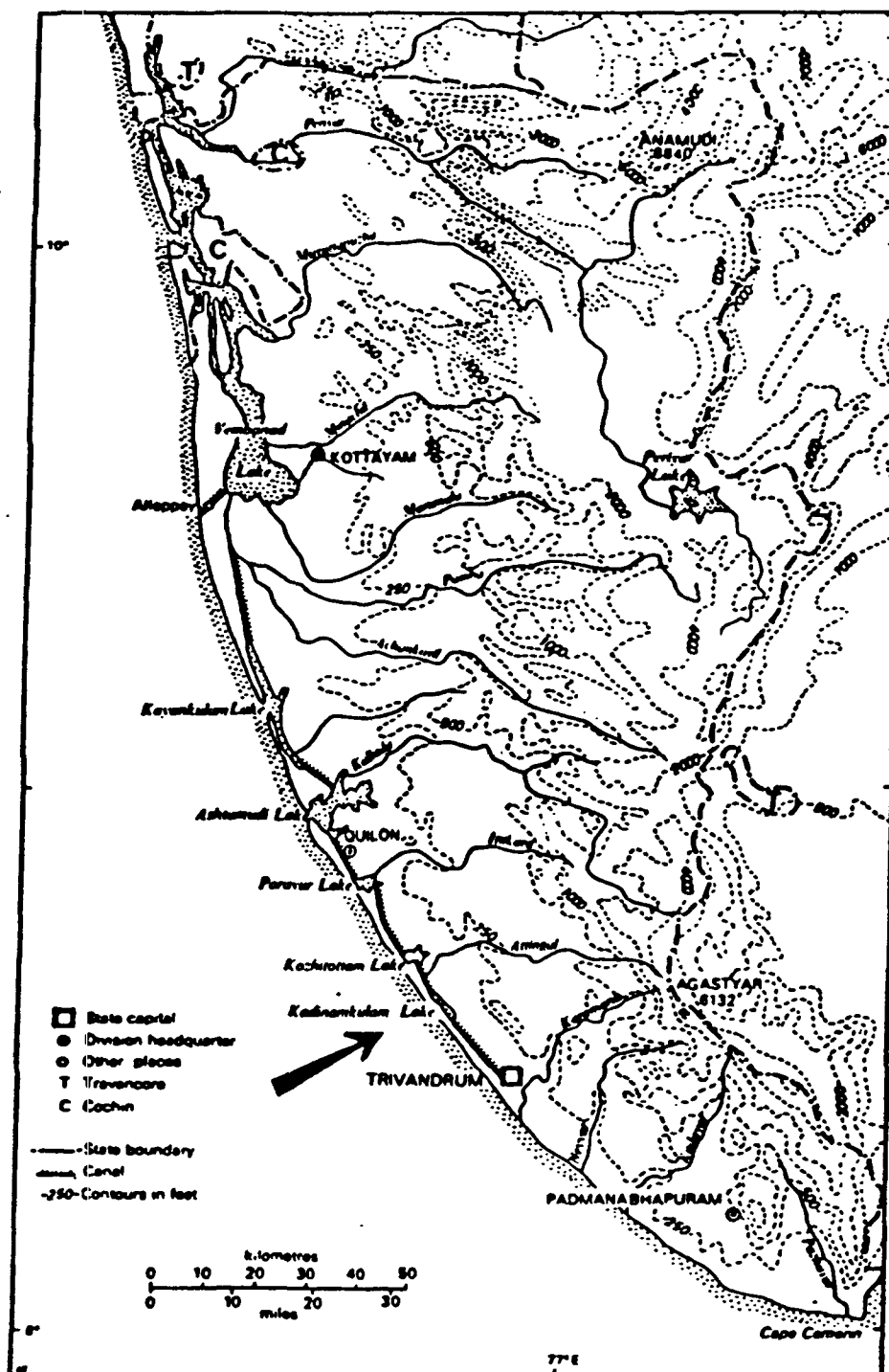
MAP 3. Travancore: Physical Features, showing 250,
500, 1,000, 2,000, 4,000 and 6,000-foot contours

common in southern Kerala, the major communication and
commerce links were through the backwaters. For that
purpose Kaṭhinamkuḷam lake was connected to the
neighbouring lakes right up to the Vēmbanāṭ lake in the
north.[1] As Murukkumpuḷa was then famous for its coconut
and coir industry, keṭṭuvaḷḷams laden with coconut produce
were always on the move from there to important places like
Quilon, Alleppey and Cochin to the north.[2] It was only in
1870 that a canal by name Cānnānkara Tōṭ was dug so as to
connect Trivandrum as well to this lake. Prior to that
people from Trivandrum and other interior places used to
come to the Murukkumpuḷa kaṭavu in bullock carts
(villuvaṇti) and transfer their goods to keṭṭuvaḷḷams
before proceeding to the north.

Nārāyaṇa Guru (1856-1928) whose birth place was at
Chempaḷanti, a place 16 kms. to the east of Murukkumpuḷa
used to travel along this traditional route to places such
as Kaikkara and Varkala in the north.[3] It was on one of

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[1]See Maps 2 and 3.

[2]A small version of dhow (masula boats).

[3]Nārāyaṇa Guru established his Śivagiri Muth at
Varkala in 1903. Menon, P.K.K., The History of Freedom
Movement in Kerala, II, Trivandrum: The Regional Records
Survey Committee, 1966, p.459. Varkala is 20 kms. north of
Murukkumpuḷa.

his travels in 1891 that he met his disciple Kumāran Āśān
(1873-1824) at Kāikkara, a place 24 kms. north of
Murrukkumpuḷa. These two most famous reformers of the
Īḷava community used to travel through Murukkumpuḷa and
whenever they came they were attracted by the large
concentration of Īḷavas in the place. Nārāyaṇa Guru is
said to have visited some of the prominent Īḷava families
of Murukkumpuḷa and maintained friendly relationships with
Nāirs, Muslims and Christians there as well. He won
sufficient support of the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa that in
1922 he was able to install a disc, containing the words
'AUM Satyam, Dharmam, Dayā, Śānti' meaning "Truth, Duty,
Compassion, Peace" in one of the temples and this initiated
what was considered one of his major efforts at reform. In
order to provide a background for understanding the local
people's response to Nārāyaṇa Guru's reforms an
ethnographic description of Murukkumpuḷa is attempted below.

2. The Religious Communities

Murukkumpuḷa is a multi-religious society with
Hindus forming the majority.[1] It has 414 families with a
total population of approximately 2570 members. The

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[1]See Table 3 and Diagram 1.

Diagram: 1 Percentage of Families in Major Religions

Christians
34.06%

Muslims
6.28%
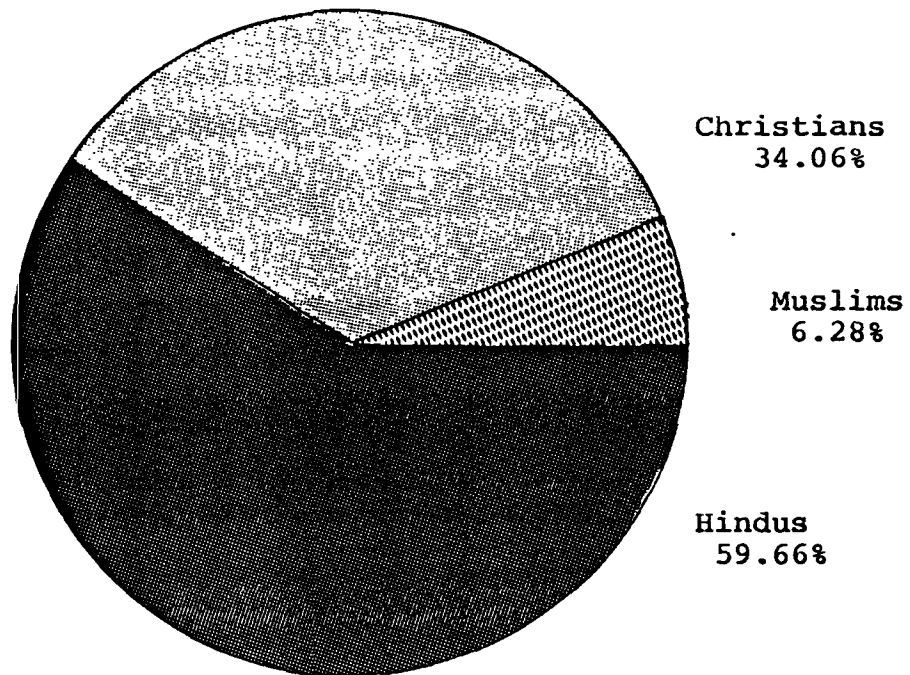
Hindus
59.66%

Hindus, Christians and the Muslims are found in the ratio of 19:11:2.

Table 3.   RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES OF MURUKKUMPULA

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES	NUMBER OF FAMILIES INTERVIEWED	NUMBER OF FAMILIES NOT INTERVIEWED	TOTAL FAMILIES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL FAMILIES
HINDUS	202	45	247	59.66
CHRISTIANS	117	24	141	34.06
MUSLIMS	21	5	26	6.28
TOTAL	340	74	414	100.00

Christians and Muslims, though non-Hindu, are regarded as caste groups by the Hindu community. Hence a preliminary understanding of all the communities is necessary to understand the place of the Īlavas in Murukkumpula.

(a)   Christians

The Christians in Kerala are divided into five branches:

(i) The Roman Catholic Church following the three different rites, viz. Syriac, Latin and Malayalam,

(ii) The Orthodox Syrian Church,

(iii) The Church of the East or the Nestorian Church,

(iv) The Marthoma Syrian Church, and

(v) the Anglican Church which is part of
the Church of South India.[1]

The Latin Catholic Christians which form a section
of the Roman Catholic Church make up the entire Christian
Community of the ward. They form 34.06 percent of the
entire population. They worship at St. Augustine Church
which is right on the east bank of Kaṭhinamkulam lake.
Even though the Baptism Register kept at this Church has
records only from 1934 and the inscription on the walls of
the Church reveal that the Church was renovated on January
6, 1934, it is considered an old Church. The older people
in the area say that the Church is quite old and that even
their parents studied in a school run by this Church in its
compound.[2]

This Latin Christian community is really a branch
of the old Mission Centre and the Christian group at
Putukkuricy, a strong Latin Christian centre on the
seashore directly west of Murukkumpuḷa. Until a priest
started staying here in 1970, it was from Putukkuricy that
priests used to come to Murukkumpuḷa by canoe to conduct
the worship services. Because of the nearness of the sea,

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., Social and Cultural History
of Kerala, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1979,
p.184.

[2]This school is now managed by the Government in
the neighbouring compound.

the main occupation of the non-agricultural people at Putukkuricy and Murukkumpula had been fishing. Some of the people at Murukkumpula claim that they originally belonged to the Paratavar community who are a class of people whose occupation is fishing using nets and boats.[1] Traditionally they were considered a very low caste and even now get grants as the government has included them among the 'scheduled castes'.[2] The interviews revealed that very few of the Latin Christians are engaged in fishing now. A change in the occupational status of the Latin Christians (four generations G-1, G-2, G-3 and G-4) could be seen from the Table 4. The interview sheets from various age groups are selected for this purpose.

The conversion of the Paratavar community probably took place about the time of the coming of Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century. Out of the 117 Christians interviewed a good number have names such as Pereira, Gomaz, Miranda, Lopez and Francis. These names appeared also at the Church cemetery. This is indicative of the probable connection they had with the Portuguese who came

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[1]They are also called Bharatavar. Census of India, IV, 1981, p.5.

[2]According to the Constitution Order 1950. Ibid.

Table: 4 Occupational History of Christians

Paper No.	Age of the Respondent	G-4 Occupation of Grandfather (Husband's)	(Wife's)	G-3 Occupation of Father (Husband's)	(Wife's)	Occupation of Husband G-2	Son G-1
012	83	Villa-Police	-	Teaching	Farmer	At Malaysia*	At A. Gulf*
107	77	Fishing	Fishing	Fishing	Fishing	"	"
007	63	Farmer	Tailor	At Malaysia*	Collector of Alleppey	Panchayat Member	"
100	57	Farmer	Farmer	School Manager	Business	School Manager	Medical Doctor
026	46	At Malaysia*	Farmer	Engineer	At Singapore*	At Kuwait*	(Study)
140	33	-	Farmer	Farmer	At Ceylon*	Army Doctor	(Study)

Legend: G-   Stands for generation.
         G-2   is the respondent.
         *   Employed in a foreign country.

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to Kerala in the sixteenth century and established Mission centres on the coastal areas of southern Kerala.[1]

The interviews revealed that some of the Christians were engaged in business near the Kaṭavu indicating that their traditional association with the sea led to their involvement in the backwater boat trade. These Latin Catholics were the first group of people to go out of Murukkumpuḷa in search of better occupations in foreign countries such as Ceylon, Singapore and Malaysia. A good number of the younger members of the community are now employed in the Arabian Gulf. The Christians are now generally wealthy and they hold a respectable position in society. They mingle freely with the Hindus and Muslims and the day to day interaction between them appears cordial.

(b)   Muslims.

Muslims constitute only 6.28 percent of the population of Murukkumpuḷa.[2] Even though they are a small group at Murukkumpuḷa they have a larger concentration in one neighbourhood and are seen as a significant community.

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[1]Quilon was the centre of activities of Portuguese in southern Kerala. There is a large colony of Latin Catholics at Thankassery, on the sea coast of Quilon.

[2]The 21 (out of the 26) Muslim families interviewed have a total of 132 persons.

There is a mosque in the area and they go there for prayer regularly. They are Orthodox Sunnis and they recite their creed, observe the five daily prayers, the Ramzan feast, alms to the poor and the pilgrimage to Mecca (Haj). Their children are sent to an educational institution called Madrasa which is attached to the Mosque where they receive religious instruction.

No one in the area was able to tell when the conversion to Islam took place at Murukkumpula. A number of old Mosques are found in the neighbouring areas. Beemapalli is an important Muslim pilgrimage centre located to the south-west of Murukkumpula on the beach.[1] It is the most important pilgrim centre of the Muslims of southern Kerala and is dedicated to the sacred memory of Beema Beevi, a pious lady who is believed to have come from Mecca and died in the area. Historians contend that it was Umayamma Rāṇi who checked the spread of Islam in Travancore during her reign which started in 1677. If that is the case perhaps the conversion to Islam in the area took place before the 17th century.

Muslims in this area are either businessmen or labourers. Some are rich and own extensive coconut

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., *Cultural Heritage of Kerala - An Introduction*, 1978, p.59.

gardens. A few run shops and restaurants near the kaṭavu, and a good number are now engaged in the coir business.

(c) Hindus

Most of the major Hindu castes of Kerala are found in Murukkumpuḷa. Even though some temple legends speak of the presence of Brāhmans, the local people remember only a few Brāhman families who had stayed in the neighbourhood. The other Hindu sub-groups include Nāirs, Īḻava, Taṇṭān, Vāṇiyan, Vaṇṇān, Taṭṭān and Pulaya. The number of households in each of these castes and the percentage of their population at Murukkumpuḷa are shown in Table 5.

(i) Nāirs.

Nāirs had been the chief militia in southern Kerala. They devoted themselves to warfare and provided armies for the king. As a throwback to their warrior role Nāirs of Murukkumpuḷa and other places in southern Kerala still participate with spears and shields in the Pūjā Eṭuppu (Āyudha-Pūjā) procession of Śrī Padmanābha Swāmi Temple, Trivandrum in October every year. They also play a similar role in the annual Ārāṭṭu celebration in the month of March. Some of the older members in the area recall the regular visits of the king Śrī Chittira Tirunāḷ Mahārājā to

Table: 5   Population of the Caste Groups

Caste Groups	Total Number of Families	Number of Families Inter-viewed	Total Number of Persons			Percentage of the total Number of Persons
			Male	Female	Total	
BRĀHMAN	-	-	-	-	-	-
AMBALAVĀSI	1	1	1	3	4	0.32
NĀIR	20	19	80	51	131	10.42
ĪḶAVA	142	125	388	375	763	60.70
TAṆṬĀN	42	35	110	114	224	17.82
VĀṆIYAN	7	6	19	22	41	3.26
VAṆṆĀN	11	9	35	23	58	4.62
TAṬṬĀN	3	3	10	7	17	1.35
PULAYA	21	4	8	11	19	1.51
Total	247	202	651	606	1257	100.00

Legend: The order of castes given in the table is my own.   E. Thurston and the Census of India report these in the alphabetical order.

One Ambalavāsi now present in the area is a temporary resident.   Literally the word Ambalavāsi means 'one who lives in a temple'.   Customarily they were assigned different services in the temple.

the Śiva Temple at Kaṭhinamkuḷam,[1] a place directly west of

Murukkumpuḷa on the west bank of the lake near the sea

coast. In those days, while the King travelled through the

Kaṭhinamkuḷam lake Nāirs had the duty of showing the light

at night from either bank.[2]

The Nāirs of Murukkumpuḷa were formerly tenants of

State lands and from these lands were required to supply

paddy for the use of the Padmanabha Swāmi Temple and the

Ūttupuras.[3] The Kaḷakkūṭṭam and the Chempaḷanti families

who were members of the Eṭṭuvīṭṭil Piḷḷamārs and famous at

the time of Marttāṇḍa Varma (1729 - 1758) were feudal

chiefs and stayed in the neighbourhood of Murukkumpuḷa.

Nāirs, because of their economic status and role in warfare

exercised dominance over the other castes.

The matriarchal system of family organization was

strong among the Nāirs of Murukkumpuḷa. Under this system,

the family consisted of all persons who could trace their

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[1]The Śiva Temple at Kaṭhinamkuḷam was constructed
at the time of Vira Rāma Kerala Varma (1205-1215), the then
ruler of Vēṇāṭ. The inscription at the temple shows the
date as 381 M.E. (1205 A.D.).

[2]Such occasions were intimated to the Nair chiefs
of the area well in advance. A Nair aged 66 recalled such
an instance at the time of the interview.

[3]King Marttāṇḍa Varma opened dozens of Ūttupuras
i.e. places for feeding the Brahmans at the State expense.
Jeffrey, Robin., The Decline of Nayar Dominance, 1976, p.4.

ancestry on the female side to one woman. With the introduction of the Nāir Bill in 1925, partition of the family property to one's own children became possible.

There are only 20 Nāir families at Murukkumpuḷa forming 10.42 percent of the Hindu population. Though they are few in this place, they are more in number at Vailūr (Ward IV) and Kaṭhinamkuḷam. The Śiva Temple at Kaṭhinamkuḷam is a prominent and old Nāir temple, dating back to 1205 A.D., now managed by the Dēvasvam Department of the State Government. The Nāirs have a Sasta Temple and a Durgā Devī Temple at Murukkumpuḷa.

Some of the Nāirs in the area are employed in government offices. It is only recently that a few of them took up employment in the Arabian Gulf countries. In this respect they follow the pattern initiated by the Christians.

(ii) Īḷavas.

Īḷavas constitute the largest caste community at Murukkumpuḷa. They constitute 34.30 percent of the total population with 142 families.[1] The interviews revealed that the Īḷavas of southern Kerala are classified into

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[1]Among the Hindu Caste groups, they constitute 60.70 percent.

two: the Pāṇḍy Īḷavas and the Malayalam Īḷavas and that

the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa belong to the former group.[1] It

has also been stated that the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa can

be categorized as 'Two Chānnans and Twelve Chānnans', the

latter holding a higher status.[2] In earlier years,

marriages did not take place between members of these two

groups. Now members of both these groups are present at

Murukkumpuḷa.

Īḷavas, were treated as an untouchable caste. They

had no access to the temples managed by the Brāhmans and

Nāir communities. Old and rich Īḷava families such as

Pāṇūr, Ēṛayil and Teṅgarvilākam owned their own temples and

employed their own priests. Of these, the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara

Dēvī Temple gained prominance among the Īḷavas of the

locality. There was another Kāḷi Temple at Murukkumpuḷa

once owned by the Pāṇūr family. In both these temples

animal sacrifices were once conducted.[3]

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[1]Paper No.371. This agrees with the classification
given by Iyer, L.K. Anantakrishna, The Cochin Tribes and
Castes, I, 1909, p.280.

[2]Paper No.028. Cassette No.9.

[3]Paper Nos.028 (age 76) and 104 (Age 95). Narayana
Guru preached against these practices towards the end of
19th century. Setu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931) prohibited such
practices by law.

Table: 6 Occupational History of the Īḷavas

Paper No.	Age of the Respondent	Occupation of Grandfather (Husband's) G-4	(Wife's)	Occupation of Father (Husband's) G-3	(Wife's)	Occupation of Husband G-2	Son G-1
027	83	Toddy shop	-	Copra Business	Copra Business	At Singapore*	Vet.Dr.
031	77	Farmer	Farmer	Farmer	Farmer	Farmer	At Singapore*
020	74	Āyurvēdic Doctor	Farmer	Business	Business	Homeo-Doctor	At Gulf*
017	68	Farmer	Farmer	Cloth Business	Farmer	Cloth Business	At Gulf*
239	56	-	Coir Business	Farmer	Farmer	Military	Govt. Service
054	42	Copra Business	Farmer	Farmer	News paper Agent	Govt. Service	(Study)
309	39	Labourer	Labourer	Labourer	Labourer	Tea shop	(Study)
077	32	Mantravādi (Magician)	Business	Driver	Govt. Service	Medical Doctor	-

Legend: G -   Stands for Generation
         G-2   is the Respondent
         *   Employed in a foreign country

The Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa had traditionally been farmers and businessmen. Those who did business were confined to the business of kopra (dried coconut), coir and cloth. Change in the occupational status (four generations) could be seen from the table below. The interview sheets from various age groups are selected for this purpose. Among the Īḻavas there were some landlords and a few owned toddy shops. The interviews revealed that there were some Sanskrit and Āyurvedic scholars among them.[1] Recently, some of the Īḻavas have joined the army, some entered into government service and a few work as drivers.

Presently the Īḻavas can be seen as in two classes: The middle and the lower classes. The middle class are economically better and have more landed property than the lower class. Some of them own automobiles and keep domestic servants.[2] The lower class are mostly labourers and both husband and wife work. If they have

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[1] Paper No.104 Kṛṣṇan Vaidian was a Sanskrit Scholar of this place.

[2] 17.14 percent of the Īḻava families have servants for domestic work.

Table: 7 Names of Īḻavas : Generation-wise

Paper No.	Age of Respondent	Name of the Respondent	Father's Name	Mother's Name	Grandfather's Name	Grandmother's Name
091	87	Lakṣmi	Kiṭṭan	Picca	-	-
371	85	Nārāyaṇan	Koccappi	Bhagavati	Koccucerukkan	Koccupeṇṇu
099	78	Kuṭṭiappi-amma	Māṭan	-	Karumban	Kāḷi
031	77	Cellamma	Koccummiṇi	Cinna	-	-
022	75	Cellappan	Govindan	Lakṣmi	Palpan	Kāḷi
029	74	Pāccan Bābu	Pāccan	Kuññi	Pappan	-
243	73	Bhārgavi	Koccappi	Taivaḷḷi	-	-
146	62	Appukuṭṭan	Gōvindan	Lakṣmi	Pappan	Koccappi
045	61	Bhāskaran	Rāman	Cempakam	Koccan	Pōti

small children they are looked after by older children or by grandparents.[1] There is a growing tendency among them to give their children the best education possible.

Before the turn of this century, Īlava men at Murukkumpuḷa had names such as Kiṭṭan, Koccappi, Koccummuṇi, Koccucerukkan, Karumban, Pappan and Koccan and Īḻava women such names as Picca, Cinna, Kunñi, Taivaḷḷi, Koccupeṇṇu and Pōti (See the Table 7).[2] Interviews revealed that after 1900 they started giving Sanskritized names such as Nārāyaṇan, Bhāskaran and Gōvindan for men and Lakṣmi, Bhārgavi and Bhagavati for women.[3]

Judging from physical appearance it is not easy to distinguish Īḻavas from the Nāirs. Once they could be

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[1]Among the 125 Īḻava families interviewed there are 424 children (221 boys and 203 girls) and 98 dependents (mostly grandparents: 43 men and 55 women).

[2]Young respondents are not included as almost all have Sanskritic names.

[3]One respondent said that, while lower caste children were admitted to school, those children who did not have Sanskritized names were given the name Karuṇākaran. It was the practice of Nārāyaṇa Guru also to give Sanskritized names to Īḻava and other lower caste children. Such names were required for government records, over the names that were popularly used in conversation.

distinguished from other castes by their clothing and the location of their hair lock. Now these practices have been stopped.[1] Untouchability is unknown to the younger generation. They are brought up in an environment of equality, social justice and educational opportunities. They live and move in a world much different from that of their parents.

Īḷavas are a dominant caste at Murukkumpuḷa. Numerically they are more in number than the Nāirs and the Latin Catholics. Economically they are powerful due to the absence of Syrian Christians and Brāhmans and the relatively small number of Nāirs, the three groups that tend to dominate in other regions of Kerala.

(iii) Taṇṭān

A group below the Īḷavas that strictly follows the profession of coconut planter is known by the caste name

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[1]Elderly Īḷavas address the upper caste people in respectful terms, a practice which they followed for years. The young Īḷavas are against this practice. Instead they assert their equality.

Taṇṭān. They constitute 10.62 percent of the total
population at Murukkumpuḷa.[1] Their occupation is the
climbing of coconut trees. Their women are usually engaged
in the manufacture of ropes and the plaiting of coconut
leaves. Most of them live in small huts with thatched
roofs.

The Taṇṭān is a prominent group among the lower
castes and is considered next below the Īḷavas. Thurston
is of the opinion that they are a group of Īḷavas who have
fallen away. "The Tandans are said to have once belonged
to the same caste as the Izhuvans, but to have fallen away
from that position".[2] The chief deity of this group is
Bhadrakāḷi, at whose shrines they make offerings. At
Murukkumpuḷa they worship at an unhoused holy place 50
yards away from the old Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple. They
also worship Māṭan and Maṛuta.[3]

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[1]Among the group, thirty five families were
interviewed.

[2]Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India,
I, 1909, p.10.

[3]This is under a tree in the temple precincts.
Maṛuta is said to have control over the spirits of
smallpox. Māṭan is considered as an animal deity.

(iv) Vāṇiyan

Vāṇiyans consider themselves Vaiśyās and claim to
be above Nāirs in the caste hierarchy.[1] By occupation they
were oil-pressers and traders.[2] They pressed the coconut
and extracted oil using the traditional oil mill. Once
these people were a flourishing group because they were the
only people who could press oil seeds for the local
community. Now these oil mills are replaced by
electrically run mills, leaving the old ones without enough
customers and proper income to maintain their business.[3]
The 7 Vāṇiyan families at Murukkumpuḻa are now poor and
gain a livelihood by working as petty merchants and shop
keepers.

(v) Vaṇṇān

Another group that is associated with the Īḻavas in

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[1]The word Vāṇijyam means trade.

[2]Paper No.066. One of them is a coconut merchant
at Murukkumpuḻa now.

[3]This change practically stopped a way of life
rooted in a caste occupation. The mass produced oil is
available now at the local stores.

southern Kerala are the Vaṇṇāns.[1] Though they are regarded
as a low, unclean class and are confined to the occupation
of washing clothes, they have a significant role in
society. It is thought that the clothes washed by them are
not only clean but also ritually pure. It was required
that ritually pure clothes should be worn on ritual
occasions.

The 11 families belonging to this group also
worship, like the Taṇṭān, at a specified area in the
precincts of the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple, just outside
its wall. Some of them live now in houses with tile and
concrete roofs.

(vi) Taṭṭān

Carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, sculptors and
metal workers believe that they have sprung up from
Viśvakarma.[2] The Taṭṭān (goldsmiths) make jewellery for
the people in the area. There are only three Taṭṭān

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[1]They are also known by the name Maṇṇān. Thurston
E., Caste and Tribes of Southern India, IV, 1909, p.455.

[2]Iyer, L.K.A., The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I,
1969, p.343.

families at Murukkumpula. Two of them still keep up their traditional occupation while the third one works as a mechanic. Their women seldom go out for work, but look after the household. Educationally and economically they are more backward than the Īlavas. They have no temples of their own. Kāḷi or Bhagavati is considered as their guardian deity.

(vii) Pulayan

The caste that is considered the lowest at Murukkumpula is the Pulayan. The word 'Pulayan' is said to be derived from 'pula' meaning pollution.[1] Since they were labourers attached to the soil, they were denied admission to the markets and other public places. Until recently, they had no property of their own. They depended on the landlords for food and accommodation. The landlord employed them in his fields to plough the land, sow the seed, transplant the seedlings, regulate the flow of water in the paddy fields or to uproot the weeds. When the crops ripened they had to keep watch at night. At harvest time they were required to cut the crops, carry them to the

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[1]Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.46.

barn, separate the corn from the stalk and winnow it. For
all this labour, they were given a certain quantity of
paddy as wages. They stayed in the landlord's property in
small thatched huts, guarding the property day and night
against the encroachment of cattle and the depredation of
thieves.

A change in the position of the Pulayans had its
beginnings from the time of Ayyan Kāḷi (1863-1941). The
influence of this reformer, who had come to Murukkumpuḷa
made them aware of their rights.[1] With the enactment of
property laws, they got the right to own property.[2] With
the formation of trade unions and caste associations, they
now have fixed hours of work and better wages. One
respondent said that he is working now at the Government
Press at Trivandrum. He goes to work from Murukkumpuḷa by
train every day. Now the Pulayans have freedom of movement
and their children study in the schools. However, some of

[1]Ayyan Kāḷi had some relatives at Murukkumpuḷa.
Some Pulayans recall his visits to this place.

[2]Under the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963, as
amended in 1969, the hutment dwellers or Kuṭikiṭappukars in
rural areas were given the right to purchase lands from the
landlords upto 10 cents. (Menon, A. Sreedhara., A Survey
of Kerala History, 1967, p.381). The 'One Lakh Houses
Scheme', 1972, provided permanent dwellings for several
Pulayan families in and around Murukkumpuḷa.

their dwellings are still found in the low lying areas of Murukkumpuḷa where they once had to stay as labourers in the paddy fields.

Hindus of each caste at Murukkumpuḷa traditionally lived in complete segregation from other castes. The higher castes did not permit the lower castes to approach them for fear of pollution. For instance, the Īḷavas were not allowed to enter the houses of Nāirs. They were not allowed to take a bath in the pool of the Śāsta temple.[1] When Īḷavas passed by, lower castes had to get off of the road. The caste practices of untouchability and pollution determined the location of the houses and public institutions at Murukkumpuḷa. A look at the topography and physical layout of the community will make this clear.

3. Topography

In the present administrative system of Kerala, Murukkumpuḷa is known as Ward-I in the Mangalapuram

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[1]This is a temple managed by Nāirs in the past.

NOTIONAL MAP
OF
PANCHAYATS
AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCKS
IN
TRIVANDRUM DISTRICT

QUILON

TIRUNELVELI

LAKSHADWEEP SEA

KANNIYAKUMARI

LEGEND

STATE BOUNDARY........
DISTRICT BOUNDARY....
TALUK BOUNDARY.........
C.D. BLOCK.............. *Kilimanoor*
PANCHAYAT............. *Madavoor*
DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS
TALUK HEADQUARTERS...
CORPORATION AREA....
MUNICIPAL AREA.......
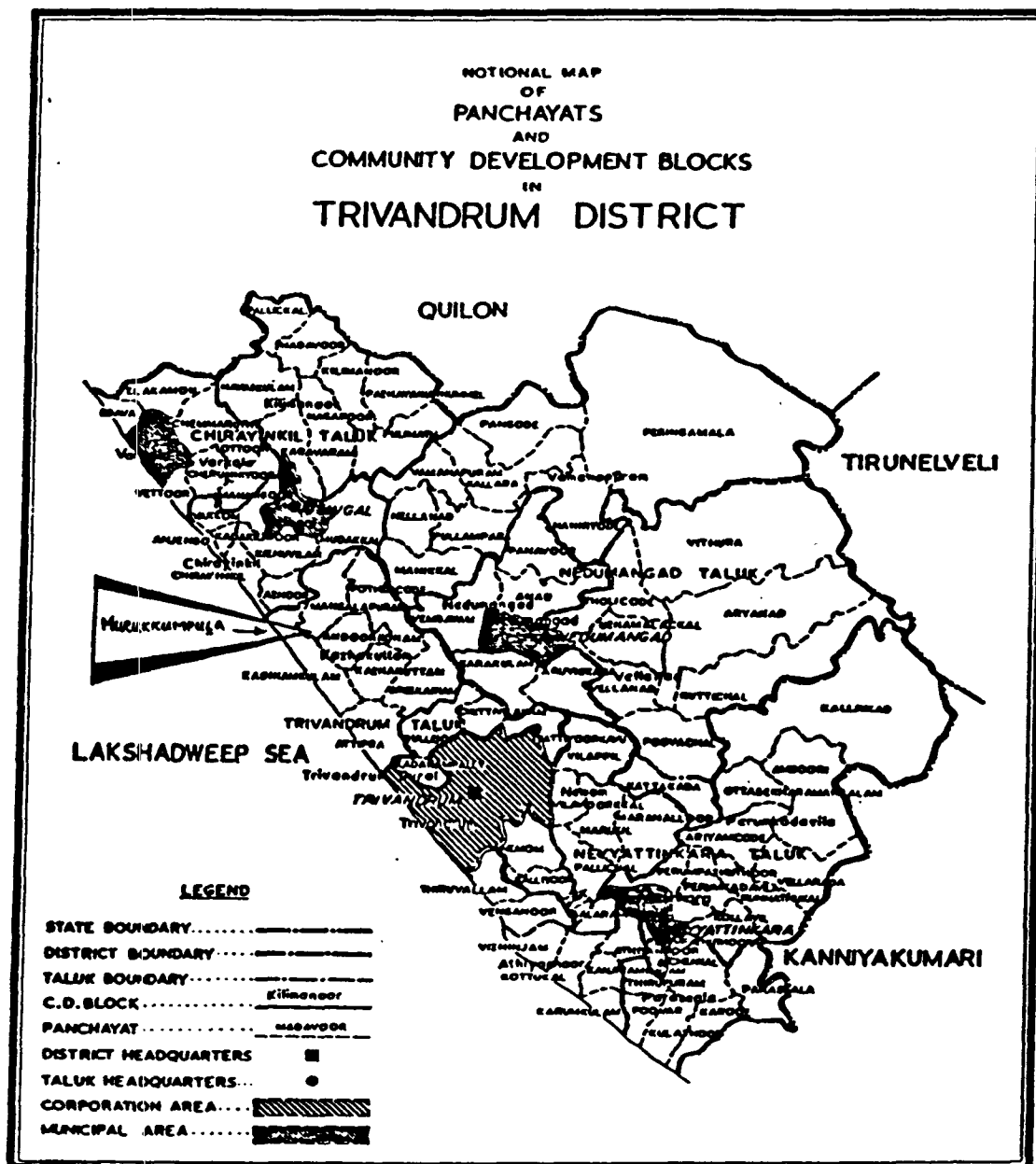
MAP 4   Map of Trivandrum District

Map of Murukkumpula
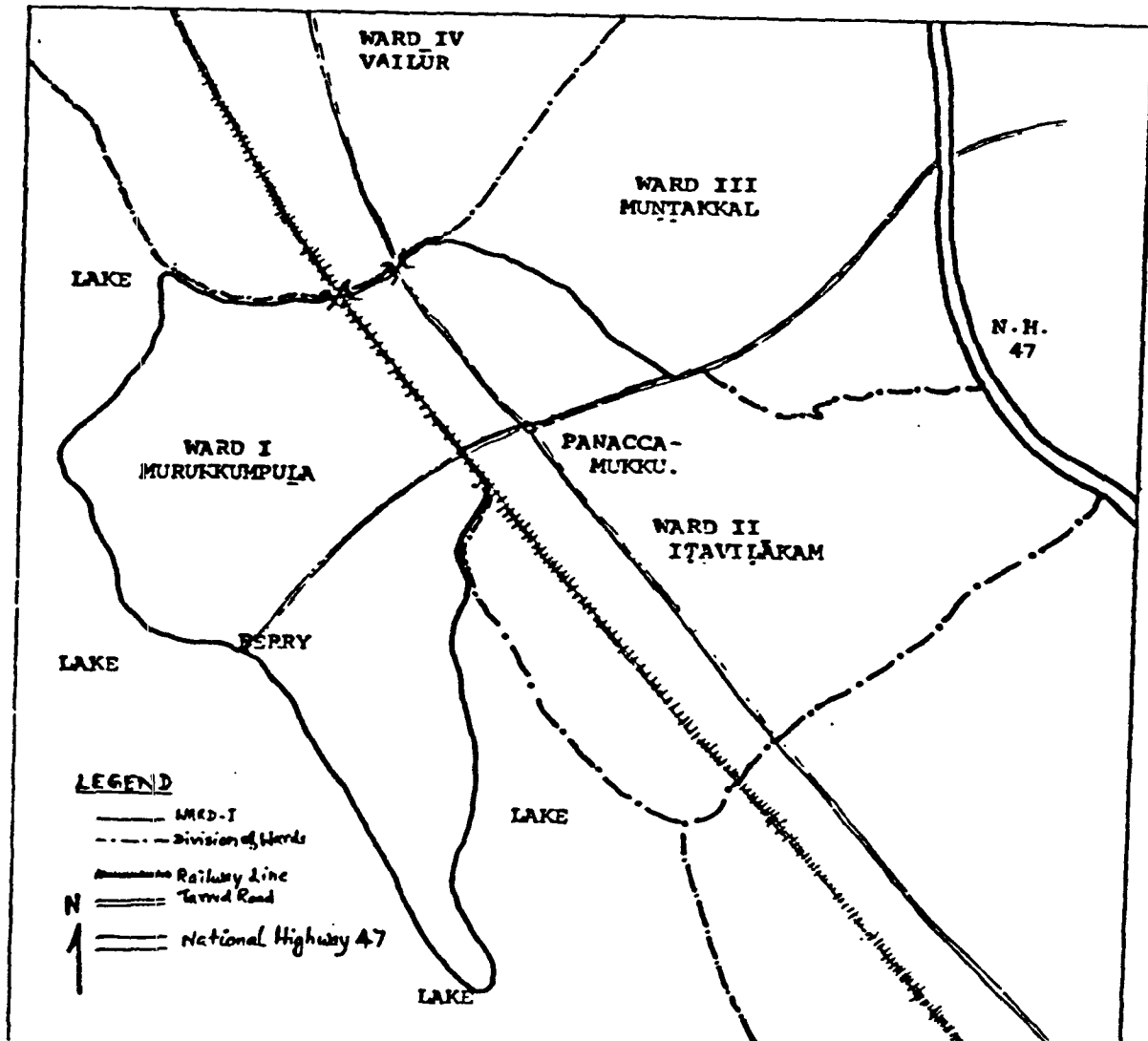
MAP. 5. **Reproduced from the map received from the Mangalāpuram Pancāyat office (August 1985).**

Panchayat of Trivandrum District.[1] (See Map 4). On the
west of it lies Kathinamkulam Lake which separates
Murukkumpula from Kathinamkulam Panchayat. Neighbouring
places such as Ward-II, Ward-III, and Ward-IV are locally
known by the names Itavilākam, Muntakkal and Vailūr
respectively - (See Map 5). Murukkumpula (Ward-I) is bound
on the south by a creek to the lake, the railway line and
the road connecting the ferry to National Highway 47. On
the south, the road from the ferry separates it from
Ward-II; on the east a high school compound and a paddy
field separate it from Ward-III and on the north paddy
fields and another creek of the lake from Ward-IV. Ward-II
is predominantly Muslims, Ward-IV Nāirs, Ward-III lower
castes and Ward-I Īlavas.[2]

For studying the topography of Murukkumpula more
minutely I have divided Ward-I into areas A-1, A-2, A-3,
and A-4. (See Map 6). The two major roads in the area,

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[1]Mangalapuram Panchayat is one among the 1000
Panchayats of Kerala State. The Mangalapuram Panchayat
came into being in 1953. All the Panchayats in the State
are administered now according to the Kerala Panchayat Act
of 1960.

[2]The Muntakkal Harijan Colony, Khān Colony and the
Harijan houses under the 'One Lakh Houses Scheme'(1972) are
in this ward.

MAP.6   Map of Ward-I

ⓉTEMPLE
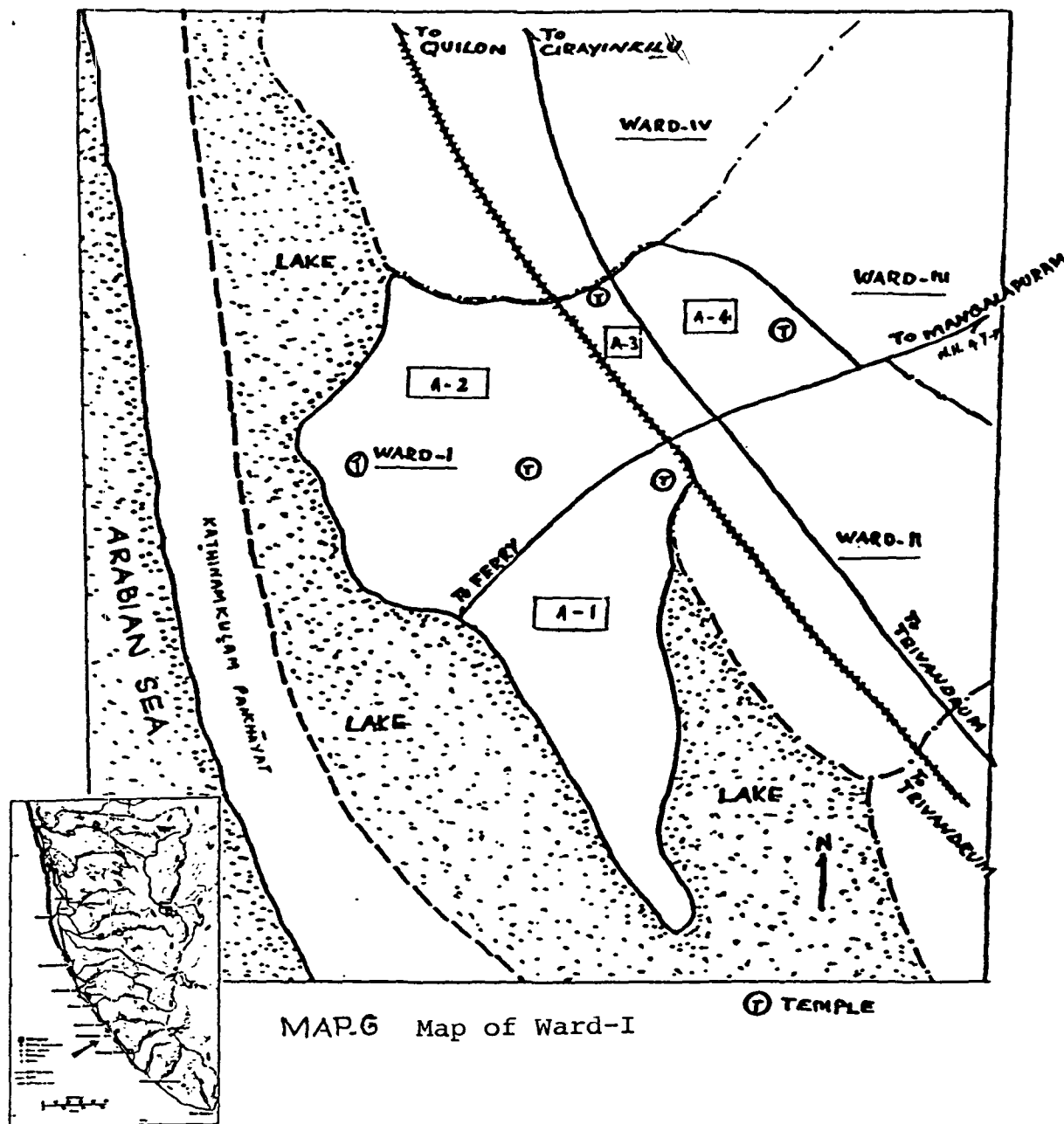
one from the ferry to Mangalapuram (Highway 47) and the other from Trivandrum to Chirayinkīḷu, which crosses at Panachamukku and the railway line which runs across Murukkumpuḷa form the boundries to these divisions.

There are two temples traditionally managed by Nāirs at Murukkumpuḷa. They are the Śā́stā Temple in A-3 and the Durgā Devī Temple in A-4. The Śā́stā Temple is an old temple with a serpent kāvu near the creek of the Kaṭhinamkuḷam lake on the northern boundary. The Durgā Devī Temple lie to the east of it with paddy fields forming its northern boundary.

Three temples belonging to the Īḷavas lie within A-1 and A-2. The Śiva Temple is in A-1 near the creek of the lake on the southern side of the Ward with the Railway line forming its eastern boundary. There are paddy fields on the south and west of the temple. The other two temples are in A-2. The Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple lies near the road connecting the ferry to the Panaccamukku. The other temple which is associated with the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple is popularly known in the locality as Ēra. This is

located northwest of Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara near the lake. The
area west of it is made up of low-lying paddy fields.

The St. Augustine Catholic Church lies on the north
of Ēra. Its cemetery lies on its southern side. The
Kaṭhinamkuḷam Lake forms the western boundary of the
Church. There is a public pond lying on the west of the
Railway line in A-2. The Muslim mosque in the ward is on
the south of the Śāstā Temple in A-3.

The residences of the various religious and caste
groups form a pattern at Murukkumpuḷa. The Nāir families
are very few and live around the Śāstā Temple and the
Durgā Devī Temple in A-3 and A-4. The majority of the
Christians are near the Catholic Church in A-2 even though
a few live in A-3 and A-1. Muslims are concentrated to the
south of the road connecting the ferry to the Panaccamukku
in A-1. The houses of the Christians and Muslims are
mostly near the lake probably indicating their earlier
identity as fishing communities. Īḷava families, though
scattered in all the areas, are concentrated near the Śiva
Temple and the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple in A-1 and
A-2. Taṇṭān and castes below them live in clusters at some

distance from the upper castes concentrated in the low lying areas along the creeks and on the banks of paddy fields in A-1, A-2 and A-4. The Vaṇṇāns have their residences near the public pond in A-2 and near the creek at A-1.

Houses at Murukkumpuḻa are independent homesteads with small and large compounds of coconut trees. The houses of the lower castes generally have mud walls and thatched roofs. The upper castes have larger buildings. Some of the modern buildings belonging to Īḻavas and Christians have concrete roofs, painted walls and mosaic floors.

There are a few educational institutions at Murukkumpuḻa. Two Nursery schools, Mary Māthā and Vidyā Nikētan, are on either side of the road from the junction to Chirayinkiḻ, near Panachamukku in A-3 and A-4. One of them is managed by an Īḻava family. A Lower Primary School (L.P.S.) managed by the government lies to the east of the Catholic Church in A-2.

There is an english medium primary school, managed by a Christian near the ferry on the roadside at A-2.

The St. Augustine School is the only High School in the
Ward. It forms the eastern boundary of the Ward, near the
road in A-4. A Tutorial college and two Technical
Institutes managed by Īḻava teachers function near
Panaccamukku in A-3 and A-4.

Though Murukkumpuḻa has no government hospital,
there are small private hospitals and dispensaries. Holy
Cross Hospital is a mission hospital managed by the
Catholic Church.[1] It lies on south of the Muslim Mosque in
A-3. Gāyatri Clinic, owned by an Īḻava couple is near the
Panaccamukku in A-4. There are two homeopathic
dispensaries run by the Īḻavas, one near the ferry on the
side of the road in A-1 and the other south of the Railway
Station near the road in A-2. The two 'Day Care Centres',
the Vanitā Samājam (Reg. No.46) in A-4 near the Harijan
colonies of Ward-III and Indira Mahilā Samājam (Reg.
No.251) near the residence of the lower castes (Harijans)
in A-1, distribute nutritional food to the poor children in
the Ward.[2]

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[1]This hospital was started in 1968.

[2]These are government aided voluntary service
agencies run by Ilavas at Murukkumpuḻa.

The Veterinary Hospital, the Sub-registrar's office
and the village office function in buildings owned by the
Īḷavas.[1] The Veterinary Hospital is located on the
northern side of the Muslim Mosque at A-3. The
Sub-registrar's office and the Village office are located
on the side of the road from ferry to Panachamukku at A-1.
The Post Office is also on the side of this road, west of
the Railway Station at A-2.[2]

There are 135 shops and stores at Murukkumpuḷa
concentrated near the Railway Station, the Holy Cross
Hospital, Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple and at Panaccamukku.
These include 27 betel, cigaratte and soft drink shops, 13
large and small grocery stores, 13 tailor shops, 9 tea and
coffee shops and 6 restaurants. Most of the buildings
rented out for these shops belong to the Īḷavas. There are
no large industries or factories in this Ward.

There are several recreational facilities at
Murukkumpuḷa. Cinema houses have been running for the last

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[1]The Veterinary Hospital was started in 1984.

[2]The Post office has five staff members. The new
Post and Telegraph building was opened on January 9, 1984.

thirty years. At present there are two theatres of which one is a modern building built in 1981. Both of these are owned by Īḻava families and are located in A-2, one on the south of the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple and the other on the west of the Railway Station. There are altogether 6 associations and clubs formed since 1970. Two of them, Navaraṅgam Arts Club and Vēlu Tampi Memorial Sports and Arts Club located near the Śāśtā Temple are run by Nāirs. The Cultural Organization has its office in a building owned by an Īḻava near the Muslim Mosque at A-3. Īḻavas form the majority of the members of this organization. The Merchants' Association and the Railway Passengers' Association have their offices near the Railway Station. The Recreation Club, north of the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī Temple in A-2 was started in 1980. Murukkumpuḻa has no public library, even though an Īḻava once managed one called the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Vilāsam Library for a number of years.[1]

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[1]Paper No.104. This library is no longer functioning properly as the owner is about 95 years old.

VI.   THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

OF THE ĪḺAVAS OF MURUKKUMPUḺA

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

OF THE ĪḶAVAS OF MURUKKUMPUḶA

At the beginning of this century, southern Kerala underwent a series of changes in the social, economic and political spheres. Social reformers like Nārāyaṇa Guru and Kumāran Āśān attempted to utilize these changes in a way which would ameliorate the social conditions of lower caste people. Changes in the culture of people, however, are determined to a great extent by their own choices, on how they respond to external pressures and to new ideas. Īḷavas, who form the most important single community in Murukkumpuḷa, responded both to changes in the world around them and to the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru. The following section looks at this process of change in the educational, occupational, political, economic and social life of the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa.

1. Education

Regular education in Kerala before the nineteenth century was meant for the higher castes. The Brahmans were provided with all kinds of teachers who made them proficient in various arts. The Nāirs, who were the militia of Kerala, had their basic education and lessons on warfare and self-defence in special schools called Kaḷaris.

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A few of the Īḻavas had their own Kaḷaris, but most remained illiterate cultivators and labourers. In those days children were sent to one teacher, called an Āśān, from whom they would learn the alphabet and counting. Children usually learned by writing with their fore-finger on the fine sand spread on the ground before them.

The Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa and other places in southern Kerala were a backward class educationally until the beginning of this century. The highest learning that an Īḻava could aspire to, till then, was a rudimentary knowledge of the vernacular. For a long time the government schools in the State were closed to them. We saw earlier that Dr. Palpu raised his voice about the educational inabilities of Īḻavas through the Īḻava Memorial submitted to the king in 1896. In 1905, Nārāyaṇa Guru not only spoke of the value of education but also sent out leaders to instruct Īḻavas in the need for and benefits of education. His instructions were as follows:

> (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
> goes without at least primary education.

(b)   Enthuse and help people to open schools
      and libraries wherever necessary.[1]

The SNDP Yōgam over the years since has made a constant

effort to uplift the Īlava Community educationally. Its

first effort in this field was to remove the obstacles for

admitting Īlava children to government and government-aided

schools in Kerala. Both Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān took a

leading part in that effort. This struggle continued for

some time. In the meantime Īlava leaders and the SNDP

Yōgam concentrated its attention on establishing schools at

various centres of southern Kerala. They already had

schools at Varkala and Aruvippuram by the beginning of this

century. The Īlava Community established its first college

at Quilon in 1947. Several educational institutions were

developed while R. Śankar was the secretary of the SNDP

Yōgam. People at Murukkumpula recall the visits of R.

Śankar and the collections he made for establishing

educational institutions for the Īlavas at different places

in southern Kerala. A college called Śrī Nārāyana College

was established at Chempalanti, the birth place of the Guru

near Murukkumpula (16 kms. away) in the year 1964.[2]

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[1]Sanoo, M.K., Narayana Guru, 1978, p.97.

[2]Now the Īlavas have 14 colleges, 1 Training
college, 1 Poly-Technic, 13 High schools, 8 Upper Primary
schools and 3 Lower Primary Schools in the State. Letter
from the General Secretary of the SNDP Yōgam dt. December
7, 1985.

At Murukkumpula, the first school was established
under the initiative of the Christian Church.[1] The school
building was in the church compound before 1936 and
Christians were the first to get educated there. This
school also admitted children from other communities, but
in those days caste restrictions and pollution practices
prevailed in society and the Īlavas did not take an
interest in joining this institution. They were more
interested in agriculture and business, and parents
directed their children into these occupations.[2]

After 1904 Nārāyaṇa Guru visited Murukkumpula and
urged the Īlavas to send their children to the Christian
school and they gradually responded. This was possible as
the Christians were from the beginning willing to admit
children from the Īlava community to the school.[3] It was a

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[1]No one remembers precisely when this school was
started. The records at the school do not have any
specific date. It can be assumed from the data gathered
that the school was started sometime towards the close of
the 19th century.

[2]The oldest Īlava at Murukkumpula told me that he
could learn only to write and read Malayalam, as his father
wanted his help in the coconut business. Paper No.104.

[3]There was opposition from the Brāhman and Nāir
teachers. They demanded that the management of the school
be taken up by the government. The communique of the
Travancore Government in 1936 said that schools should not
be held in places of public worship. The school at
Murukkumpula was handed over to the government in 1939.

primary school with classes up to standard IV. Children
passing out from this school had to go to distant places to
continue their education. As this was difficult in those
days, Nārāyaṇa Guru repeatedly asked the local people to
start a High school as well at Murukkumpuḻa.

Kumāran Āśān in the 1920s pursued this interest of
the Guru and met the local leaders to ascertain the
possibility of starting such a school.[1] The local Īḻava
landlords were not interested as they themselves were not
educated and could not see the advantages of school
education. It was also a time when even educated Īḻavas
could not get employment in the State service. However,
Kumāran Āśān succeeded in stirring up the interest of M.J.
Lopez, a Christian leader, who had returned from Singapore
and who had the advantage of education and travel to
outside countries. Āśān as a member of the Śrī Mūlam
Assembly helped to get permission from the government to
start the school. The new school, called St. Augustine

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[1]It was Nārāyaṇa Guru who sent Kumāran Āśān for
studies at Mysore, Madras and Calcutta. Guru said to the
Īḻavas in 1912: "In our community only a few have higher
education... 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
chief language now is English. Therefore our attention has
to turn to English". Sanoo, M.K. Narayana Guru, 1978,
p.113.

school, was opened in 1926 with facilities to accommodate
children from standard V to VIII. This system continued
until the school was upgraded into a High School in 1949.
Even now St. Augustine School is the only High School in
this Ward.[1]

Till 1947, fees had to be given for studying in
both government and private schools in southern Kerala.
With the Independence of India, fees in the schools were
reduced by government grants, and the State Government
gradually took more interest in reducing fees and
eventually granted free education to all children up to the
final grade in school. Now free education is available for
all until high school graduation and in addition children
of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes get government
grants to buy books.[2]

College education became possible for the students
at Murukkumpula with the establishment of two colleges, Śrī
Nārāyaṇa College at Chempalanti and St. Xavier's College at

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[1]Some people say that the foundation stone of this
school was laid by Kumaran Āśān. Paper No.005.

[2]Īlavas are considered as a backward community but
not as a Scheduled Caste. They do not get government grants
for education like the Scheduled Castes of the State.

St. Andrews, both within 16 kms. from Murukkumpula, in 1964. The Śrī Nārāyaṇa College at Chempalanti is owned by the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Trust of the Īlava Community. The State transport services from Murukkumpula to these colleges which began in 1979 enabled a larger number of students to pursue their studies there.

At the time of the fieldwork, a question was asked to find out where the parents of the respondents had their education. The answers received from 99 Īlava respondents reveal that about 8.08 percent had their education with Āśāns in the area; 10.10 percent went to distant places like Trivandrum; 31.31 percent studied at the local school and 50.50 percent did not go to school at all. These figures indicate that around the turn of this century, Īlavas were an educationally backward class. However, some Īlavas who were economically well off, aspiring to come up in society, sent their children to distant places for English education.[1]

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[1]The present pattern of education in Kerala is a course of fifteen years' duration leading to the first degree. It consists of ten years study in schools and five years of study in colleges. See The Manoramma Year Book 1985, p.553.

Table: 8 Educational Status of Īlavas vs Christians

Educational Status	Total Respondents		Christians		Īlavas	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
No schooling	26	7.65	3	2.44	10	7.94
Upto Class V only	96	28.24	22	17.89	42	33.33
Class VI-VIII	66	19.41	26	21.13	18	14.29
Class IX-X	88	25.88	48	39.02	29	23.01
Vocational Training	10	2.94	5	4.07	5	3.97
Pre-Degree	17	5.00	5	4.07	7	5.55
Graduate	20	5.88	9	7.31	5	3.97
Professional Degrees	17	5.00	5	4.07	10	7.94
Total	340	100.00	123	100.00	126	100.00

Legend: Vocational Training: TTC, Poly-Tech., Nursing, Certificate etc.

Professional Degrees: B.Ed., BT., BL., MA., Sc., ME., etc.

Table 8 presents the educational status of the Īlavas and Christians at Murukkumpuḷa. The figures given in the Table indicate that while only 2.44 percent of the Christians are illiterate, 7.94 percent of the Īlavas have not gone to school. That the educational standard of the Īlava community is lower than that of the Christians is also evident from the fact that 66.67 percent Īlavas as against 82.11 percent Christians have studied above the primary level (Standard V).

There were several difficulties that in the perception of the Īlavas had hindered them in the field of education at Murukkumpuḷa in the earlier decades of this century. The dominant among them were the following:

(i)   The schools had mainly Brahman and Nāir teachers and children in the school practised caste restrictions.[1]

(ii)   Until Independence children of other low castes did not come to the school. Therefore in school the Īlavas felt like the lowest group.[2]

(iii) In the school Īlavas were not allowed to draw water from the well or drink

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[1]Narasimha Iyer, Ramakrishna Iyer, Sankara Piḷḷai, Velu Piḷḷai and Nārāyaṇa Piḷḷai, were teachers at this school in the 1920s. Paper Nos.006, 007, 031, 117, 221 etc.

[2]Children of higher castes were reluctant to sit with Īlavas. The teachers would not touch them, and threw sticks at them rather than spank them. Paper No.022.

Table: 9 Education by Age of the Īlava Respondents in Ward - I

Age Groups	Profess. Degrees	Graduation	Pre-Degree	School Final	Vocat. Train.	Up to Std.VIII	Up to Std. V	Std.IV & below	Not gone to Sch.	Total
Below 20	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
21 - 30	1	3	3	5	-	2	-	2	1	17
31 - 40	3	-	-	10	2	4	4	6	1	30
41 - 50	2	1	2	5	1	2	4	4	3	24
51 - 60	4	-	1	3	2	3	3	6	2	24
61 - 70	-	-	-	2	-	2	2	6	1	13
71 - 80	-	1	-	2	-	4	-	4	1	12
80 and above	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	4
Total	10	5	7	29	5	18	13	29	10	126

from the same utensils as other
students.[1]

(iv) Fees had to be paid to the school for
education. Some of the Īḻavas did not
have fees, or did not have anything
to eat during 'lunch-break'.

Nārāyaṇa Guru and Kumāran Āśān raised their voices against

this situation. Their advice and personal influence

eventually gave rise to some local leadership in

Murukkumpuḻa.[2] These local leaders took the initiative in

admitting more children from the lower castes to the school

and discouraging the discriminatory practices.[3] These

efforts gradually yielded results.

The table clearly shows that those who are below

the age of 60 (having been children when the reforms

started) have higher educational standards than those who

are above that age. Out of 29 persons who are above 60

years of age (4 of these went to school before 1929), 11

persons (37.93 percent) studied up to the Lower Primary; 7

persons (24.14 percent) studied up to the Middle School and

only 5 persons (17.24 percent) graduated from school.

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[1] Paper Nos. 045, 354. (Cassette No.10)

[2] Paper Nos. 002, 015, 022, 031, 104, 266 etc.

[3] Paper Nos. 005, 026, 045 etc.

After 1930 more schools were opened at different places in southern Kerala under the initiative of the government and religious organizations like the SNDP Yōgam. Students from Murukkumpula started to go to Kaṇiāpuram and Āṭṭingal by foot and to Trivandrum by train for higher studies.[1] The table above indicates that out of the 48 persons whose age falls between 40 to 60 years (i.e. those who went to school between 1929 and 1949), 20.83 percent went for higher studies; 47.50 percent graduated; 57.92 percent completed Middle School (grade VIII) and 78.75 percent completed Lower Primary (grade V).

By 1947 people at Murukkumpula had become generally conscious of the benefits of education and a larger number joined schools and colleges. The above table shows that out of the 47 Īlavas whose age falls between 20 and 40 years (i.e those who went to school between the years 1949 and 1969), 21.28 percent went for higher studies; 53.20 percent graduated; 65.97 percent completed Middle School and 84.99 percent completed Lower Primary.

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[1] In earlier days a few students had gone to Trivandrum by Keṭṭuvaḷlam for studies.

Table:10 Education According to Age Groups

Education	Age Groups		
	Above 60 years Percentage	40-60 years Percentage	20-40 years Percentage
Lower Primary	37.93	20.83	17.02
Middle School	24.14	10.42	12.77
High School	17.24	16.67	31.92
Higher Studies	8.45	20.83	21.28

The above table indicates that as the years passed by, there was a decrease in the number of persons who limited their studies to the Lower Primary classes (up to standard IV). On the other hand there was an increase in the number of persons who graduated from school and went for higher studies. Today 92.06 percent of the Ilavas at Murukkumpula are literate.[1] Of this number, 40.48 percent have graduated from school and 11.91 percent are either college graduates or post-graduates.[2]

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[1]The literacy of the people at Murukkumpula now stands at 94 percent. The literacy of Kerala is 70.42 percent where as that of India is only 36.03 percent. Census of India. Paper 3 of 1981, series:10.

[2]7.94 percent Ilavas have post-graduate degrees.

Education led to freer mingling among the younger generations of the various castes than was possible in the previous century. It was difficult to maintain caste regulations in the school, and the students had to rub shoulders both in the classroom and playground. Students behaved more freely and on more equal terms with children of both superior and inferior castes than their parents had. With the growth of education, the differences between the various castes in dress and fashions, in language and pronunciation and in the standard of personal cleanliness, measures by which caste was traditionally recognized, have disappeared.[1]

The progress in education of the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa was partly due to the opportunities they had at the Christian schools. It may appear that there is an element of Westernization in the educational change. But the total process of change cannot be called Westernization because Westernization as such would not deal with the caste distinctions and prejudices the Īḷavas faced in Kerala society. Instead, that part of the change regarding caste structure was set in motion by the religious

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[1] As English education became popular, the place of Sanskrit as a measure of literacy and educational achievement declined.

awakening initiated by Nārāyaṇa Guru. He came to Murukkumpuḷa several times around 1904 and exhorted the people to get educated and to get rid of caste. He emphasized the significance of getting enlightened by vidyā (education). Kumāran Āśān who stayed at Thonnakkal (5 kms. east of Murukkumpuḷa) and visited Murukkumpuḷa several times and explored all possible avenues for the education of the people. This initiated an awakening among the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa. This awakening met with resistance from Nāirs and Brāhmans and the government took over the administration of the school at Murukkumpuḷa in 1936. At the same time Kumāran Āśān and other leaders were repeatedly asking the government to admit students from all the lower castes (including girls) in the government schools. In spite of the resistance of the higher castes the Īḷavas pursued education, but in seeking an education the Īḷavas did not follow either the route of religious conversion or of Sanskritization (assuming the status of higher castes). The speeches of Kumāran Āśān at the Assembly reveal that he demanded the right of education for the Īḷavas on the basis of their status as a 'Backward Community', and not on the assumption that they were adopting either western ways or the culture of the higher castes.

The monopoly of education by the higher castes was
shattered with the rise in the number of lower caste
persons graduating from schools and colleges.
Traditionally, the ritual purity of the higher castes and
their association with literacy and learning was thought to
fit them for a range of administrative and professional
occupations. In those days, most of the lower castes,
because of their ritual impurity, were considered servants
who provided only material support for the rest of the
society. Education granted equal opportunities for
employment and a new freedom of choice in employment.[1] It
also created an awareness and acceptance of the new idea
that each person enjoyed his or her own self-acquired
status.

Education served as a powerful agent of social
change among the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa. It opened up
greater opportunities for work for the lower caste people
and a freer choice of occupations. Social mobility through
occupation happened in a remarkable way for the first time.

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[1]Mr. Kuñjukṛṣṇan, an Īḷava from Murukkumpuḷa,
served the State Government as the Public Service
Commissioner (P. No. 364) Adv. Rāghavan was another with an
early government appointment. (P.No.358, 361). When
educated Īḷavas were appointed to such responsible
administrative posts in the Government Service, men of
superior castes had to serve under them and members of the
public had to show respect to them inspite of the lowness
of their caste-status. Traditional occupations were thus
seen to be no longer obligatory. Caste sanctions
prescribing or prohibiting occupations do not ofcourse
prevail any longer.

2. Occupation

A good number of Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḻa, traditionally, were agriculturalists.[1] An equal number were labourers or business men. Though Īḷavas are popularly known as toddy-tappers, that was not a traditional occupation of Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḻa. (See the following table). Nevertheless those Īḷavas who did business were mainly engaged in the preparation and sale of coconut and coir products. Some were also engaged in the cloth business as weaving was done in some places south of Murukkumpuḻa. The labourers were mostly engaged in coconut gardens or in the paddy fields. Nārāyaṇa Guru encouraged the educated Īḷavas to innovate in the earning of material wealth and the promotion of industry and other productive business. This he understood to be necessary for the total development of the Īḷava community. Inspired by the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru and Kumāran Āśān, the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḻa realised that the traditional occupational pattern and the landed economy were not going to help in their social emancipation.

Before the turn of the century, it was almost impossible for Īḷavas to get a government position in

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[1] It was a time when population was less and the Marumakkattāyam system of inheritance (Joint-family) prevailed in Travancore.

| No.	Occupations	Occupation of Husband	Occupation of Husband's Father	Occupation of Wife's Father	Occupation of Grand Father Husband's	Wife's
1.	Agriculture	8	26	26	22	19
2.	Business	27	28	22	6	7
3.	Shops	8	6	5	2	-
4.	Daily wage earnings (kuli)	7	17	21	4	4
5.	Medical	4	2	5	4	-
6.	Temple Management	2	1	1	1	-
7.	Toddy Shop	-	1	2	1	-
8.	Fire works	2	2	1	-	1
9.	Barber shop	4	3	2	2	-
10.	Military	5	1	1	-	-
11.	Driving	2	2	-	-	-
12.	Tailoring	6	1	2	-	-
13.	Government Service	12	4	2	-	-
14.	Clerical work	3	2	4	-	-
15.	Teaching	5	2	2	-	-
16.	Employed in other countries	18	1	2	1	1
17.	Others (Bedi making, painting, repair work etc.)	5	4	5	1	-
	Total No. of Respondents	118	103	103	44	32

Travancore because of their low caste position. It has already been noted earlier that Dr. Palpu, an Īlava doctor from southern Kerala, was denied employment in Travancore and was forced to go to Mysore to practice medicine. The Malayāli Memorial (1891) and the Īlava Memorial (1896) prepared under the initiative of Dr. Palpu pleaded with the king of Travancore to enact laws to provide the natives with a fair quota of government appointments. As the government was slow to enact laws and reserve quotas for the backward communities, the Īlavas generally remained agriculturalists and labourers.[1] A few of the educated among them sought employment in foreign countries such as Ceylon and Malaysia.

The rate of population growth in Kerala has been significantly higher than in other parts of India since 1900.[2] With the rapid growth of population arose the related problem of unemployment. This has been a growing problem during the last thirty years. Job opportunities increased in the Arabian Gulf countries since the 1960s

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[1] There were also some Āyurvedic and Homeopathi doctors from the Īlava Community at that time. (See the table).

[2] See Final Population Totals, Census of India 1981, Series 10, Kerala, Paper 3, 1981.

Diagram: 2 Place of Employment

Legend

Arabian Countries

Malaysia

Other States in India

Kerala

Īḻavas

Nāirs

Christians

Muslims
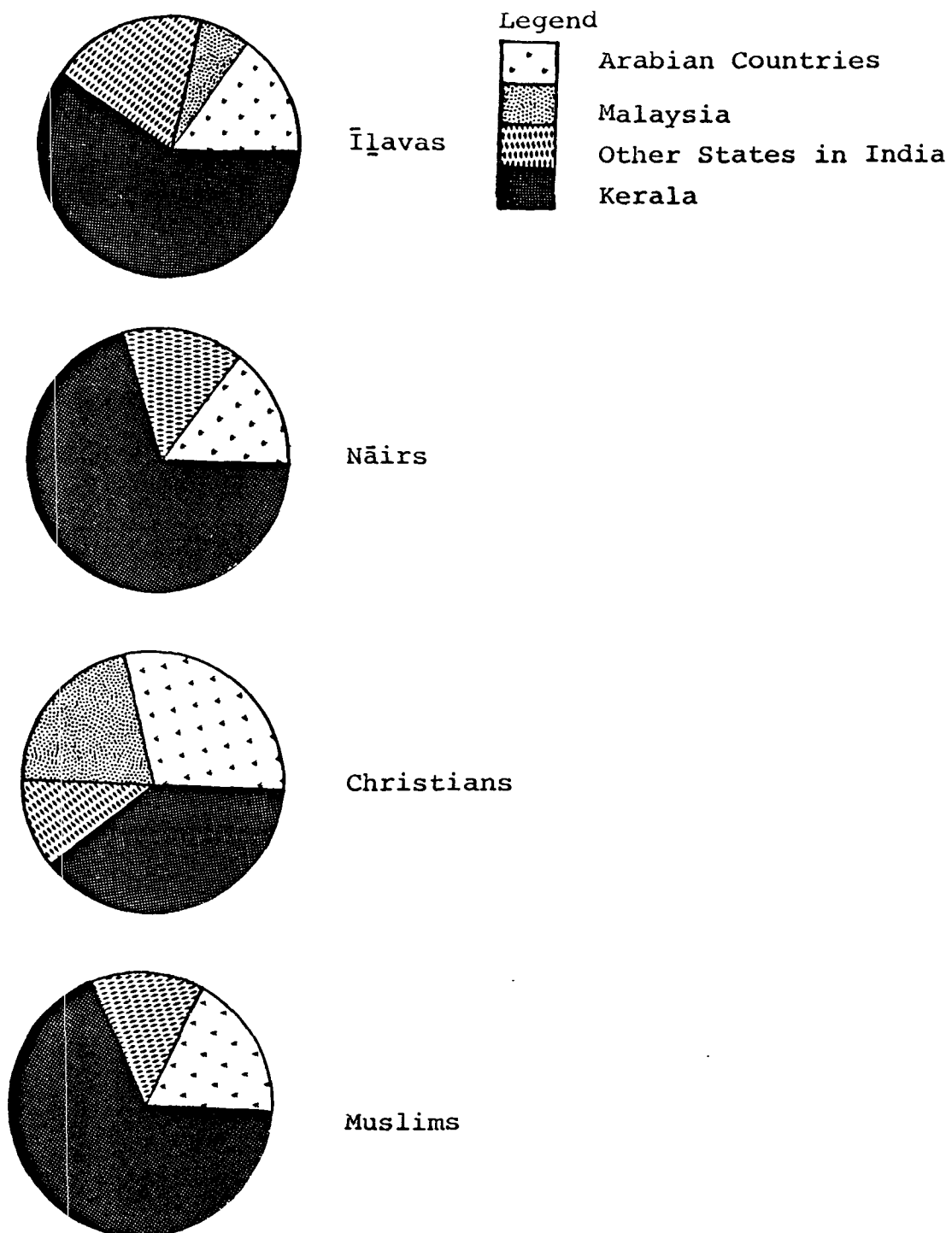
Community	Total Respondents	Employed in A. Gulf Countries Percentage	Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Other Places Percentage	Other States in India Percentage	Inside Kerala Percentage
Ilavas	118	15.25	5.93	18.64	60.17
Nāirs	20	15	-	15	70
Christians	125	28.80	20.80	11.20	39.20
Muslims	22	18.18	-	13.64	68.18

Table: 12   Place of Employment of Respondents

and a good number of young people, mostly Christians and Muslims, have availed themselves of this opportunity.

Table 12 indicates that 15.25 percent of the Ilavas are now employed in Arabian Gulf countries; 5.93 percent in other countries; 18.64 percent in other States in India and 60.17 percent inside Kerala.[1] The percentage of Ilavas employed outside Kerala is greater than that of the Nairs, but Christians and Muslims have a larger percentage employed in the Gulf Countries than do the Ilavas.[2] Nevertheless the figures do suggest that changes are taking place in the traditional occupations of the Ilavas.

As the above details show there has been visible occupational mobility among the Ilavas of Murukkumpula during the past two generations. There was progress in the community. New employment opportunities generated a purpose for the Ilavas to get educated. In the initial stages Ilavas encountered several difficulties in the area of employment. The caste restrictions and practices

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[1]Among the above mentioned communities (see the Table above) 149 persons are working in Kerala. In this group Ilavas alone form 47.65 percent.

[2]The Ilavas are kept back on account of two handicaps. The Ilavas do not have the wider contacts that the Christians have, nor the kind of backing and support which the Muslims can expect from their fellow Muslims in the Gulf countries.

initially did not permit them to come out into the public places or work there. From the time of Marttāṇḍa Varma there was a tendency to import foreign (non-Kerala) Brāhmans for the administration of various departments in the State Government. Even towards the end of the nineteenth centurey, educated Īḻavas were not given employment in the State. The case of Dr. Palpu and the submission of The Īḻava Memorial (1896) are evidences of this. Later when the government became willing to hire local people it was the Nāirs (being a higher caste) who got the initial benefits. Added to the traditional caste prejudices was the problem of population increase and the development of an unemployment problem in the state. Īḻavas who were educated, however, exhibited a remarkable spirit of adventure in seeking the available avenues for employment. They broke the traditional practice of remaining in the place of their birth.

Occupational mobility enlarged the world-view of the Īḻavas and made them fit for participation in new fields of activity. It gave them a new sense of selfhood and a new satisfaction in creativity. They travelled outside the traditional territories and came into contact with different cultures. They became more receptive to new

ideas and less automatic in their reactions. The
traditional land-economy changed into a money-economy.
Those who went abroad brought back to Murukkumpuḷa the
money they earned and were then able to maintain a higher
level of life than the traditional high caste elite in the
area.[1] As a new elite whose power is rooted in achieved
status they have brought to the community modern patterns
of living from their experiences abroad. This new
occupational order has in turn led to further changes in
the values, attitudes and religious practices of the whole
Īḷava community

Religion as interpreted by Nārāyaṇa Guru was not
against Īḷava enterprise. The occupational mobility of the
Īḷavas in this situation corresponds with a growing sense
of economic progress and development which are
characteristics of modernity. These values were not
observable in that measure among the Brāhmans and Nāirs of
Kerala at that time. The crises the Īḷavas faced as an
outcaste community and the difficulties they encountered in
getting employed in Kerala are what challenged them. They
used those challenges as opportunities to strive for

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[1]The people working abroad have a larger investment
in the banks now. There are two banks operating at
Murukkumpuḷa

progress and bring about a total development to their community.

3. Politics

Side by side with the growth of education, political activity has entered the lives of the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa during the last half century. The teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru and the desire of Īḷavas to fight for freedom and justice encouraged them to take an active interest in politics. For Īḷavas this was a means of exercising social freedom and bringing about social and economic progress for their community. The Guru's teaching of 'One caste' affirmed the equality of all men. As an Īḷava the Guru understood the privileges denied to the lower castes under the traditional hierarchical caste structure. He exhorted the people to find freedom and strength in organization and for that purpose he constituted the SNDP Yōgam in 1903, before the politicization of other Hindu castes.[1] The SNDP organization served as a stepping stone which enabled all the Īḷavas to participate in politics and in turn opened up for them new opportunities to interact in public.

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[1] See Rudolph,Lloyd.I., and Susanne.H., The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,1967.

Kumāran Āśān, the first secretary of the SNDP Yōgam,
settled in Tōnnakkal, a place 5kms. east of Murukkumpula,
in 1919, and had much contact with the people at
Murukkumpula. In his speeches and literary works he laid
emphasis on social and economic freedom and upheld the
importance of individual dignity.[1]

Though both Nārāyana Guru and Kumāran Āśān
frequently visited the people in Murukkumpula real
political activity only gradually picked up momentum in
this rural setting. The slow political development in the
area was partially due to the economic dominance the Īlavas
traditionally enjoyed in the place and the considerable
freedom they had because of their large numbers.[2] It is
not easy for a tradition bound society to change and
innovation is not sought where the felt need is not so
acute. Hence the process of political development was
gradual.

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[1]Āśān wrote Duravastha and Candālabhiksuki while he
stayed at Thōnnakkal a place east of Murukkumpula.

[2]While Kumāran Āśān was speaking at the Śrī Mūlam
Popular Assembly in 1913 demanding Government measures to
admit Īlava children in all government and government-aided
educational institutions, Īlavas at Murukkumpula were
already enjoying this privilege in the local school managed
by the Latin Christians.

With the sudden demise of Kumāran Āśān in 1924 and

Nārāyaṇa Guru in 1928 the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa and

elsewhere lacked proper leadership. During this period of

uncertainity the Īḻavas became slowly conscious that only a

co-operative and massive effort could bring the freedom and

dignity that they felt they deserved. Increased

transportation facilities and a better communication system

were making it possible for the people to understand what

was going on in other parts of the State and Country. The

1920s was a time when communal interests picked up momentum

in Kerala. The SNDP Yōgam became active in pursuing the

needs of the Īḻava Community on the State level in the

1920s.[1] People at Murukkumpuḻa organized meetings near

the Railway Station and in the premises of the Īḻava

temples to support the wider efforts of the SNDP Yōgam. By

the time the Joint Political Congress was formed in 1933 to

demand proper communal representation at the Assembly, the

Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa were becoming quite politically

conscious and local leadership was appearing.[2]

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[1]It was a time when SNDP Yōgam was demanding
educational facilities, job opportunities and more social
freedom for its members. For the freedom of movement and
equal right for all castes to enter the State temples,
satyāgrahās were launched at Vaikkam Temple in 1924 and
Guruvayūr Temple in 1931.

[2]Īḻavas did not have proper representation at the
Śrī Mūlam Assembly reconstituted in 1932.

When the State Congress was formed in 1938, Īḻava members from Murukkumpuḻa such as V.G.Das, Kuñjukṛṣṇan and Rāghava Paṇickkar became active members.[1] Murukkumpuḻa served as a meeting place for many of the State Congress leaders.[2] Accamma Cherian, the twelfth President of the State Congress led a procession from Murukkumpuḻa to Trivandrum demanding the resignation of the Divān C.P. Rāmasvāmy Iyer.[3] R. Śankar who was then the SNDP Yōgam secretary (early 1940s) and an active member of the State Congress, came to Murukkumpuḻa and organized the Īḻavas by opening a Śākha (unit) of the Yōgam with its office on the premises of the Śiva Temple (Puttenkōvil).[4]

The 1940s saw the emergence of two political parties in Murukkumpuḻa: The Indian National Congress supported largely by the middle class and the Communist Party of India supported by the lower class. The World War brought in scarcity of essential commodities and acute forms of poverty. It was the lower class that suffered the most. In the interviews a number of people recalled an

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[1]Paper Nos. 293, 018, 311, 339, 340, 302.

[2]People remember the visits of Pattom Tāṇu Piḷḷai, T.M. Varghese and C. Kēśavan. Paper Nos. 062, 074, 368.

[3]Paper No. 062. Cassette No.16.

[4]Reg. No.673.

incident which took place at this time where some members
of the lower class forcefully took away food grains from
the house of a wealthy Īlava at Murukkumpuḷa.[1] The
Communist party grew in strength among the lower castes and
the low income groups and encouraged them to form trade
unions to demand more wages and privileges.[2] Leaders like
Kāṭṭaikōṇam Srīdharan and Sadānandan taught study groups at
Murukkumpuḷa and organized the people under the Communist
Party.[3] They joined with the followers of the Congress
Party to demand a 'Responsible Government' in the state,
but the Īlava political loyalties continued to be divided
along class lines. By the time elected governments came
into place active political participation became the means
by which all communal groups, including the Īlavas, sought
to achieve their communal interests. Political action
forced the State Government to recognize the Īlavas as one
of the backward communities and give them favourable

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[1]Paper No.125.

[2]C.I.T.U. (Centre of Indian Trade Union) and
I.N.T.U.C. (Indian National Trade Union Congress) are the
two dominant trade unions now at Murukkumpuḷa.

[3]Study classes were conducted at nights extending
from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. Paper Nos.014 & 015.

treatment in matters regarding education and employment.[1]

With the Indian Constitution providing full adult

franchise, elected representatives have come to replace the

hereditary caste authorities in leadership roles and

individuals now take their political freedom for granted

and influence caste leaders to seek their interests.

The Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa are now a politically

conscious group. They are literate and read the newspapers

daily.[2] They listen to the radio and some of them watch

television and keep themselves informed of the current

issues. Those who cannot afford to own radios or

televisions can be seen reading the newspapers and

discussing the political issues at the local tea shops

every morning.[3]

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[1]Hand book: Relating to the Amendments Issued to the various Rules and Regulations Incorporated in the Kerala State Manual I (upto 31 Dec. 1981), Ernakulam: Government Press, 1982, pp.20-21.

[2]Malayāla Manōrama, Māthrubhūmi and Kerala Kaumudi are the newspapers popular at Murukkumpuḷa.

[3]Tea shops are open as early as 5.30 a.m. and the newspaper agent distributes the paper at 6 a.m. Tea is not usually prepared in the homes of the lower class as they cannot preserve milk overnight.

The 'Congress-I' and the 'Communist Party of India (Marxist)' are the two dominant political parties at Murukkumpula now. The local leaders of these parties are two young members of the Īḷava community: Mōhana Chandran representing Congress-I and M.R. Ravi representing CPI(M). Mohana Chandran is a member of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (K.P.C.C.) (Member of the State Congress Committee). He is the son of a wealthy cloth merchant at Murukkumpula, owns a truck and a motorcycle and lives in a modern house near the ferry.[1] M.R. Ravi the Communist leader is the Vice-President of the local Panchayat. He is the son of a lower class Īḷava; his wife works in a restaurant run by her father and they live in a low-lying area with the lower class in A-2. He moves around on a bicycle. He has considerable influence on the Panchayat. The present Panchayat President Ummer is also a CPI(M) representative.

The pattern of Īḷava involvement in politics at Murukkumpula reveals that they join with the Christians and

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[1]The house belongs to his brother who is working at the Gulf. He has membership in many of the local organizations such as the Service Cooperative Society and the Cultural Organization.

the Muslims in nominating candidates for the various
elections now. There are three general elections in which
people usually participate. Elections to the Panchayat,
the State Assembly and the (Lok Sabha) Parliament.

The Panchayat is the lowest level administration
encompassing an area covering five villages. Each
Panchayat is divided into wards and the people in each ward
can elect a representative (ward member) to the Panchayat
Council.[1] Murukkumpuḷa is a ward in the Mangalapuram
Panchayat which was formed in 1953.

Murukkumpuḷa forms part of the Kaḷakūṭṭam Assembly
Constituency which covers about seven Panchayats. For the
Parliamentary election, Murukkumpuḷa forms part of the
Chirayinkīl constituency which covers an area of about
fifty Panchayats.[2] The representatives elected at the last
elections for the Panchayat, State Assembly and Parliament
are all Congress-I candidates (a Christian as the ward

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[1]The Panchayats are responsible to undertake the
work such as construction, repair and maintenance of public
roads, drainage, lighting of public roads and places and
the like. Minor offences and property disputes in the ward
are settled by the ward representative.

[2]Seven Assembly Constituencies are included here.

representative and Muslims as Assembly and Parliament representatives), showing the dominance of this party at Murukkumpuḷa. Since the Īḻavas are fairly evenly divided between the Congress-I and CPI(M) parties, they must join with the Latin Christians and Muslims to elect their representatives.[1] In this role the Īḻavas tend to co-operate with the Christians and Muslims rather than with the Nāir Community.

Political power is a central consideration of the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḷa. This they naturally possess because of wider association with political groups and leaders. To cite two instances, the local SNDP Yōgam was able to invite political leaders (who are also Īḻavas) such as Vakkam Puruṣōttaman (now a Member of the Parliament) and M. Kamalam (now a State Minister) to address the gathering at the time of the temple festival in February 1985. Earlier when the new Post Office Building was opened at Murukkumpuḷa in 1984 it was Vayalar Ravi (another State Minister and an Īḻava) who presided over the function. Now the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḷa have two young political leaders

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[1] Latin Christians generally support the Congress-I. If there is a Muslim candidate, Muslims generally vote for him.

who are influential in their respective parties.[1]   Their

leadership enables the community to have a sense of

political dominance over the other castes and religious

communities at Murukkumpula.

Political dominance can be maintained only when the

leaders are interested in the development of the entire

community and people are given a chance for participation.

The Cultural Organization formed at Murukkumpula on March

15, 1975 is an example of an effort to sustain such

participation.[2]   It has an advisory committee and its

membership indicates that it consists of Īlavas and

supporters of the Congress Party.[3]   The Cultural

Organization consists of young members of the area and

enables them to utilize their abundant youthful energy and

dynamism for community development.   Their activities

consist of social, economic, recreational and cultural

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[1]Mōhana Chandran represents Congress-I and M.R.
Ravi represents CPI(M).

[2]Once Nārāyaṇa 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.   Sanoo, M.K., Narayana
Guru, 1978, p.114.   See also Annual Report, Cultural
Organization, Murukkumpula: 1984, p.1.

[3]The members of the Advisory Committee are: M/s
Walter D. Paul (ward Member), C. Mōhana Chandran
(Congress-I leader), Naṭarājan, Gōvardhanan and Śrikumār.
(Annual Report of the Cultural Organization 1984).

programmes guided by an Advisory Committee.

One of the programmes they have taken up was to seek an increase in the transportation facilities of Murukkumpuḷa. For this, they sought the help of the Panchayat Member and the State Assembly representative and submitted memorandums and petitions to the ministers and government officials. As there was considerable delay in the procedure of the State Transport Corporation, the Cultural Organization conducted <u>satyāgrahā</u> and public meetings in front of the Bus Depot at Āṭṭingal.[1] They succeeded in their attempt and since 1979 Murukkumpuḷa has had increased transportation facilities.[2] Other achievements of the Cultural Organization include opening of the Village Office on February 19, 1979, the Sub-registrar's Office on May 21, 1982 and a Veterinary Hospital on July 10, 1984.[3] These public institutions have

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[1]N.M. Hassan (M.L.A.) spoke at this meeting.

[2]There are State Transport buses now from ferry to Nedumaṅgāṭ and Trivandrum via Chempaḷanti. In addition buses from Chirayinkil pass through Murukkumpuḷa to places such as Āṭṭiṅgal, St. Andrews, Kaḷakūṭṭam and Trivandrum. Some fast moving trains also stop at Murukkumpuḷa.

[3]Land transactions are possible only with the help of these offices. The annual report of the Veterinary Hospital mentions that 40 cows and 160 goats have been distributed to the people under the Integrated Rural Development Programme of the government. There are also two Poultry farms at Murukkumpuḷa.

not only added more facilities to Murukkumpula but also

helped the local people to get more employment. The

stadium under construction near the St. Augustine Church is

now giving employment to several low-income groups in the

Ward.[1]

As part of its programme the Cultural Organization

arranged a devotional session at Murukkumpula on December

29, 1983 in which Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati, the Āchārya of

the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Gurukulam spoke on Guru Deva Darśanaṅgal

(Divine Visions of Guru).[2] This was an occasion for the

Īlavas to recall the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru. The

Cultural Organization also arranges seminars and

study-classes to help the coconut planters of

Murukkumpula.[3] They are now pursuing the possibility of

starting a public library towards which they have already

bought land near the Railway Station.[4]

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[1]This stadium is constructed under the National
Rural Employment Programme of the government (NREP-1980)
which offers job opportunities to the rural poor and seeks
to develop and strengthen the rural infra structure.
Manorama Year Book, 1985, p.504.

[2]Annual Report of the Cultural Organization. 1954.
p.7.

[3]An Agricultural Seminar was conducted in September
1984. Kerala Kaumudi. September 24, 1984.

[4]They raised sufficient funds from the Public to
buy the land. They are now attempting to construct the
building there. Kerala Kaumudi. September 20, 1984.

Thus political participation has on the one hand given Ḹavas freedom from the traditional hierarchical caste structure where an individual's role was solely determined by his birth in a particular caste. The multi-party democratic system of modern India gives every citizen equality before law and equal opportunity to occupy the highest political position in the nation. Now the individual has more freedom and his social or economic status stands as no barrier to his rights and privileges as a citizen.

Ḹavas have on the other hand also acquired a sense of communal identity in this process of change from traditional caste subjugation to modern political dominance. With their political power at Murukkumpuḷa, Ḹavas promote a co-operative way of life along with the Latin Christians and Muslims. This is beneficial to all religious communities, but the Ḹavas have the dominant voice because of their number and local leadership.

Political participation is open for all, but it has been mainly Ḹavas and Nāirs who have found meaning in actively participating in Kerala politics. Nāirs used political means to demand their rightful share in the administration of the State. Ḹavas developed this same

goal, but they also found political involvement a means to exercise their freedom and reduce caste distinctions. Traditionally Īḻavas had no political voice. It was some elite members such as Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān who raised their voice against the traditional social structure. In the beginning the Īḻavas had to depend on the Nāirs as was the case when the Īḻavas joined the Nāirs in submitting the Malayāḷi Memorial. Realizing the need for independent action Dr. Palpu tried to mobilize the Īḻavas in submitting the Īḻava Memorial. He was partially successful, but a more active participation of the Īḻavas of southern Kerala in organizing themselves as a religious and political pressure group took place only in 1903 under the initiative of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru.

The Guru had no active political involvement but he did not discourage Kumāran Āśān and Dr. Palpu from adopting political means to demand the rights of the Īḻavas. It was during his life time that the Īḻavas started state-wide agitations to remove untouchability and demand their right to enter all public temples. The Guru repeatedly told the Īḻavas to find strength in organization.

It was at Aruvippuram (1888) that the Īḻavas first found unity in organization. There, after the consecration

of the temple, the Guru organized them into the SNDP Yōgam
in 1903. The initiative for organization and political
participation thus came in the name of religion. The
teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru emphasized the freedom and
responsibility of the individual to liberate oneself from
the clutches of saṃsāra and find fulfilment of his
personality (mokṣa) in such a liberation. Kumāran Āśān
constantly spoke in the Assembly about the dharma
(responsibility) of the state in showing justice to all
religious communities. In their teachings political
involvement was considered not a hinderance to religious
growth, but a form of spiritual exercise.

It is significant that in a place like Murukkumpuḷa
the SNDP Yōgam has its office in the temple compound, and
it is the same committee that discusses the religious
(temple matters) and political matters. Īḷavas at
Murukkumpuḷa do not separate politics and religion.

4. Economy

Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa and elsewhere were once
backward and many of them worked as labourers. Those who
worked as labourers depended on the Nāirs, who were mostly
landlords, for their regular occupation and wages. Īḷavas

were not united and there was little interest in progress among them. Nārāyaṇa Guru was interested in the eradication of the economic backwardness of the Īḻavas. In the early decades of this century, he told the people that industrialization of traditional industries like coir could be a means to achieve economic prosperity.[1]

The Guru alerted the people to the fact that other countries were given the raw products of Kerala like copra (dried coconut) and coconut husk at a cheap price and in turn the people of Kerala paid a high price for the consumer goods (finished products) they manufactured out of such raw products. This happened because the people did not know the manufacturing process and were quite ignorant of the advantage of indulging in trades and industry. So the Guru said that the only way to make a flourishing economy based on such products was to mechanize after getting the technical knowhow from other countries. He also sent out able speakers with the following instruction:

> (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 will feel it
> an unsocial act to lead an
> idle life.

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

(b)   Induce people to establish
      industrial factories wherever
      required and to study and
      popularize industries in a
      scientific way.[1]

To make these ideas more effective, Nārāyaṇa Guru

encouraged the people to assemble at a common place once a

month to discuss their problems and take relevant action.[2]

The teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru were directly

relevant to the Īlavas of Murukkumpuḷa as a good number of

them were traditionally agriculturalists and businessmen.

The land owners of Murukkumpuḷa traditionally had not only

coconut groves but also paddy fields.[3] These fields are

found on the bank of the lake and either side of the

creeks. The cultivation depends on the monsoon that comes

in June-August, as the plants are otherwise scorched by the

sun.[4] The soil at Murukkumpuḷa is not good for rice and

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[1]Ibid., pp.97-98.

[2]The object of organizing the SNDP Yōgam was to
promote and encourage not only religious and secular
education but also good industrial habits among the Īlava
community.

[3]Rice is the staple food of the people of Kerala.

[4]The average annual rainfall is 1803 mm. The
atmosphere is humid throughout the year. The temperature
ranges between 30 C (April-May) and 22.5C (December-
January). Manorama Year Book 1985, p.392. There was a
heavy drought in 1982 which lingered for most part of 1983.

therefore the yield from paddy fields is poor. Failure of a crop affects the economy of both the land-owner and the labour dramatically, and this insecurity has led the people to more and more discontinue paddy cultivation.

While paddy cultivation is rather unprofitable, the market for coconut products is on the increase. People at Murukkumpula are raising the low-lying lands, where rice was once grown, in order to plant coconut trees. The soil at Murukkumpula is fertile for coconuts. Out of the 340 persons interviewed only 49 people (14.41 percent) possess paddy fields now. Statistics show that out of the 128 Ilavas only 27 families (21.09 percent) maintain paddy fields.[1] This process of conversion from paddy fields into coconut gardens can be especially seen now in the coastal areas of Murukkumpula.

A major industry now at Murukkumpula that depends upon the coconut plantations is the coir industry. It provides employment to a good number of people. The thick

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[1]It is even lower in the case of Christians. Among them, out of the 126 respondents only 15 families (11.90 percent) have paddy fields now.

fibrous coconut husk is the raw material and the different process in the industry are

(i)   Soaking the raw coconut husks in retting pits in the backwater marshes.

(ii)   Beating the fibre out of the retted husks.

(iii) Spinning the fibre into yarn.

(iv)   Bundling the ropes for transportation.

The transportion of husks from the collection spots to the retting field, preparing the pits and filling and covering them with plaited coconut leaves and weighing them down with mud are all done by men.[1] It is the women workers who do the job of beating out the fibre from retted husks. They do so out on the banks of the lake on heavy wooden planks with sticks of coconut wood. The extracted fibre is dried and used for spinning. The actual spinning is done in thatched sheds, mostly by women and children. The younger members turn the wheel to which the fibre is attached. Then women, each with a bundle of fibre under their arm, walk backward spinning out the yarn as they go

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[1]The retting of the husks of the coconut is possible in the brackish water of Kaṭhinamkulam lake. The husks are covered with mud under the water and left there for about eight months. 1000 raw coconut husks costs Rs.400.00 whereas 1000 retted husks costs Rs.525.00.

(See Plate No.7). The men then take up the task of bundling the ropes for transportation to the factories at Alleppey.[1]

Murukkumpula has had several small proprietors of the coir industry where investments ranged from Rs.1,000/- to Rs.15,000/-.[2] As the export trade in coir products grew and foreign firms got control of the wholesale prices, the small proprietors were faced with many uncertainities. Price fluctuations caused havoc to them. Further, only those who had a large volume of business could provide work for their labourers throughout the year. This led to the formation of a Coir Workers' Co-operative Society (Ltd. No.3063) at Murukkumpula on July 3, 1950. This Co-operative Society has liberated the people from the clutches of money lenders and promoted the habit of thrift among the rural populace.[3]

The annual report of the society for the year 1983-84 says that it holds a capital of Rs.3,38,961.00

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[1] The coir is transformed into mats at the factories.

[2] There are some businessmen at Murukkumpula with larger investments.

[3] Paper Nos. 190, 215, 243. Cassette No.36.

with 930 shareholders.[1] During the report year, the society made a net profit of Rs.10,056.23 after increasing the wages of the labourers by 15 percent and giving them seven days annual leave with pay and 15 percent bonus.[2] As a result the Coir Board of the State Government has recognized this as an ideal project in the District and sanctioned Rs.15,330.00 as subsidy and Rs.30,660.00 as loan for improving the industry. Now the coir industry at Murukkumpula thrives under the Co-operative Society.

As a result of the development of the coir industry, people have become more interested in coconut plantations. Traditionally, cowdung along with kitchen ash and silt from the backwaters given every year, before the monsoon in June-August formed the manure for the coconut trees. With the discontinuation of the paddy cultivation, the rearing of cattle became difficult and the cattle manure used for coconuts became insufficient. Along with

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[1]In this, government has a share of Rs.1,54,800.00. The society took 893996 coconut husks during the year for production and produced 768 quintal of coir, giving job for the labourers for maximum days compared to other co-operative societies in Trivandrum District. (One quintal is equal to 1000 kilograms). A share holder deposits Rs.10/- only to the capital fund. The society has a seven member managing committee.

[2]Society gave Rs.56,880/- for the raw husks and Rs.320,925.60 for production expense.

this, the periodical droughts reduced the coconut yield. This affected the coir industry also. This situation gave rise to the formation of another facility known as the Service Co-operative Society (Reg.No.T 292) in 1966.[1]

This multi-purpose co-operative society under the care of a governing board is a new feature in this ward. The membership fee of this service society is Rs.0.50 and the share value is Re.1.00. The Kerala Government is the biggest shareholder with an investment of Rs.50,000.00. According to the statistics, this society has 2100 share holders now.

The Service Society renders invaluable service to the peasants by advancing agricultural loans against the surety of their agricultural produce. A few people have made use of this provision and have installed pumps to water the coconut trees throughout the year. The society also sells fertilizers to the farmers at controlled rates.[2] Interviews at Murukkumpula revealed that 59 out of

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[1]This society has a governing board. While the interviews were conducted in November 1984, K. Sadāśivan (an Īlava) was its president. K. Ravīndran (an Īlava) was its former president.

[2]Planters can also buy large quantities of fertilizers on credit.

the 102 respondents (57.84 percent) are now buying
fertilizers regularly from the Co-operative Society. The
following table presents the change.

Table:13   Use of Fertilizers

Time period	Number of Persons	Percentage
Before 1965	5	8.48
1965-1970	6	10.17
1971-1975	9	15.25
1976-1980	20	33.90
1981-1984	19	32.20
	59	100.00

This Service Co-operative Society is an
organization of the people for mutual help and co-operation
to meet their common economic requirements. According to
the report given by its secretary, 800 persons were given
loans from the Service Society for self-employment schemes
during the year 1984. Since March 1985, this Society also
provides banking facilities.

The co-operative movement in both the Coir Society and the Service Society, has opened an avenue for all income groups, irrespective of their caste or religious background, to seek employment. Any person can become a share holder by depositing Rs.10.00 in the capital fund. Such share holders own the industry, they meet periodically to make decisions and share the profit equally.

This endeavour not only stops the economic exploitation of the weaker section but also removes the gulf between the employer and the employee. A sense of equality prevails in the community and equal opportunities are provided by the society. The shareholders have the freedom to speak as they constitute the society and feel responsible as they own the business. As Nārāyaṇa Guru desired, it opens room for the participation of all people in efforts to improve their standard of living with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative. Economic progress in the life of the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa is now quite notable. This process of change has not reduced the importance of the individual. Instead he is benefitted. In this progressive way of life, co-operation has promoted self-reliance and social cohesion. It has taught them the value of 'profit-sharing' and building up a 'new society' based on the ideals of equality, freedom and co-operation.

Liberation from the 'given' nature of traditional caste life to the freedom of choice in the new way of life is a sign of modernity and involves the shouldering of responsibility by the people. Nārāyaṇa Guru was interested not only in the spiritual liberation of man but also in the total development of his personality. This included a concern with economic progress and the development of the religious values included in that sense of progress. According to him Mokṣa includes the well-being of the ātman in his personal, corporate and cosmological levels. This is the modern sense of religiosity one finds in the Īlava awakening. The Īlavas at Murukkumpuḷa feel they experience the 'One Caste Ideal' of Nārāyaṇa Guru in the Co-operative way of life they have developed.

As seen in the earlier section, the Īlavas are interested in the socio-economic development of Murukkumpuḷa. They have found meaning not only in co-operating with other religious communities but also in working for the welfare of all the people of the Ward. The attempt to have a Registrar's office, Post and Telecommunication Office, Stadium and the like are to be seen in this context. (These public institutions not only serve Murukkumpuḷa but also the neighbouring wards.).

This process of change is not Sanskritization which is an effort to rise up in the traditional hierarchy. The Co-operative Movement is an effort for equal rights and it cuts away the hierarchical stratification of society. Neither is the change Westernization because the change is based on indigenous leadership and local machinery. Recognition of the principle of equality, the development of indigenous leadership and the resultant new value system are characteristics of modernity.

5.   New Social Order

Social changes were an inevitable outcome of the educational, occupational, political and economic changes which have been taking place since 1900 at Murukkumpula. Some of these changes have already been noted in the sections above. Further examples can be seen in the distribution of land, nature of the construction of houses, change in business activities and in inter-personal relationships.

Socio-economic institutions such as the janmi (land holding) and taravāt (joint family) along with the hierarchical ordering of caste groups prevailed at Murukkumpula till the close of the nineteenth century.

Traditionally most of the land at Murukkumpula was in the

hands of a few landlords called Janmis. They owned the

lands and permitted tenants (kutiyans) a limited occupancy

right for cultivation. It was in the interest of the

tenant to keep the janmi friendly by annual gifts, so that

the lease might be renewed periodically. The landlord

enjoyed not merely the power to evict the tenants from the

land at his will but even the power of life and death over

them.[1] Changes came with the janmi-kutiyan

(landlord-tenant) tenancy legislation in Travancore in 1932

(after the Ilava Bill in 1925) which conferred full

proprietary rights on the kutiyans subject to payment of

janmikaram.[2] After independence (1947) there were a series

of land reforms in Kerala aimed at further redistribution

of land. The Kerala Agrarian Relations Act (1960) and the

Kerala Land Reforms Act (1963-1969) restricted the

landholdings per family and required government

distribution of surplus land to the landless. As a result

several hutment dwellers (kutikitappukār) came to own land

and feudal serfdom came to an end.

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., Social and Cultural History
of Kerala, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1979, p.78.

[2]Karam = tax.

The joint-family was a distinctive social feature
that prevailed until recent times under the marumakkattāyam
system in southern Kerala. According to this system,
inheritance of the property and succession in the family
was possible only through the sister's children in the
female line.[1] The oldest female, called Ammāyi, that is
the Kāraṇavan's wife, had great influence in the taravāt
(joint-family). The junior members had no legal claim to
family property and as modern circumstances developed they
started revolting against the powers of Ammāyi and
Kāraṇavan. Nārāyaṇa Guru advocated the individual
partition of property as early as 1904. Change to this
system of inheritance became possible for the first time
through the Īlava Bill of 1925. It was the result of a
demand made by the Īlavas themselves in the Śrī Mūlam
Assembly. The Hindu Succession Act passed by the Indian
Parliament after Independence and brought into force in
1956 further provided equal rights for man and woman to
inherit property.[2]

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[1]Ibid., p.87.

[2]Menon, A. Sreedhara. Cultural Heritage of
Kerala-An Introduction, 1978, p.232.

Table 14: Land Ownership of the Religious Communities

Communities	Īḻavas	Nāirs	Christians	Muslims
Number of Respondents	112	16	111	20
Ownership of Land	%	%	%	%
1 - 2 cents	0.89	-	-	-
3 - 5 cents	8.93	-	7.20	15
6 - 10 cents	12.50	6.25	9.91	25
11 - 20 cents	16.96	18.75	9.91	10
21 - 50 cents	25	43.75	28.83	20
1/2 - 1 Acre	18.75	18.75	16.21	15
1 - 2 Acres	8.04	6.25	15.32	15
2 - 3 Acres	3.57	-	3.61	-
3 - 4 Acres	2.68	6.25	2.70	-
4 and above	2.68	-	6.31	-

In a densely populated state like Kerala, land is held to be precious.[1] The following table shows the pattern of land ownership of the various religious communities at Murukkumpuḻa. As the chart shows many

[1]Density of population in Kerala is 654 persons per sq.km. Census of India 1981, Series 10, Kerala: 1981, p.1

Īḷavas and Christians now possess land with more than 4
acres per individual. Traditionally landholding was the
prerogative of the upper classes such as the Nāirs. Now
the Īḷavas have more land than the Nāirs at Murukkumpuḷa.

With the decline of the joint-family system,
changes have also been taking place in the structure of the
houses at Murukkumpuḷa. The houses at Murukkumpuḷa are
detached homesteads located in compounds of coconut trees.

The following table shows the types of houses the
different religious communities have at Murukkumpuḷa.
Before the turn of the century permission was needed and a
tax had to be paid for roofing the houses with tiles.
Therefore the 'type of roof' is a direct indication of the
economic position and the change in the life of the
people. Construction of houses with concrete roofs is
modern and costly and people with such houses assume a
still higher social status. Time is valuable in modern
life. Though coconut leaves are plentiful, thatching of
the roofs with leaves is avoided as it involves time and
man-power. Therefore, as the table shows the first change
came with tiled roofs in the 1930s and later with concrete
roofs (following 1960).

Table:15 'THE TYPE OF ROOF' OF THE HOUSES IN WARD-I:COMMUNITY WISE PERCENTAGE
FROM RESPONDENTS

Caste	Total Respondents	Concrete Roof		Tiled Roof		Thatched Roof	
		Total No.	Percentage of Respondents	Total No.	Percentage of Respondents	Total No.	Percentage of Respondents
A. HINDUS							
Brāhman	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ambalavasi*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vāṇika	6	1	16.67	2	33.33	3	50
Nāir	20	3	15	11	55	6	30
Īḷava	125	28	22.40	38	30.40	59	47.2
Taṇḍān	35	-	-	1	2.86	34	97.14
Taṭṭān	3	-	-	1	33.3	2	66.6
Vaṇṇān	9	3	33.33	3	33.33	3	33.33+
Pulaya	4	-	-	-	-	4	100
B. CHRISTIANS	117	46	39.32	28	23.93	43	36.75
C. MUSLIMS	22	3	13.64	3	13.64	16	72.72

*   He is a Bank Manager staying in a rented building with concrete roof.

+   Percentage in tables do not necessarily add to totals, because of rounding.

The table indicates that, even though only 15 percent of the Nāirs have buildings with concrete roofs, 55 percent of them have buildings with tiled roof. This is an indication that Nāirs were prosperous before people from Murukkumpuḷa started working outside the country or between 1930 and 1960. Historical records also show that at the turn of the century, Nāirs had better chances of getting employed in the government offices of the State, while Īḷavas were kept away as an untouchable caste. The status Nāirs traditionally had in the area is evident from the fact that they have the least percentage of thatched houses (only 30 percent) now in the ward. Although 47.2 percent of the Īḷavas still live in thatched houses, that they have 30.4 percent of the houses with tiled roofs and 22.4 percent with concrete roofs are signs of the steady progress Īḷavas are making in the society.

Statistics show that out of the 28 houses of Īḷavas with concrete roofs, 6 houses were built during the period 1965-1975, 10 houses between 1976 to 1980 and 12 houses from 1981 to 1985. This pattern is indicative of their

Diagram: 3

Construction of Houses in Decades
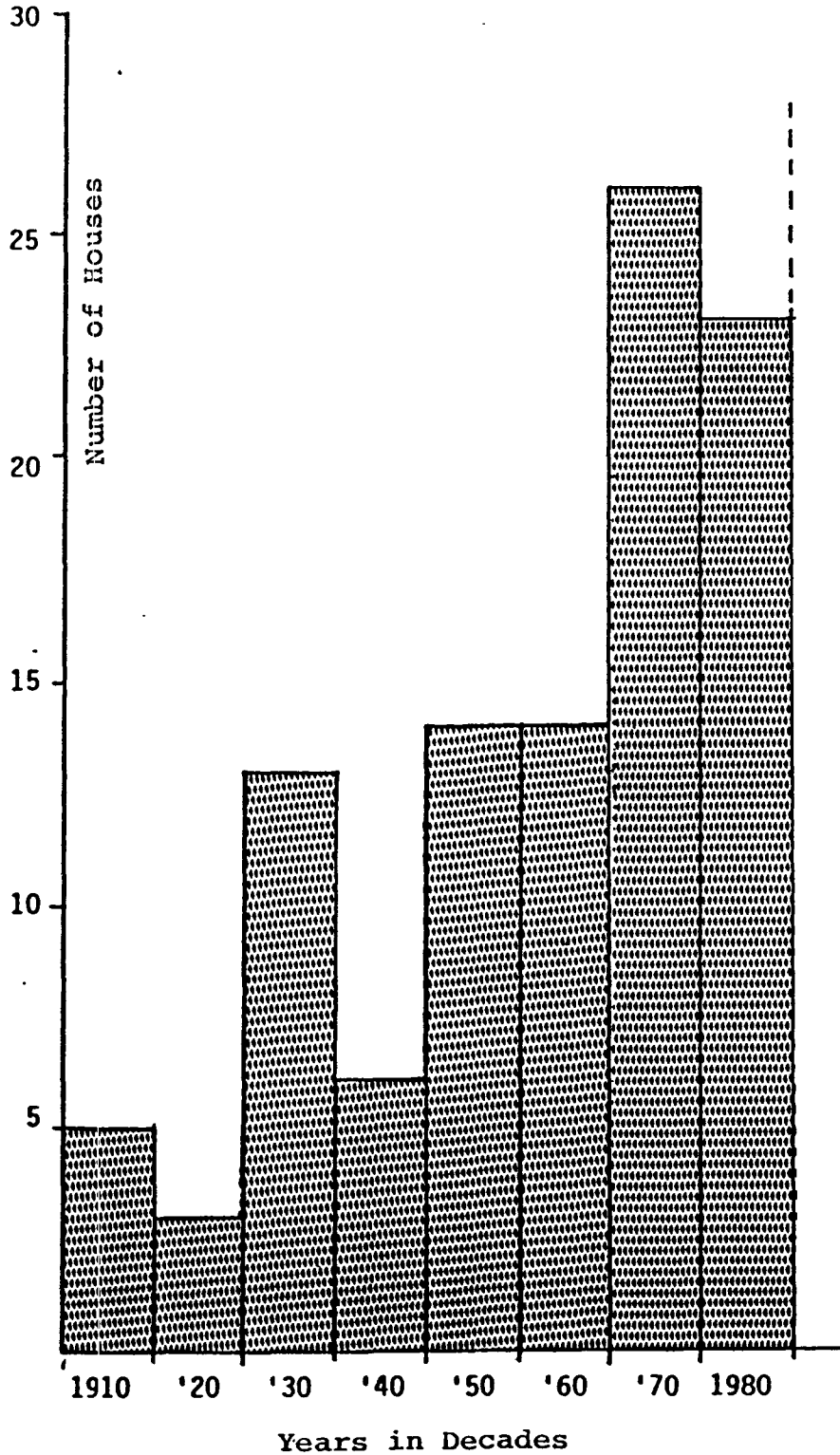
progress. Following is a table showing the year of
construction of the houses of Īlavas at Murukkumpula. It
marks an increase in the percentage of house construction
during the period 1931-1940. This was the time when landed
property was divided according to the new system of
inheritance. During this period the joint-family (taṟavāṭ)
declined and the nuclear family rose up.

Table 16: Year of Construction of the Houses of Īlavas
in Ward-I: Classification by Decades

Year of Construction	Total No. of Houses	Percentage
After 1980	23	21.91
1971 - 1980	26	24.76
1961 - 1970	14	13.33
1951 - 1960	14	13.33
1941 - 1950	7	6.67
1931 - 1940	13	12.38
1921 - 1930	3	2.86
1920 and before	5	4.76
	105	100.00

The table also shows a decline in the construction of houses in the 1940s. This was due to the financial strain the people had during World War. But as the people had relief from this strain in the 1950s they again constructed more houses. 46.67 percent of the Īlava houses were built after 1970. This is a period when more money became available to people through employment in the Gulf countries. It is significant to note that 21.91 percent of the Īlavas built new houses within a span of 4 years following 1980. This indicates their marked progress in recent years.

Other changes have also been taking place to the general setting of Murukkumpuḷa. At the dawn of this century, this place had only a narrow road connecting the ferry to Neṭumaṅgāṭ and Trivandrum. The situation changed in a major way with the coming of the Railway line with a station at Murukkumpuḷa in 1918.[1] Transportation again became easier with the later introduction of the National Highway and other State Transport routes. The first bus that linked Murukkumpuḷa to Neṭumaṅgāṭ was a private bus owned by an Īlava of the locality around 1940.[2] The State

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[1]The Metergage became Broadgage in September 1976.

[2]P.No.219. It was a 22 seater bus and made 3 trips a day.

Transport started running though the ward in 1979. Now the
majority of the people depend on the public transportation
systems even though a few people have their own
automobiles.[1]

The decline in the significance of ka_tavu (the
ferry) was another change that took place at Murukkumpu_la.
As mentioned earlier, ka_tavu was once a busy trade centre
with bullock carts and ke_t_tuvalams coming and going
frequently. Apart from the consumer goods that were
brought by ke_t_tuvallams, tapioca, pepper and other spices
were brought from hilly areas by bullock-cart. The place
was full of business and several shops thrived on either
side of the road from the ferry. But as the inland
transportation systems like the railway became faster and
easier, business activity shifted from ka_tavu to the area
near the railway station.[2] Recently a large number of
shops have been built in the area that lies between the
railway station and the Panachamukku.

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[1]Out of the 340 families interviewed, 26 families
are found to have their own automobiles and 40 have
bicycles.

[2]As the business activities declined at the ferry,
many shops there were closed down.

Shops	Total No. of shops	Īlava	Nāir	Muslim	Christian	Others
Tea & Coffee shops	9	5	3	1	-	-
Vegetable & Fruit stall	6	4	-	2	-	-
Cloths Store	7	5	-	2	-	-
Hotel/Restaurent	6	1	4	1	-	-
Grocery	13	8	1	3	1	-
Tailoring	13	8	1	1	3	-
Betel/Cegarette & soft drinks	27	14	4	7	2	-
Bakery	3	2	-	1	-	-
Toddy shop	2	2	-	-	-	-
Barber shop	4	4	-	-	-	-
Watch/Electronic Repair	4	3	-	1	-	-
Hardware store	4	2	-	2	..	-
Stationary	5	2	-	1	2	-
Underwriters	6	-	4	2	-	-
Other kinds	26	10	5	5	1	5
Total	135	70	22	29	9	5

Table: 17 Communal Distribution of Shop
Owners in Ward-I

In a changing place like Murukkumpuḻa one observes new patterns of social relationship being woven out of old strands. The great social distance, physical and psychological that kept apart people of the different castes has been reduced almost to zero. Now no member of a Nāir caste orders one of a lower caste to go off the road or footpath in order not to be polluted by the latter. If once a Nāir expected an Īḻava to address him as Tampurān (your Lordship)[1] and show him respect and obedience by removing the upper clothes, bending his body a little and covering his mouth with his hand, now such practices are unknown to the younger generation and even the older generation hesitates to practice them in the changed situation.[2] For fear of pollution, once Īḻavas were not allowed to enter restaurants run by Nāirs.[3] Now they own restaurants, enter the houses of Nāirs[4] and dine together with higher castes.[5] A few decades back Īḻavas were not

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[1]Paper Numbers 023, 191.

[2]Paper Numbers 020, 024. Cassette No.20.

[3]Paper Numbers 105, 130.

[4]For example, teachers of the same school mingle with one another. While a Nāir teacher was interviewed, (Paper No.009) his colleagues including Īḻava Teachers, visited him and they all had tea together.

[5]At Onam festival in August-September, friends, irrespective of their background, visit each others' house. For occasions like weddings, all friends are invited for either lunch or tea.

permitted to enter within a native court of justice, but
now they have advocates among them.[1] They were, of course,
jubilant when Īḷava leaders, C. Kēśavan and R. Śankar,
became Chief-ministers of the State.[2]

Īḷava men and women were not allowed the use of
upper clothes in the early decades of the 19th century.
Now the common male dress is the shirt and the <u>muṇtu</u>. The
older women wear white clothes and while going out, a
longer cloth of finer texture called <u>nēriatu</u> is worn over
the blouse. Pants and shirt are the common dress of the
professional class now.

Removal of pollution practices gained momentum not
without clashes or trial of strength between caste groups
on several occasions. People cited a few instances where
Īḷavas and other lower castes were beaten for entering
restaurants and other public places.[3] Barbers left their
shops when people of lower castes first entered the shop

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[1]Rāghavan is the first advocate among them. Now he
has retired. P.361.

[2]C. Kēśavan and R. Śankar became Chief Ministers in
1951 and 1962 respectively.

[3]Paper Nos. 005, 028, 029, 072, 130, 351, 357,
374. Traditionally, Īḷavas and other lower castes had
separate places outside the restaurant where broken glasses
and coconut shells were kept for them. After use, they
themselves had to wash them and keep them for others to use.

and asked for a haircut.[1] On such occasions, Īḻavas, who had the strength of numbers, conducted propaganda meetings.[2] They were supported by Christians and Muslims, and their leaders persisted in their efforts until their demands were granted.[3]

Changes in the social relations did not come all of a sudden. Social reformers like Nārāyaṇa Guru and Kumāran Āśān served as advocates of change. Communal organizations like the SNDP Yōgam and political parties of the modern era served as pressure groups to demand social and political rights denied to its members. Education, better means of transport and communications, employment outside the state, entry of the money-economy,[4] cultural contacts and the like loosened the caste structure and weakened the resistance of

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[1]Lower caste people did this continuously, till some barbers started cutting their hair; others virtually closed their shops.

[2]These meetings were supported by State Congress leaders. Paper Nos. 243, 340, 384, 369.

[3]Muslims took the initiative in permitting Īḻavas and others to enter their shops and have food with others. They were motivated to do so by their leader M.A. Khan. Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa had leadership from persons such as Sridharan Vaidian, Kuñjukrishnan, Rāghavan and V.G. Das. Paper Nos. 034, 151, 243, 302, 310, and 340. 294.

[4]The change was from the 'land-economy' to 'money-economy'. Employment in offices fetched them regular salaries.

conservative forces.[1] The democratic government aiming at creating an equitable distribution of wealth, made grants to any citizen, irrespective of his caste or creed, and provided greater opportunities and freedom.[2] In the changing social order, an individual exercises his freedom to choose his vocation and the pattern of his life.[3]

Thus the modern order has freed the individual from the prescriptions of the traditional hierarchical society. The change in the system of inheritance and division of joint-family gave the individual a significant place in society. It has recognized the status of the individual and provided opportunities for the individual to exercise his freedom. The individual now realizes his freedom to establish a nuclear family and his responsibility to maintain it. The individual not only enjoys his personal freedom but also senses his right to participate with others in the creation of a 'new society'

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[1] Such forces were generally represented by custodians of the traditional way of life.

[2] It was physically impossible to observe contact taboos once people started travelling together in public transportation systems, studying together in schools and colleges, playing together in recreation centres and eating together in restaurants.

[3] In terms of actual behaviour, the present situation is reflected in the freer and egalitarian manner of talk, address and general dealings characterized by the lesser frequency of commands and unpaid services.

6. Conclusion.

In this chapter we found that the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa made progress in the field of education, economy, politics and social relations. This progress has freed the Īḻavas from the enslavement of caste which was prevalent in Kerala in the past. An improvement in caste relations resulted from the growth of modern education. Employment was dependent on the acquisition of skill. Education granted skill and shattered the hold of caste. It gave rise to elite leadership in society. The educated demanded equal opportunities to compete for specialized occupations on the basis of knowledge rather than one's caste affiliation. The resultant occupational mobility opened up opportunities for the educated to travel and to mingle with new cultural patterns. This created in them a new spirit of adventure in stepping into the unknown world and a new spirit of openness in adopting new practices or patterns of life. In other words, as a result of education and occupational mobility the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa became more enlightened about exercising their newly acquired freedom and took on a new sense of responsibility. This pattern of change where the individual breathes freedom and shoulders responsibility is a characteristic of modernity.

The Iḻavas, the victims of discrimination in the
past, have organized themselves to overcome oppression.
This they did by organizing themselves as a religious
organization (SNDP Yōgam) and by rallying under the
political banner. As the Thomases say : " The adult
franchise started in the State during the 1940s as part of
a fight for 'responsible government' gave new importance to
the people of lower castes as well as women who were
allowed to vote."[1] The Iḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa, as we have
seen earlier, try to improve their situation now by
political means. This is a result of the deeper awareness
they have about their situation and the possibility of
improving it. Through political participation they also
enjoy equality and justice which were denied to them in the
past in the name of caste. Thus political participation of
the Iḻavas paved the way for a linear social mobility which
is rather different from the vertical mobility of
Sanskritization.[2]

The case study at Murukkumpuḻa shows that along with
economic progress, the Iḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa have entered
into a co-operative way of life. This has given them the
opportunity to exercise their own freedom and participate

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[1]Thomas,T.M., and Annamma., Kerala Immigrants in
America, 1984, pp.96-97.

[2]See Rudolph,L.I. and Susanne., Modernity of
Tradition: Political Development in India,1967.

in the freedom of others. They have acknowledged that the
pattern of co-operation irrespective of caste or sex is a
better way for progress and the hope to build a 'new
society' where equality rather than caste shall prevail.
This pattern of change where people break the traditional
boundaries of caste to work for the development of the
individual and society is a sign of modernity.

The awakening of the Īḻavas was initiated by the
consecration of a Śiva temple at Aruvippuṟam by Nārāyaṇa
Guru in 1888. This religious awakening, as understood and
motivated by the Guru, aimed not only at the reformation of
the religious practices of the Īḻavas but also at the
liberation of man (the Īḻavas and others) from the bondage
of caste structure and his progress in the educational,
economic, political and social areas. Our study of the
Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa reveals that they have largely
attained freedom from the traditional caste structure and
have progressed in all the socio-economic fields. Even
though this progress has exposed the Īḻavas to various
forces such as Sanskritization, Westernization and
Secularization, they have not left their sense of communal
identity or their religion. The Īḻavas now continue as
Īḻavas and religion remains at the centre of their life.
In the next chapter we will more closely study the process
of change in their religious life.

VII. THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

OF THE ĪḺAVAS OF MURUKKUMPUḺA

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

OF THE ĪḶAVAS OF MURUKKUMPUḶA

In the previous chapter we saw the progress the
Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa made in the political, economic and
educational fields. In this chapter we will concentrate on
the place of religion itself in two domains; that of family
ritual and temple practice.

1. Marriage and Funeral Ceremonies: Ritual Continuities in the Family during the Process of Change.

In this section we will see how religion dictated
the nature of family and communal relationships for
traditional Īḷavas, and how reformations introduced by
Nārāyaṇa Guru and propagated by religious organization such
as SNDP Yōgam brought changes in the traditional family.

Family and religion are the two basic institutions
in any society. No group can be critically studied without
examining these two institutions and the relationship
between them. Among the Īḷavas there are several religious
rituals that are performed in the family. Religious
rituals are generally slow to change. Their performance
follows particular patterns and is repeated as exactly as

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possible. Since a society generally does not accept new norms all of a sudden, the force for continuity found in rituals and ceremonies is often a central thread in the life of the society.

Change is inevitable in a growing community. This is true of the Īḷavas as well. Religious ritual by slowing the pace of change has been playing a vital role in keeping the Īḷavas united. As Fred W. Clothey says:

> Thus ritual serves to make the
> process of change less traumatic for
> ritual is itself process and change.
> The foreign can become indigenous by
> its use in the ritual process, and the
> 'modern' can become traditional.[1]

(a) Traditional Practices

The most spectacular and visible changes in the Īḷava community have been in some rituals in the family. Of these the rituals of tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam (tāli-tying), puṭavakoṭa (gift of the cloth), tiranṭukuḷi (puberty-rite), puḷikuṭi (pregnancy-rite) and savadāham (funeral ceremony)[2] have been selected for study. In dealing with these,

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[1]Clothey, Fred W., Rhythm and Intent: Ritual Studies from South India, Madras: Blackie, 1983. p.5

[2]Savadaham literally means 'thirst of the corpse'. (Sava means corpse; daham means thirst). The ritual is also called 'dahanam' which means cremation.

marriage, the most important rite of passage is given major attention.

The traditional marriage custom of the Ilavas consisted of two ceremonies called tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam and puṭavakoṭa. The tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam has been misunderstood as marriage by some students of religion.[1] Etymologically tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam means the auspicious event of tāli-tying.[2] This rite was considered an indispensible religious rite for the Ilava girls. If any family failed to conduct the tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam for its daughter before the onset of puberty, that family was socially ostracized. The assembly of the elders of the community called kūṭṭam decided the punishment for such offences and usually village functionaries were forbidden to serve the ostracized families.

For the ceremony of tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam the senior members of the family assembled and in consultation with Kaṇiyān (astrologer) a pandal was erected. The services of the Taṇtān and Ambaṭṭan were called forth to erect the

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[1]Tāli is a tiny gold ornament shaped like the leaf of a banyan (Ficus religiosa) tree, keṭṭu derived from the word keṭṭuka means 'tying' and kalyāṇam means an auspicious event.

[2]Puthenkalam, J., Marriage and Family in Kerala, Calgary: University of Calgary, 1977, p.35.

pandal and to decorate it.[1] Ambaṭṭatti, the wife of the Ambaṭṭan, assumed the responsibility for teaching the girl the rudiments of the duties of adult women. The tāli-tier generally was the son of the maternal uncle and he was called maccaṁbi.[2] He came to the house of the girl, riding on a caparisoned elephant.[3] When they arrived at the gate, the girl's relatives welcomed them.

The girl was then led to the pandal by her Kāraṇavan.[4] At the auspicious hour, while the instrumental music was played, the boy with the permission of the senior members assembled there would tie the tāli around the

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[1] Taṇṭān is the tree climber and Ambaṭṭan is the Īḷava priest and barber.

[2] It used to be one boy for each girl. Thurston agrees that there used to be more than one girl. Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.413.

[3] Paper No.331. Kane P.V. agrees that marriage with maccaṁbi was sadācāra. Kane, P.V., History of Dharma Śāstrā, I, p.461. The ride on an elephant was avoided if the boy was poor. Paper Nos.104, 219, 222, 243, 299, 364 etc.

[4] For the ceremony, both the boy and the girl would be facing a lighted wick lamp called nilaviḷakku, a bushel of paddy called nirapara, flowers and incense placed in the pandal. The girl with the betel leaf rolled up between her fingers to fill the spaces between would cover her face indicating her shyness. Her head would be covered after making a turmeric paste mark on her forehead. A tāli tied to a thread dyed yellow with turmeric, would then be handed over to the boy by an elderly person. See Mateer, Rev. Samuel, Native Life of Travancore, 1883, p.87.

girl's neck.[1] In this, he would be assisted by his sister
or an elderly lady.

Once this ceremony was over, all the people present
joined in a grand feast. The tāli-tier would stay in the
house for a couple of days with his relatives, and until he
left, the festival continued.[2] The tāli-tier was then
presented with cloth and money and he left for his home.
The girl remained in her house and she could take the tāli
off after the days of festivities.[3] The tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam
lasted for seven days.

In those days, no one considerd the tāli-couple as
man and wife outside the tāli booth.[4] Should he (the
tāli-tier) want to have her as his wife, it was necessary
to perform another ceremony later on. The essential

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[1] Paper Nos.030, 189. Cassette No.33.

[2] Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India
II, 1909, p.413.

[3] Puthenkalam, J. Marriage and the Family in Kerala,
Calgary: The University of Calgary, 1977, p.40.

[4] Paper Nos. 005, 017, 018,182. Similar ceremonies
were held by Nairs also. Based on the study of Nairs of
Central Kerala, Kathleen Gough interprets this ritual as a
ceremony signifying group marriage. A. Aiyappan and J.
Pathenkalam argue that this was only an initiation rite
prior to marriage. Pathenkalam J., Marriage and the Family
in Kerala, 1977, p.49. See also Aiyappan, A. Iravas and
Culture Change, 1945, p.160. Had he been her husband, she
would have observed death pollution ritual called pula.

ceremony to accept her as his wife was to present her with a cloth (putava). Such a ceremony was called putavakota.

A feature of the Ilava putavakota in the past was that they were held in the bride's house. Once the boy and the girl were selected, their horoscopes were examined with the help of an astrologer.[1] When satisfied the family of the bride would duly inform the caste leader of the locality with the customary dues. The caste leader would then instruct the Tantan and Ambattan to help the family in the various arrangements.

According to the old custom, it was not required that the bridegroom go to the house of the bride for putavakota.[2] On that day his sister and other relatives would take a loin cloth called putava to the bride's house. There at the auspicious hour (muhurttam), she loudly asked the assembly: "Shall I give the putava?"[3] This was repeated thrice to ascertain that there was no disagreement about the marriage. The groom's sister then assisted the bride in dressing in the new putava and led

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[1]Puthenkalam, J., Marriage and Family in Kerala, 1977, p.122.

[2]Menon, A.S., Social and Cultural History of Kerala, 1979, p.100. Paper No.014.

[3]Paper Nos. 028, 262.

her out to the assembly. The guests were then treated to a sumptuous dinner and afterwards the bride was taken to the groom's house.

If the bridegroom was someone other than the maccambi, then as the party stepped out of the pandal after the puṭavakoṭa, they were met by the maccambi expressing his prior claim to wed the girl. He would then be given a payment to satisfy his claim.[1] The traditional marriage pattern continued till Nārāyaṇa Guru reformed the rituals of the Īḻavas towards the close of the nineteenth century. Before looking into the teachings of Nārāyana Guru and the reformed practices, we proceed now to other traditional practices of the Īḻavas such as tiraṇṭukuḻi and puḻikuṭi.

Another mile-stone marking the social progress of an Īḻava girl towards womanhood, (before wifehood) was tiraṇṭukuḻi.[2] This ceremony was celebrated when a girl attained puberty and the function lasted for seven days. On the particular day the girl's friends and relatives

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[1]This was the contribution demanded and paid to the cross-cousin of the bride for forgoing his claim to the bride, who was his preferential mate. This amount was generally less than a rupee (one panam).

[2]Tiraṇṭukuḻi is the puberty-rite. Etymologically the word tiraṇṭu means 'to unfold' and kuḻi means 'to take bath'. In southern Kerala ṛtumati is another word used for a matured girl. In northern Kerala, this ceremony is called vayassariyikkal, meaning to disclose the age.

would assemble and announce the event by cackling a shrill voice called kurava. The girl was then lodged in a separate room and segregated from others for fear of pollution.[1] On the fourth day, she would be smeared with oil and given a bath by her friends and relatives. One of her Ammāyis (wife of her uncle) would be there. She was then given washed clothes (māttukacca) by the washer-woman (Mannātti) and again secluded in the room. On the seventh day, she was again given a ceremonial bath. The Ambattatti would mix cowdung in the water for purification and the girl would take her bath in the mixture. The room in which the girl was secluded would then be swept and Ambattatti would sprinkle purificatory fluid to purify the house and the persons present. On the seventh day, a pandal would also be erected which would be decorated by Tantān and Ambattan. The relatives and friends were given a sumptuous feast including a sweet rice pudding called pāyassam.[2] Tantān, Ambattan and Mannān were given gifts.

From the time of puberty, the girl was allowed to chew betel, the privilege of an adult woman. Her movements would then be curtailed, education discontinued and the relatives would start thinking of her marriage.

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[1] Paper No.050. Cassette No.12. Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern Kerala, I, 1909, p.35.

[2] Paper Nos.031, 099, 017, 018, 027, 045, etc.

Another ceremony that was indispensible for an
Īḷava lady was puḷikuṭi celebrated during her first
pregnancy.[1] On the seventh month, the girl's relatives,
mostly ladies, would go to see the girl with seven kinds of
sweets. The pregnant woman would prepare sweet-rice
pudding on that day. This ceremony was called vayattu
poṅkāla.[2] Traditionally, this was prepared in seven pots
and only raw rice (not boiled rice) was used for the
preparation. Once this was prepared, the relatives and
friends who assembled on that day would join for a grand
feast. The rice-pudding and the sweets brought from the
girl's house would be given to everyone. After the feast,
the mother-in-law would give the pregnant lady an earthern
jar full of oil and send her to her home.[3] The girl would
return to her husband's home only after the delivery.

(b) The Teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru with regard
to Family Rituals

The ceremonies, tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam, puṭavakoṭa,
tirantukuḷi and puḷikuṭi were expensive ceremonies for the

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[1]Puli = tamarind, kuṭi = to drink. This is the
ceremony of drinking tamarind juice.

[2]Paper Nos. 002, 003. This was considered as an
offering to the Sun-God.

[3]Paper Nos. 018, 009, 222. It indicates fullness
or perfection. Some respondents emphasized the fact that
the oil should be upto the brim.

Īḷavas as for each important occasion the family concerned fed a large number of people in a place like Murukkumpula. Even though tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam could be conducted for more than one girl at a time, tiraṇṭukuḷi, puṭavakoṭa and puḷikuṭi were conducted separately for each girl at the appropriate times. These ceremonies carried with them elaborate arrangements as mentioned earlier. For a poor Īḷava family of Murukkumpuḷa these ceremonies were expensive and the practice of them constituted a drain on already limited economic resources. Nārāyaṇa Guru who wanted the emancipation of the Īḷavas decided to reform these customary practices. According to Nārāyana Guru the tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam was a 'mock wedding' and therefore unnecessary. He spoke on the discontinuation of the tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam at several places during the years 1888-1928. In the year 1904 Guru convened a conference of the Īḷavas at Paravūr, 30 kms. north of Murukkumpuḷa. There he 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. [1]

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

The Guru then travelled to various places preaching the above message and influencing certain aristocratic families to stop these practices. Fr. Puthenkalam mentions that at one instance Nārāyaṇa Guru persuaded a follower to call off the festivities of tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam even after the dinner was ready.[1] Though Nārāyaṇa Guru recognized the religious significance underlying the rites of passage, he found the elaborate celebration and the enormous expenses unnecessary. In 1908, the Guru wrote the following lines as a message to be read at the annual meeting of the SNDP Yōgam.

> Functions like Tirandukuli
> and Pulikuti 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.[2]

The traditional practices of tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam, puṭavakota, tiraṇṭukuli and puḷikuti were related to the traditional caste roles in society. These ceremonies had roles for each of the different caste-functionaries. As we have seen earlier, the Kaṇiyan (astrologer), the Taṇṭān,

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[1]Puthenkalam, J., Marriage and the Family in Kerala, Calgary: University of Calgary, 1977, p.47. See also Sanoo, M.K., Narayana Guru, 1978, pp.100-101.

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

the Ambaṭṭan (Īḻava barber), the Ambaṭṭatti, the Maṇṇān and the like had definite roles to play and their roles fortified the continuation of a hierarchical caste structure. The traditional system also socially ostracized those who violated the caste rules. Religion was inseparable from the social life of the Hindus of Kerala and therefore religiously ostracized persons were also socially ostracised. Nārāyaṇa Guru who preached 'One Caste' ideal wanted to challenge this traditional caste structure and liberate the Īḻavas from their given caste rank. He thought that greater freedom for the Īḻavas in the religious and social sphere would be possible if the rites of the Īḻavas were modified. He did not just throw aside traditions, however, for as innovations in ritual are accepted they are added to the tradition.

As early as 1908 Nārāyaṇa Guru spoke against polygamy and polyandry. He sent the following message to the SNDP Yōgam:

> Polygamy and polyandry are
> being practiced in some places. Steps
> should be considered to stop free
> indulgence in these practices in future.
> Where 'Marumakkathayam' system is followed
> in the community legal provision should
> be made to give the wedded wife and
> children the right to a portion of a man's
> individual earning. Otherwise marriages
> would be meaningless.[1]

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[1]Ibid., pp.102-103.

Nārāyaṇa Guru understood that for the stability of a nuclear family due respect and care for the members are necessary conditions. So he recommended a legal provision for the right of the wedded wife and children to a portion of a man's individual earning. To increase the sanctity of marriage, Nārāyaṇa Guru gave the following instructions on marriage ceremony:

> 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.[1]

By this reformation, Nārāyaṇa Guru was anchoring the marriage rite of the Īḻavas in the larger Hindu religious tradition. He recommended the 'prajāpatyā' form of marriage of the Hindus in which the father of the bride gives his daughter as a gift to the bridegroom as this was scriptural and traditional for the Hindus even though the Īḻavas, a Hindu Community, had earlier been denied the privilege of following this practice. Nārāyaṇa Guru stressed the sanctity of the ceremony and the sacrament of marriage by introducing the practice of pouring holy water

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[1]Aiyyappan, A., Iravas and Culture Change, 1945, p.154.

on the hands. In the reformed practice he insisted on the presence of both groom and bride and specified their role in the sacrament.

Nārāyaṇa Guru wanted the Īḻavas to reduce the expense of marriages. He advised his followers that the number of people attending the wedding could be reduced to ten consisting of the bride, bridegroom, their parents, one companion from each of the new couple, one priest and the local chief.[1]

In the beginning Nārāyaṇa Guru was able to persuade only a few families to adopt these changes. Though he permitted local variations, he insisted on the Īḻavas practicing the exchange of garlands and the tāli-tying on every wedding. He also taught women to wear the tāli even after the ceremony, indicative of their marital status.

To increase the sacredness of the marriage and to reduce expenses, the Guru instructed his followers to conduct the weddings in temple premises and to conduct the garlanding and tāli-tying ceremonies in front of the

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[1]Ibid., Swami Satyavrta, a disciple of Nārāyaṇa Guru advised Īḻavas to save the money by reducing marriage expenses and give that amount for the wedded couple. Sanoo, M.K., Nārāyaṇa Guru, 1978, p. 130.

deity.[1] Guru made this possible at 'Sāradā Temple,
Varkala, 20 kms. north of Murukkumpuḻa and advised the SNDP
Yōgam to propagate this practice.

(c) Process of Change.

At Murukkumpuḻa, tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam continued to be
practised till the 1920s and five of the respondents
revealed that they did undergo this ceremony in their
childhood days but that they had refrained from performing
the ceremony in the case of their children.[2] When Nārāyaṇa
Guru proposed the abolition of the tālikeṭṭu rite people
had no arguments to advance, except that it was done
traditionally, in support of its continuance as an
essential rite.[3] The use of the tāli was incorporated into
the marriage rite as will be seen in the following section.

Tiranṭukuḻi is also no longer a public function for
the Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa. The respondents spoke about
the influence of Nārāyaṇa Guru in this change. Tiranṭukuḻi

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[1]In the case of a wedding conducted at the temple
premises, they need not spend money for making a Kalyana
mandapam (Kāvaṇam:marriage-booth). It is probable that
Nārāyaṇa Guru was familiar with the Christian practice of
conducting weddings in the Church.

[2]Paper Nos. 028, 104, 182, 262 and 339

[3]Paper Nos. 028, 022, 104. Aiyyappan, A., Iravas
and Culture Change, 1945, p.162

served the purpose of announcing to the relatives that the girl had come of age for marriage. This function is carried out now by the parents of the girl speaking of the matter privately to the immediate relatives. Menstruation is considered polluting and therefore even now the girl is segregated from the kitchen and prayer hall for three days.[1] Some respondents revealed that they still call Ambaṭṭatti for the purificatory ceremony. However, a washerwoman is not called nowadays to change the clothes and the women relatives do not make the sound of kurava to announce the news. At present the menstrual period no longer interferes with the education of the girls.

Puḷikuṭi has also become a very domestic affair now. The relatives desire the safety of the mother and the child. Hence the rite is continued as vayattu-poṅkāḷa.[2] Though the exchange of sweets and preparing ponkala are still retained, it is not compulsory that the pregnant woman herself should prepare the rice pudding.

Traditionally puṭavakoṭa in continuation of the tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam constituted the marriage rite. Since the days of Nārāyaṇa Guru this rite has undergone a process of

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[1] Paper Nos. 233, 333

[2] Vayattu-poṅkāḷa is the ceremony of preparing the rice pudding.

change. Marriage is a composite rite composed of several
subordinate elements which have to be done in a certain
order. Following is the order one finds in the reformed
marriage ritual of the Īḻavas:

    (i) Choosing the partner.

   (ii) Matching the horoscopes.

  (iii) Arranging the marriage booth (kāvaṇam).

   (iv) Receiving the bridegroom.

    (v) Giving the cloth (puṭavakoṭa).

   (vi) Holding the hands (pāṇigrhaṇa).

  (vii) Tying of the tāli.

 (viii) Circumambulating the marriage booth.

   (ix) Giving the sweets and the feast.

    (x) Entering the house of the husband.

Since Nārāyaṇa Guru's time the parents have assumed
greater responsibilities at home. The choice of maccaṁbi
as the partner has become less common and the young men and
women are now allowed to meet and talk before they express
their choice. As in the past, their horoscopes are then
matched and the girl's parents make necessary arrangements
for the wedding to take place either at their home or in
the temple. When the bridegroom and his party arrive for
the ceremony, they are received and given drinks by the
bride's relatives. While the guests are seated in the
pandal the sister of the groom takes the puṭava to the

bride who is inside the house and helps her to wear it.
The bride is then led to the marriage booth called kāvanam
by her father. In accordance with the teachings of
Nārāyana Guru the father joins the right hands of the groom
and the bride and holds them in his hands, one above the
other, upon which the celebrant (priest) pours the holy
water. The priest conducts the pūjā over the garlands and
the tāli and hands them over to the bride and the groom at
the auspicious time. After giving daksina (money-gift) to
the priest the bride and the groom exchange the garlands.
This is followed by the tying of the tāli. The couple then
steps down the kāvanam and circumambulates it three times
in the clock wise direction. Then they enter the bride's
house where they are given sweets in the form of plantain
and milk. They share these food and drink and join the
assembled guests in a sumptuous feast. Once the ceremonies
to be performed at the bride's place are over the couple go
to the house of the bridegroom. There the bride is
welcomed by a ceremony called arattamuliyuka which is to
ward off all the mishaps that may arise when a new member
enters the home.[1]

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[1]With a tālam (plate) containing turmeric and lime
paste (red in colour) broken coconuts with cotton wicks
lighted in it, the mother of the bridegroom circles
clockwise over the head of the bride and throws the tālam
away to the outside. This ceremony is called
arattamuliyuka.

(d) Continuity and Change in the Reformed
Ritual of Marriage

Īḻava marriages are performed as a religious rite rather than a mere civil contract. Matching the horoscopes, arranging the kāvaṇam, receiving the bridegroom, giving the cloth, tying of the tāli, giving the feast and conducting the ceremony of arattamuḻiyuka are continuities with traditional practices. Matching the horoscopes and conducting the ceremony of arattamuḻiyuka are done to avoid all possible mishappenings to the marriage partners and the related families. The wedding is an occasion when all the relatives, friends and neighbours and local caste groups are invited and all kinds of bonds are reaffirmed. By feeding and treating all the assembled properly, the bride's parents show them respect and honour. Īḻavas continue the traditional practice of conducting the marriage in a kāvaṇam. When the marriages are conducted at the temples and reception halls, a marriage booth is duly arranged there. The traditional practices of giving the cloth (puṭavakoṭa) and tying the tāli are continued in the reformed ritual of marriage with new meanings. The continuities in these practices show the conservative forces of religion. They also show the dynamism and immanence of tradition in the lives of the Īḻavas.

One notable change in the present form of marriage
of the Īḻavas is the decline in the role of the Kāraṇavan.
In the traditional marriage ritual it was the Kāraṇavan who
took the initiative of proposing the marriage and
conducting it. In those days marriages were 'arranged
marriages' and the parents had fewer responsibilities. In
such cases the likes and the dislikes of the boy and the
girl were not considered and normally they agreed to the
choice made by the Kāraṇavan. Traditionally the maccambi
had the right to marry his niece and the Kāraṇavan enforced
it. After the disintegration of joint families and the
establishment of nuclear families the parents have assumed
more responsiblities. When the traditional caste hierarchy
was questioned by the reforms of Nārāyaṇa Guru the
authoritarian behaviour of the traditional society was
shaken and the individual attained more freedom. As a
result the emphasis within the arranged marriage got
shifted to allow for the choice of a partner by the
individual. This indicates that there is of more
individual responsibility in the present pattern of
marriage than in the traditional tālikeṭṭu-kalyāṇam and
puṭavakoṭa.

Following the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru, the
Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa are gradually adopting the practice
of conducting the marriages at the temple premises. The

field work reveals that from 1930 onwards out of the 92

cases, 22.82 percent of the weddings were conducted at the

temple precincts of Murukkumpuḷa. The figures also

indicate that 10.87 percent of the weddings were conducted

at other convenient places. This would include the

marriages conducted at the Śarada Temple, Varkala and at

the reception halls at Trivandrum. In the case of

marriages conducted at the Śiva Temple the priest brings

out the garlands and the tāli from the inner sanctum of the

temple at the auspicious time. After the tying of the tāli

the couple goes three times around the temple and worships

the deities. These innovative changes have enhanced the

religious values associated with marriage.

The traditional practices of tāli tying and giving

the cloth (puṭavakoṭa) are incorporated in the reformed

ritual of marriage. Traditionally giving the puṭava and

receiving it by the bride marked the significant event of

the ceremony of marriage. After 1930, this came to be seen

by the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa as only an initiation to

marriage. Now considering the value of time and the

possible choice of the partner from distant places, the

puṭava is sometimes given to the bride a few days earlier

and in some cases the bride's family is even asked to buy

the required set of clothes on behalf of the groom. The

tāli is now regarded as the symbol of marriage which no

woman will part with as long as her husband is alive.

Kanyādānam (gift of the girl by the father), the pāṇigrhaṇa
(holding the hands) and the exchange of garlands by the
bride and groom have taken the central place in the
reformed marriage ritual. These are innovatory changes and
are followed by the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa. These
reformatory measures have increased the importance of the
father in the family and the sanctity of the ritual. Also
it has increased the significance of the nuclear family.
In the reformed ritual the bride and bridegroom have their
parts to play. They have the freedom to choose their
partners. This personal involvement helps them to be
conscious of their mutual responsibilities as husband and
wife. The process of change that grants freedom to the
individual and encourages them to assume responsibilities
is deemed a characteristic of modernity.

The reformed practice of kanyādānam and the
pāṇigrhaṇa are in accordance with the Dharma Śāstras which
are followed by the Brāhmans of Kerala. Being in
accordance with the Sanskrit texts and practice of a higher
caste is what Srinivas defines as Sanskritization. But
this process of change among the Īḷavas differs from
Sanskritization in the sense that they are not attempting a
positional change in the caste structure to the status of
Brāhmans. Also they were not imitating all the marriage
practices prevalent among the Brāhmans. Instead they were

adopting "nobler" forms of marriage according to the scriptures. By this reform the Īḷavas continued the Hindu religious tradition but in this they adopted a process of selection and integration. While integrating the practices of kanyādānam and the pāṇigrhaṇa, they did not embrace other practices such as looking at the Sun or pole star, stepping on a mill-stone, or saptapadi (making seven steps) commonly found among the Brāhmans. This characteristic of continuing one's religious tradition but exercising careful selection and integration is a significant aspect of modernity.

The new order of marriage among the Īḷavas recognizes the freedom of the bride and the bridegroom to enter into wedded life and grow into the fullness of person-hood. This underlines the ideas of the fundamental rights of the individual, equality between man and man and a sense of society where moral fellowship of persons is upheld. This is not a negation of the values of social life but an enrichment of social bonds by means of religion. Therefore this process of reformation recognized the place of religion and its meaning in the every day life of man. This reorientation of values is another characteristic of modernity.

The growth of the SNDP as a religious organization is a significant aspect of change among the Īḷavas. The

branch office of the SNDP Yōgam formed at Murukkumpuḷa in
the 1940s provides the facilities of a reception hall and a
kitchen space at the Śiva temple premises to conduct
weddings. Because of these facilities, statistics show
that out of the 27 Īḻava respondents whose marriages were
conducted after 1950, 12 of them (44.44 percent) had it
conducted at the Śiva temple.

The SNDP Śākha (branch office) since its
organization has taken the initiative in modifying the
Īḻava marriage customs. Now, when a marriage is agreed
upon by the two parties, an application is submitted to the
SNDP Śākha. Based on this application the Śākha office of
the bridegroom issues an official notice to the Head-office
of the SNDP Yōgam and to the Śākha office of the bride
indicating the following particulars of the bride and the
groom.

   (i) Full name

  (ii) House name and address

 (iii) Age and date of birth

  (iv) Is it the first marriage or not

   (v) If second, details of the divorce

  (vi) Name and address of the guardian

 (vii) Date of marriage, place and time.

It is required that the notice carry the signature of the secretary, the official seals of the SNDP Yōgam office, Union office and the Śākha office. The field study revealed that the SNDP Yōgam also issued 'Marriage Certificates' that could be used for many official purposes. Herein we find an organized way of life and the development of new institutions. This institutional effort to propagate the reformed form of marriage is a characteristic of modernity.

Following the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru the Īḻavas have given up the traditional practices of polygamy and polyandry. The Īḻava Bill passed in 1925 made a provision for the inheritance of property by one's wife and children. Since then the marumakkattāyam gave way to the makkattāyam system of inheritance. This was followed by the distintegration of joint-families and the establishment of nuclear families in the 1940s. As seen earlier education led to occupational mobility and some of the educated Īḻava members went to foreign countries in search of employment since 1970. These changes have influenced the Īḻavas and in the resultant flux stability and control systems became essential. The SNDP Yōgam with its branch offices at different places emerged to serve these purposes. This feature of the SNDP helps bring about a sameness in the practice of rituals among the Īḻavas of Kerala.

The field study revealed that 50.46 percent of girls (out of 109 cases) were married between the ages of 16-20 years and 29.36 percent between the ages of 21-25 years. As for men, only 30 percent of the Īḻavas married before they were 25 years of age while 38 percent married while they were in the age group 26-30 years. It is customary even now that the Īḻavas marry from their own caste. Though Nārāyaṇa Guru encouraged intercaste marriages, the force of tradition is so strong among the Īḻavas that it generally limits the choice of partners to the same community. Inspite of the changes marriage is still a sacrament and religion has a significant place in the social life of the Īḻavas.

(e) Death Ritual: Traditional Practice

The other major rite of passage in the family is the one connected with death. The field study shows that there is relatively less change in the practice of the funeral ceremonies. The following section looks at the past and present practices as they were described by the respondents and observed in the field at Murukkumpuḻa. In this process, traditional practices are described in order to isolate the changes taking place. The impact of Nārāyaṇa Guru was to break the absolute unchallenged hold of tradition and help the community reflect on how to cope

with the pressures of modern life while maintaining some
traditions.

Traditionally as soon as a person breathed his
last, the body was washed and neatly dressed as if the
person was going on an auspicious journey. The body was
placed in the north-south direction with the head towards
the south. The general custom among the Īḻavas involved
the cremation of the dead body if the deceased was the
eldest in the family. But if the deceased was a junior,
then he was buried. For cremation the Ambattan prepared
the funeral pyre called cita with pieces of wood from mango
trees or coconut husk and shell. The Taṇṭān helped the
Ambaṭṭan in this preparation and they together erected a
small pandal in front of the house. The Ambaṭṭan played
the role of a priest in the entire funeral rite.

Before cremation the corpse was brought out of the
house to the pandal. As last respect to the deceased, the
immediate relatives performed vāykkari and kōṭiyiṭuka.
Vāykkari was the ceremony involving the placing of three
handfuls of rice in the mouth of the dead by the eldest
heir. This was then followed by sons, nephews and grandsons
of the deceased. The second ceremony was to give new
clothes (kōṭiyiṭuka) to the deceased. The price and type
of cloth depended upon the wealth and social status of the

persons making the gift. Apart from these functions the relatives also contributed money (kattappanam) to the family. This was to meet the expenses connected with the funeral rites.

The corpse was then taken to the pyre in a procession led by the Ambattan carrying a lamp and the eldest son carrying an earthen pot full of water. When the group reached the place they circumambulated the pyre. The Ambattan then removed all the new clothes from the corpse and the body was placed on the pyre. The funeral pyre was lighted by the heir (balikkāran) with a consecrated torch (kolli) handed over to him by the priest. After that a tender coconut was placed beside the head of the corpse as an offering. Then the balikkāran with the earthen pot full of water on his shoulder went thrice around the pyre while the priest pricked the pot with an iron instrument on each round. Finally the pot was broken on the pyre and everyone returned home without turning back or looking at the pyre.

From the second day onwards the balikkāran offered an oblation of food to the departed and the relatives partook in the rice gruel. On the fifth day the balikkāran with the help of the priest picked up the bones and

purified them in pañcagavyam.[1] The purified bones were collected in one or two new unbaked earthern pots and the pots were covered with red linen. On the fifteenth day the balikkāran with the help of the priest carried the bones to the nearest sea or river to throw them in running water. This ceremony was called Sañjayanam. However, some Īḻavas kept one pot of bones in their compound under a jack tree for a period of time and then floated them in water. On the sixteenth day the Ambaṭṭan purified the house and the bereaved members of the family from pula (death pollution) by a ceremony called tali (sprinkling the purificatory liquid).

According to tradition the chief mourner observed dīkṣā for about a year and did not take part in any festivities.[2] During this period he grew his hair and beard and ate only vegetarian food. On the day he broke his dīkṣā a pūjā was conducted, rice balls were given to the ancestors and he participated in the feast. He would cut his hair and shave off his beard on that day to mark the end of his dīkṣā.

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[1]Pañcagavyam consists of cowdung, cow urine, cow milk, butter milk and clarified butter. Paper No. 371. Cassette No.43.

[2]Dīkṣā observance is very rarely seen today. Some of those who observe it, reduce the length of the period to 41 days or till the tali is over.

For Īḻavas and other Hindus of southern Kerala, the
New Moon day in the month of Karkaṭakam (July-August) every
year continues to be a very important day to offer
ancestoral worship. The Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa whose
parents are dead observe vṛta and conduct the bali
(ancestoral rite) at Kaṭhinamkuḻam beach on this day.

(f) Influence of Nārāyaṇa Guru and the
Process of Change in the Death Ritual

Nārāyaṇa Guru, the reformer of the Īḻavas,
expressed his desire to simplify the elaborate practices
related to death. He used to say that people should not
spend more than 10 cakrams (less than a rupee) and the
practices should not be for more than ten days. Once he
was asked whether he preferred cremation or burial, he said
that it is better to use the dead body as a fertilizer
after processing it in a crusher. This was an intentional
exaggeration of Nārāyaṇa Guru to make the point that old
rituals are not necessary. Towards the end of his life
when he was asked whether he wished a memorial on his
behalf, he told his followers to plant an oil tree (punna)
so that it would give shade to travellers and oil for
lighting lamps.

Nārāyaṇa Guru's comments on using his body as a

fertilizer or planting an oil tree as a memorial are to be understood as evidences of his indifference towards the traditional funeral rites. His comments can be interpreted as:

(i) There is no meaning in debating whether cremation or burial is better; both are equally good. What is necessary is to dispose the corpse.

(ii) Even in death man should be thinking of the good of others. Death should not impoverish the living, but enrich them.

(iii) It is the person who is more important than the corpse.

In making these points Nārāyaṇa Guru was advocating that attention be given to the higher values of life. While the traditional funeral practices were elaborate and impoverished the living, Nārāyaṇa Guru shifted the emphasis from rigid ritual practices to the life of the people involved. He never wanted man to be chained by religion or ritual practices. Instead he wished the freedom for man which transcends the mundane practice of religion. He once said: 'Whatever be one's religion, it is sufficient that man be good'.

Changes in the traditional funeral ceremonies of the Īlavas are relatively minor. Since Nārāyaṇa 'Guru's

time the funeral rites of the Īlavas, however, have
undergone some changes. The following pages describe the
changes.

Laying a shroud (kōṭi) over the corpse by each of
the relatives was a common practice of the Īlavas at
Murukkumpuḷa until 1950s. As the economic position of the
Īlavas improved, the relatives started using costly clothes
for this purpose and the number of kōṭi put on the corpse
increased. As mentioned earlier, these shrouds which could
be thirty, fifty or more in number, were taken away and
shared by the Ambaṭṭan and the Taṇṭān. As the number of
kōṭi increased, disputes between the Ambaṭṭan and Taṇṭan as
to who should get more became common. After the formation
of the SNDP Śākha (branch) at Murukkumpula, the Īlava
leaders got together and discussed the possibility of
settling this issue and avoiding such disputes at the
funeral ceremony. An Īlava by name Appukkuṭṭan, insisted
that the Īlavas at Murukkumpuḷa should allow only the
chief-mourner to place a shroud (kōṭi) and said that he
should by his act represent all the other relatives.[1] The
SNDP Śākha decided likewise and has taken the initiative
since then in insisting on this new form. When an old
leader of the community from a prominent family died

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[1] Appukkuttan is a businessman at Murukkumpuḷa.
Paper No.046.

at Murukkumpuḷa in 1966, the SNDP Śākha persuaded his
relatives to stick to the new order in spite of the initial
resistance of the family members.[1] Now when a death occurs
in an Īḷava family, the SNDP Śākha committee members go to
the house and instruct the people to discontinue the
practice of putting kōṭi.[2] However, they have not fully
succeeded in stopping this practice as there are
neighbouring places where the Īḷavas practice this and the
relatives coming from such places bring kōṭi to put over
the corpse. Interviews revealed that out of the 92
respondents only 33 (35.87 percent) still practiced the
putting of kōṭi. In a family at Murukkumpuḷa, while the
lady of the house died in 1985 (while the field-study was
conducted) the SNDP leaders were found taking the
initiative in the funeral arrangements.[3] There only the
chief-mourner laid a shroud over the corpse. This new
practice is a specific instance of the process of change in
a religious ritual among the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa and it
illustrates the way in which the SNDP Yōgam has come to be
accepted as the agent of change.

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[1] He was once the Īḷava caste leader. Paper No.031.

[2] They also assist the family in the various
ceremonies. Paper Nos. 027, 192, 219, 371.

[3] Paper No.104.

Another practice that has been subject to change is vāykkari. In giving rice and water, the Īḷavas believe that they are providing food to the departed for his outward journey. As a result, all the relatives who come to the house place some rice and pour water into the mouth of corpse. Large quantities of rice are used which spill from the mouth while the water drips to the cot and from there to the room in which the corpse is placed.[1] In the early 1960s SNDP leaders argued that this practice was not necessary as there was already a ceremony of giving water and tender coconut at the funeral pyre. Here the SNDP as an organization of the Īḷavas initiated a rational approach which helped the process of modernity. Change in this practice has been relatively slow. The first stage of change was to reduce the practice merely to giving drops of tender coconut juice with the help of a basil leaf.[2] Now a large number of people either abstain from the practice altogether or put some flowers on the corpse. Out of the 92 respondents, 64 persons (69.57 percent) said that they do not practice vāykkari any longer. They attributed this change to the direct influence of the SNDP Śākha.[3] It is

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[1]This is a practice that is not seen among the Christians or Muslims at Murukkumpuḷa.

[2]Paper Nos. 192, 091, 194, 310, 014, 073.

[3]Paper Nos. 219, 088, 372, 373. Out of the 92 Īḷava respondents 81 persons said that the change is due to the influence of SNDP Śākha.

another instance of the process of change in which some
resistance is followed by general compliance with a new
idea as the tradition is modified.

Nārāyaṇa Guru was the first leader to tell the
Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa to reduce the pula observance to ten
days. Later on when nuclear families became common with
the disintegration of joint-families in the 1930s and
people settling at distant places in the 1940s it became
difficult for the relatives to leave their home and spend
about 16 days in a home where death had occurred. Once the
Īḻavas started working in government offices in the 1950s
and at places far off from their home, it became difficult
for them to miss work for so many days. Many now even fix
the rite for a Saturday or Sunday and complete the taḷi on
the same day. There are also cases, for example children
coming from Arabian Gulf countries on hearing the news of
death, where sañjayanam and tali are all done on the third
day. Out of the 122 respondents only 30 (24.59 percent)
said that they conduct the sañjayanam on the 15th day; 41
(33.60 percent) said that they do it on the 5th day and 32
(26.23 percent) said that they observe it on any convenient
day. There are forces such as Secularization working on the
younger members of the Īḻava community. Some of the young
respondents below the age of forty (5.74 percent) expressed
disinterest in the continuation of these practices. The

forces of tradition are strong among the Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa and the SNDP śakha helps them to resist the forces of Secularization and to act in a common way in regard to ritual practice. The above figures indicate that, even though changes are not uniform, the process of change started modestly with a few comments by Nārāyaṇa Guru has come to acquire momentum as the absolute hold of tradition is broken and the pressures of modern life make the rituals inconvenient.

The observance of dīkṣā has greatly declined. Traditionally, if death occured in a home, the chief-mourner used to shave his hair first and then abstain from all festivities without cutting his hair or shaving his beard for one year. While the field study was conducted, three Īḻavas died and none of the relatives shaved his hair. There is also a growing reluctance among the Īḻavas to cook rice in new earthen pots in the traditional way during pula days. Out of the 122 respondents only 40.16 percent adhere to the traditional practice of cooking food separately for the balikkār and sticking to a vegetarian diet. It is also known from the interviews that rice-gruel (kañji) is prepared only on the day of death and rice with vegetable curry is served on other days. Only very few Īḻavas now bury the bones in their compound near a Jack tree and light a lamp there

every evening. Some of the young respondents whose parents
have died even said that they do not go for the bali
(ancestral rite) on the New-moon day in the month of
Karkkaṭakam (July-August). Generally they thought that
flexibility of tradition and adaptiveness are signs of
modernity and they were not ashamed of the changes in the
ritual.

(g) Conclusion

Traditionally the Īḻavas looked up to the higher
castes to find a model for their own religious practices.
Tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam, puṭavakōta, tiraṇṭukuli, puḷikuṭi,
kōṭiyiṭuka, vāykkari and kattappaṇam were also common among
the Nāirs. Tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam followed by tiraṇṭukuli
allowed the Nair girls, who followed the marumakkattāyam,
system of inheritance, to enter into sambandham with more
than one man either from their castes or castes above
them. At the same time girls of the Nambūtiri Brāhmans,
who followed the makkattāyam system of inheritance, if
permitted to marry, had their tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam along with
the marriage rite. Though the Brāhman men had conjugal
relationships with women, the Brāhman women, if permitted,
could have only one husband. As seen earlier tradition
left many Brāhman girls unmarried and the rite of
tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam for them was performed only at the time

of death.   Infant marriage was uncommon among the
Brāhmans.   Nārāyana Guru was not appreciative of many of
these practices of the Nairs and Brāhmans.   Nārāyana Guru
in advocating change in the rituals of the Īlavas did not
appreciate the marumakkattāyam system of inheritance of the
Nāirs or the joint family system of the Brāhmans.   Instead
he advocated the makkattāyam system of inheritance and the
nuclear family system.   Nārāyana Guru was against polyandry
(as was the practice among the Nāir women) and polygamy (as
was the practice among the Brāhmans).   He was against
infant marriage as was the custom among the Nāir girls as
well as curtailing the freedom of persons to marry (as was
the practice among the Brāhman girls).   He recommended
monogamy and emphasized the sanctity of marriage, the
freedom of individuals concerned and the responsibilities
involved in the wedded life.   The reformed ritual of
marriage among the Īlavas differed from the Brāhmans in
that the Īlavas did not follow the customs of stepping on
the mill-stone, looking at the pole star or conducting the
saptapadi.   Traditionally the wedding of the Brāhmans
extended from six to ten days and a sacred fire was lit in
the courtyard.   The Īlavas did not adopt these practices.
The process of change in the marriage ritual of the Īlavas
was neither an imitation of the practices of the Nāirs or
the Brāhmans nor an attempt to elevate the Īlavas to the
status of the Nāirs or the Brāhmans.   Instead the challenge

for Nārāyaṇa Guru was to liberate the Īḻavas from the
caste hierarchy, work for their social emancipation and
restructure Hindu society with his ideal of 'One Caste'
which could stand on an equal footing with the oth
er religious communities such as the St.Thomas Christians.
Therefore Nārāyaṇa Guru attempted a rational approach to
liberate the Īḻavas from the entire caste structure by
introducing a process of modernization. This made it
possible for the Īḻavas to evaluate their own traditional
practices, to give up those that did not appeal to their
reason and to adopt those that gave meaning and status in
their historical context.

In the case of the funeral rite both the Nāirs and
the Brāhmans, like the Īḻavas, had the practice of <u>vāykkari</u>
and <u>kōṭiyituka</u>. The Nairs and the Brāhmans had the custom
of placing small pieces of gold on the corpse before
cremation. They also followed the practice of giving rice
gruel (<u>paṭṭiṇikañji</u>), and performing <u>sañjayanam</u> and <u>taḻi</u>
following the death of a member in the family. The
Brāhmans followed the custom of cremating all members
except children who are not older than ten days. In the
death ritual the Īḻavas did not adopt the practice of
putting small gold or metallic coin on the pyre like the
higher castes of Kerala. However, they conform with the
practice of the Brāhmans in cremating all the deceased.
Some Īḻava respondents, at the time of interview justified

this change by saying that it is more hygenic to cremate as the fire consumes the germs in the corpse. This indicates the rational justification the Īḻavas attribute to changes in their ritual practices. The Īḻavas were the pioneers in stopping the practices of vāykkari and kōṭiyiṭuka and thus they became a model for the Nāirs and Brāhmans. With their reformatory measures and the ideal of 'One Caste', the Īḻavas broke off from the caste hierarchy and paved the way for a 'new society' to meet the challenges of the modern times.

Another significant aspect that governs the process of change in the rituals of the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa is the consideration of economy. Nārāyaṇa Guru was interested in the eradication of the economic backwardness of the Īḻavas. One of the reasons for considering the Īḻavas a low caste in the traditional set up was their low economic status. Economic freedom and economic competitiveness were thus necessary for the Īḻavas in the early decades of this century to raise their status in society. Therefore, the Guru's exhortation to reduce expenses even in religious rituals carried special meaning for the Īḻava Community. Nārāyaṇa Guru exhorted the elite members of the community to strive by all means to improve their standard of living and to set an example to the low income groups in following the new

codes of conduct.[1] It can be observed that in
discontinuing tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam or transforming tiraṇṭukuḷi
and puḷikuṭi into domestic rituals it was the time and
labour connected with the festivity that were cut down but
not generally the symbols or meaning of the rituals. In
the case of tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam, the tāli-tying ceremony was
incorporated into the marriage rite. Again in the case of
the death ritual it was the length of pula observance that
was reduced, thereby decreasing the total expenditure. At
the same time, the practice of kaṭṭappanam(giving the
funeral expense) in which the close relatives contribute
money to the chief-mourner to meet the expenses is
retained. Since 1980, the SNDP Śākha at Murukkumpuḷa
collects Re 1/- per month from each family and gives
Rs.101/- when a death occurs in a family as an aid to meet
the immediate expenses.[2]

This change has reduced the social distance of both
class and caste. The economic disparity that brings class
distinction is reduced by discouraging the expenses
connected with the various religious ceremonies. The
initiative of the SNDP Yōgam in providing facilties for the
wedding at the temple premises has also reduced the wedding

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[1]Sanoo, M.K. Narayana Guru, 1978, p.130.

[2]The field study revealed that most of the families
returned that money to the SNDP Śākha once the period of
crisis was over.

expenses. Tālikettukalyāṇam as described earlier was a
ritual prevalent among the non-Brāhmans. The Īḻavas were
the first to discontinue this practice; the Nāirs followed
them and this change lowered the wall of distinction
between the high and the low castes. In the process of
change that has been noted in this section, the Īḻavas of
Murukkumpuḻa were not adopting the religious practices of
the Nāirs but were taking the initiative on their own to
reform it. As mentioned earlier the process of change is
not Sanskritization where the higher castes are imitated,
but a form of modernization in which rituals that suit new
economic and social circumstances are worked out.

Another important dimension of these changes is the
emergence of the SNDP Yōgam as the 'Church' of the Īḻavas.
The introduction of the 'marriage notices' which can be
sent from one branch (śākha) of the SNDP Yōgam to another,
the contribution of Rs.101/- at the time of death in a
family and the collection of subscription (Re 1/- per
month) from each Īḻava family have raised the SNDP Yōgam to
the status of an active religious organization not usually
found in a Hindu community. In sociological literature a
religious organization is called a 'Church' where its
'members are united by the fact that they think in the same
way in regard to the sacred world and its relation with the
profane world and by the fact that they translate their

common ideas into common practices'.[1]   Nārāyaṇa Guru was
very particular to organize the Īḻavas and he exhorted the
members to find strength in their organization.   The Guru
who was friendly with the Christians, the Muslims and the
Buddhists understood the significance of the 'church' for a
particular community.[2]   The Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḷa observed
how the church unites the Latin Christians.   The SNDP Śākha
assumed the status of the church when it started helping
the Īḻavas to be united under its banner, to act uniformly
in the case of marriage or death rituals and seek its
verdict in all matters pertaining to the community.   This
role of the SNDP Śākha at Murukkumpuḷa will be discussed
again in a different light in the next section where temple
worship and festivals are dealt with.

The process of change among the Īḻavas of
Murukkumpuḷa shows that they have not totally given up the
traditional practices.   At the same time they show openness
to change.   As seen in the case of death ritual, the change
was gradual, but the change was sufficient to give freedom
to the individual from the traditional and authoritarian
character of the older pattern.   The assumption of the
higher responsibility of the individual brought with it
also a higher appreciation of individual dignity.   This

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[1]Durkheim, Emile., The Elementary Forms of the
Religious Life, New York: The Free Press, 1915, p. 59.

[2]Nārāyaṇa Guru met several Buddhists at Śrī Laṅka.

process did not wipe away the religious dimension of the
rituals but in certain ways enhanced it. The process of
modernity necessitated an accommodation of change and a
reorientation of values. Nārāyaṇa Guru was an advocate of
change and made the process legitimate. After him the SNDP
Yōgam acted not only as an agent of change but also as a
control system. Perceived as an organization of the
people, it introduces change and maintains a uniformity in
the ritual practices among the Īḻavas which again makes
change appear legitimate. Many of the changes were not
suggested initially either by Nārāyaṇa Guru or the SNDP
Yōgam, but their general advocacy of change legitimizes the
overall process and gives it an acceptable religious
atmosphere.

The pressures of modern life involving both
Secularization and Westernization are evident among the
people, especially the educated and those who have
travelled widely. Their influence on traditional society
cannot be ignored. The process of modernization as it has
emerged among the Īḻavas does not entail antagonism towards
such pressures. Instead a process of selection and
integration is being carried out. In this process people
feel that the place of religion is not being ignored.

Religion in the form of family ritual has undergone
major changes, but it is still seen as a dynamic

force keeping the members together, emphasizing the freedom
and dignity of the individual, strengthening his social and
communal bonds and sense of responsibility.

2. Temples and Festivals: Carriers of
Traditions in Modern Times

Religious centres (temples) and rituals (festivals)
are discussed here with a view to study the process of
change in the community life of the Īḷavas. Temples and
festivals are carriers of the traditional life of a
locality.

Temples are centres of religious activity. Temple
rites and festivals reflect the values of the people in a
particular locality. These ceremonies not only form an
intimate part of the religious and cultural life of the
people, but also act as carriers of traditional beliefs and
practices. In the ever-shifting 'present' people change
and so do their religious practices. Showing both
resilience and adaptiveness, religious activities exhibit
both the structures of more lasting forms of meaning and
the changing surface of lived situations. This two fold
process of preserving and adapting can be clearly seen in
the temple structures and the temple festivals in a place
like Murukkumpuḷa.

The temples at Murukkumpuḷa are found near the backwaters and creeks. It may be that the water transportation of the earlier period indicated such venues for temple, providing people with easy access to them, or it may have been the case that waterways were considered sacred. According to Thurston the Īḷavas had the practice of paying homage to a spirit called <u>Kāyalil Daivam</u> or the deity of backwaters.[1]

(a) Kōḷimaṭa Temple

Among the temples at Murukkumpuḷa, the Kōḷimaṭa, the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara and the Puttenkōvil temples are selected for study. The Kōḷimaṭa temple is located on an elevated place near the creek in Ward I.[2] Ward III and Ward IV nearby are higher in elevation than Ward I. It is probable that these places were once thick woods and the natives were afraid of going out at night.

The chief deity at Kōḷimaṭa temple is Śāstā. Other deities such as Gaṇapati, Trimūrti, Nāgar, Māṭan, Yakṣas and Rakṣas are also worshipped here. Yakṣas are considered

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[1]Thurston, E., <u>Castes & Tribes of Southern India</u>, II, 1909, p.410

[2]See the lay-out map of the temple and plate No.8.

deities of vegetation possessing life giving power.[1] They are also considered mountain spirits. There is no image of Yakṣas in this temple but only a masonry platform. Devotees usually offer kuṁkum (red powder), perfumes and flowers for the Yakṣas.

Rakṣas are fierce deities whom the people worship with fear. They are believed to enter the body of women and drink their blood if not propitiated properly. They are also considered to make women barren. The temple priest, who is a Brāhman, said that a light is kept burning for the Rakṣas of the temple every evening and special pūjās are conducted on every Saturday.[2]

The word Māṭan signifies 'he who is like a cow'. People believe that he is black in colour and his body is covered with hair. He is said to strike men and cattle with sudden illness and assumes any shape. In case of accidents at night, people generally say that the injured person is struck by Māṭan. In such cases he is worshipped for relief. An image of Māṭan is not generally made. Mateer reports that the natives of Travancore worshipped

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[1]Some people consider Yaksas as a guardian deity. Kumaraswamy, A.K., Yaksas, New Delhi: Munshirim Manoharlal, 1971, p.14. Also see Rao, Ramachandra, S.K., The Folk Origins of Indian Temples, Bangalore: IBH Prakashana, 1980, p.95.

[2]Rao, Ramachandra, S.K., The Folk Origins of Indian Temples, 1980, p.95.

Kōlimaṭa Temple
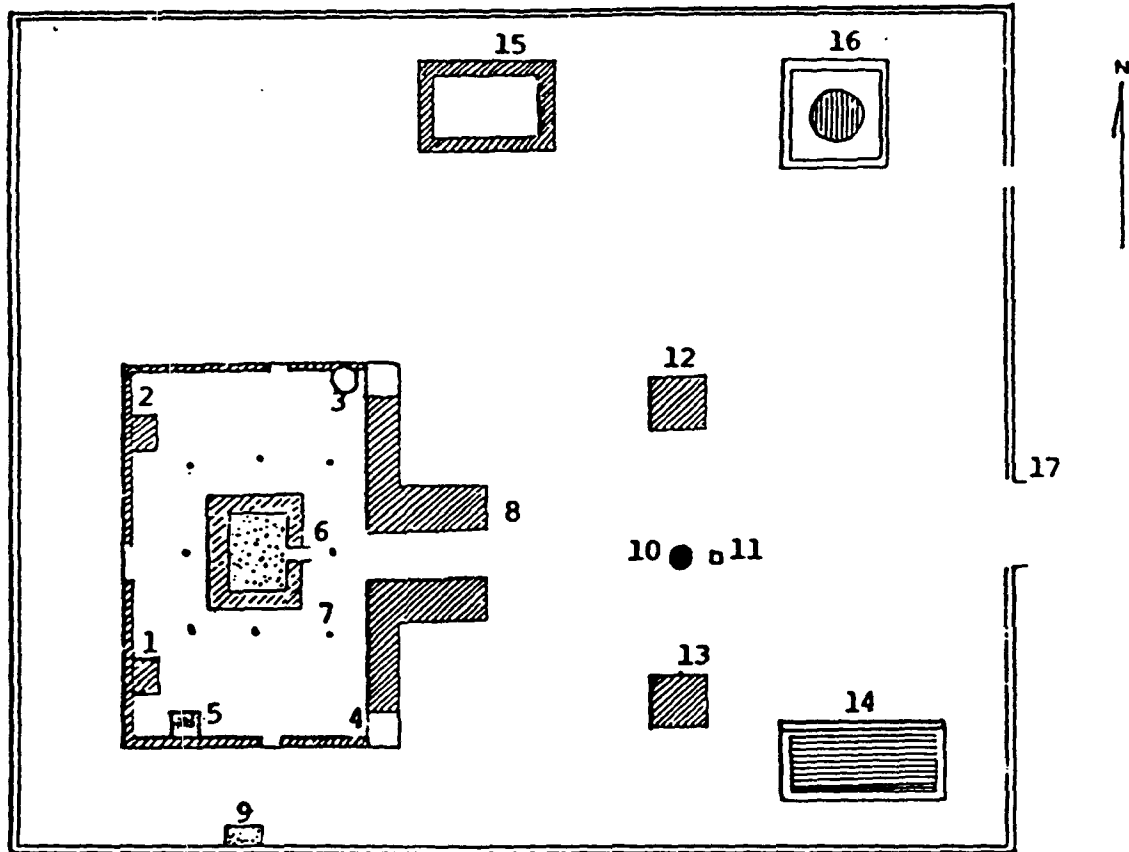
1. Gaṇapati Kōvil
2. Trimūrti Kōvil
3. Well
4. Pācaka-śāla (kitchen)
5. Rakṣas
6. Garbhagṛha
7. Dikpālakar
8. Paṭippura
9. Nāgakkallu
10. Dīpastambha
11. Granite stone for breaking coconuts
12. Māṭan Tara
13. Yakṣas
14. Stage
15. Dēvasvam Board Office
16. Snake shrine (Nāgar)
17. Outer Gate.

Māṭan traditionally with offerings of fowls, goats, fruits and flowers.[1] The devotees at the ʹSāśtā temple now offer only tender coconut, milk and malar (rice pop) to this image.

Nāgar (Snake) worship is a significant aspect of the religious life of the Hindu Community in Kerala.[2] Several temples have images of snakes on granite stones placed over a <u>sarpakaḷḷu</u> (a plain granite stone) in the woods.[3] Snakes were believed responsible for the fertility or barrenness of women. According to Samuel Mateer, offerings are generally made in return for relief from sickness or trouble of some kind.[4] Devotees at Murukkumpuḷa can be seen propitiating the snakes by offering <u>nīṟum pālum</u> (a combination of fruits, flour, milk, saffron powder and the like) every evening.

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[1]Mateer, Samuel., <u>The Land of Charity</u>, 1871, p.195.

[2]A Serpent kavu has been a prominent feature of the houses of almost all affluent Nāirs. Snake worship is done in almost all temples. At Maṇṇāṟaśāla Temple in Kerala there are more than 30,000 images of snakes. Menon, A. Sreedhara., <u>Cultural History of Kerala - An Introduction</u>, 1978, p.31.

[3]The snake God is believed to grant children to the family and promote domestic prosperity. Leprosy and death of a child are believed to be the consequence of killing a snake. Thurston, E., <u>Castes and Tribes of Southern India</u>, VII, 1909, p.105.

[4]Mateer, Samuel., <u>Native Life in Travancore</u>, London: W.H. Allen & Company, 1883, p.93.

The kōvil (place of worship) for Ganapati (God who is believed to remove all obstacles) is on the southwestern corner and the kōvil for Trimurti (Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva) is on the northwestern corner of the temple. The devotees worship these deities as they come to worship the deity Śāsta.

Śāstā is considered the chief of ghosts whom he restrains from inflicting harm on human beings. Followed by his retinue Śāstā is believed to go hunting at midnight. He rides with sword in hand over the hills and dales to clear the country of all obnoxious spirits.[1] Anantakrishna Iyer says that people propitiate Śāstā in order to avert all kinds of pestilential diseases prevailing in the villages, to prevent failure of monsoons and to keep off evil demons.[2]

It is probable that the stone images of Ganapati, Trimūrti and Nāgar were installed at a later date at the Kōḻimaṭa temple. The worship of Māṭan now takes place with the offerings of tender coconut, milk and malar. These are indications of the process of change taking place in this temple. This temple does not have a gōpura (tower), vimāna (structure above the central sanctum), balipītha (platform

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[1] Iyer, L.K. Anantha Krishna., The Cochin Tribes and Castes, I, 1909, p.312. Also see Plate No.9.

[2] Ibid., p.314.

for offerings) flag staff or kalyāṇa maṇḍapa (hall for auspicious events). The garbhagṛha (sanctum sanctorum) is on the nālukettu style (indicative of a traditional high caste temple structure) and Śāstā is represented here by a plain granite stone. According to an oral tradition, this stone was first discovered by an Īḻava woman who reported it to the local Nāir chief.[1] After consulting an astrologer, the Nāir chief built the temple at the present site. The older Nāir respondents said that the garbhagṛha was originally a thatched building which was tile roofed later in 1930s. At present the temple is managed by the Dēvasvam Board of the Government with the help of a local committee consisting mainly of Nāirs.

The Śāstā temple has its annual utsava (festival) for two days in the month of Mīnam (March-April) on Pūram and Utaram nakṣatrās.[2] On the first day the caparisoned elephant is taken to the Hindu houses in the nearby places for a ceremony called parayetuppu (collection of grains for the temple expense). The Vēlāns (potters) bring clay figures of face, hand, leg, arm, animals and the like to

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[1]There is no written record about this tradition. Several people narrated this orally at the time of the interview. Paper Nos. 009, 050, 219, 358, et.al.

[2]These are astral dates. Information regarding these are from the temple notice and interview with the temple-priest. Cassette 66.

the temple for sale in the evening.[1] Devotees buy some of

these and place them on the sides of the garbhagrha after

worshipping the deity.

At dusk, the caparisoned elephant is brought in

front of the patippura and the temple-priest conducts

diparadhana (worship: waving of the lamp in circles) in

front of a clay figure of a dog (vehicle of Sasta).[2] The

clay figure of a dog is then carried with the elephant to

the Muntakkal-kavu by the side of the creek and paddy

fields. People carrying lights called tivetti go in front

of the procession. On reaching the place, a puja is

conducted and devotees are given some time for worship.

Then the clay figure of the dog is brought to the main gate

of the Sasta temple through the same route. The temple

priest and the trustee of the temple receive the procession

by placing Nirapara (a bushel of paddy) and conducting

diparadhana (worship with light) to the accompaniment of

nadasvaram (instrumental music).[3] Ceremonially, the priest

[1]These are a group of low caste people living in
Ward III & IV. Velan is a title assumed by some Kusavans
(potters). Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern
India, VII, 1909, p.342. See plate number 10.

[2]The clay figure is brought to the temple by Velans
every year. The dog is considered as the vehicle of Sasta
p.376.

[3]Sreedhara Menon says that such instrumental music
expresses the all powerful nature of the Supreme God.
Menon, A. Sreedhara., Cultural Heritage of Kerala-An
Introduction, 1978, p.103.

gives a handful of grain to the trustee and he receives it after giving daksina (money-gift) to the priest.

By this time young girls well dressed and adorned with flower garlands and crown will be ready with tālappoli to accompany the deity in procession.[1] They circumambulate the cuttambalam (house or wall enclosing the garbhagrha).[2] Once this is over, the priest carries the clay figure of the dog to the garbhagrha and the devotees offer their offerings.

The group of people called Vēlāns (potters) have a prominent place in this temple festival.[3] The clay-figures used by the devotees and that of the dog used for the temple festival are brought by them to the temple. Vēlāns are animists and their gods are represented by stones

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[1]See Plate No.11.

[2]Tālam is a metal dining dish. For tālapoli an earthen lamp burns in it. The lamp rests on a thin bed of rice spread inside the dish. There will also be coconut and flowers in this dish. Srinivas, M.N., Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of Southern India, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1952, p.75.

[3]The word vela means work. As to the origin of velans Thurston has the following story: 'Once upon a time, when Parameśwara and his wife Pārvati were amusing themselves, the latter chanced to make an elephant with earth which was accidently trodden on by the former, whence arose a man who stood bowing before them'. Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, VII, 1909, p.343.

located under trees to whom they offer tender coconuts,
rice pop (malar), jaggery and plantains.[1]

Rama Chandra Rao says that the oldest shrines are
those that have been built over rocks and stones.[2]
Stone-worship, animal worship (Māṭan), use of the clay
figures and the maintenance of a wood (kāvu) suggest that
the Kōḷimaṭa temple had a tribal origin. The worship of
Māṭan, Yakṣas and Śāstā are significant to an agricultural
people. Agricultural products such as paddy, coconut,
plantain and jaggery are given by the people at the
Paṟayeṭuppu (collection of grains) ceremony. The festival
falls after the harvest in January-February and therefore
people offer these agricultural products as a thanks
offering. They consider it a blessing that the temple
procession to Munṭakkal-kāvu goes through their paddy
fields and coconut grove.

Though the oral tradition and the temple festival
associate the Īḷavas and other lower castes with the Śāstā
temple, traditionally the lower castes were considered
untouchables by Nāirs and other higher castes, and were not
allowed to take a bath in the temple pond or enter the

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[1] Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India,
VII, 1909, pp.354 & 359.

[2] Rao, Ramachandra., The Folk Origins of Indian
Temples, Bangalore:1BH Prakashana, 1980, p.21.

temple premises. If they had offerings to make, they had
to leave them on a platform near the outer gate. In the
case of offerings of rice and coconuts, they were required
to bring only unhusked ones, lest in husking they pollute
them.[1] Prasādam (sacred items given out after temple
worship) was not handed to them, but thrown out at them.
Some respondents said that higher castes carrying rice from
the temple used to throw it away when some lower castes
polluted it by their touch. Others reported that the
higher castes punished the lower castes for entering the
temple premises or violating other caste rules. Because
the population of the area is predominantly Īlava and
Īlavas are no longer economically dependent on Nāirs,
worship at this Nāir temple has declined and Īlava temples
have become more prominent at Murukkumpuḷa.

(b) Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Temple

Traditionally prominent Īlava families had their own
temples where they conducted worship by themselves. In
southern Kerala, most of these temples were Devī temples.
Murukkumpuḷa had three such temples belonging to the Pāṇur
family, the Teṅgarviḷākam family and the Ērayil family. Of
the three Devī temples, the one belonging to the
Teṅgarviḷākam family gradually grew into prominence as the

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[1] Paper Nos.50,069. Cassette No.12.

Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Temple
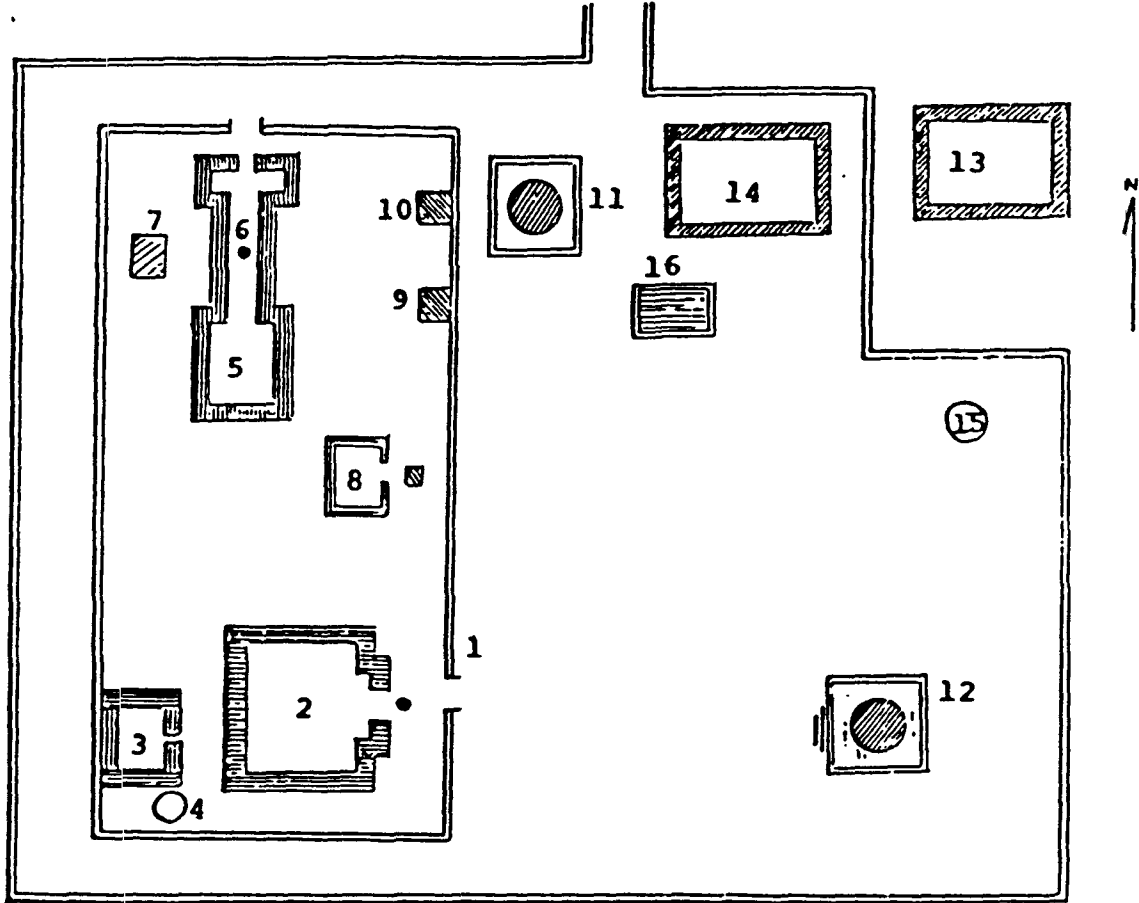
1. Prākāra (Compound wall)
2. Mūrti Taṟa (Yōgīśvaraṉ)
3. Kitchen space
4. Well
5. Garbhagṛha
6. Namaskāra-maṇḍapa
7. Karimkāḷi
8. Gaṇapati kōvil

9. Maṟuta
10. Māṭaṉ
11. Āl-Tara
12. Taṇṭāṉ Tara
13. & 14. Temple ponds
15. Well
16. Stage

village temple. This is now popularly known as
Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Bhagavati (Devī) temple. (See Plate No.12).

The name of the temple Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara literally
means 'on the bank of two ponds'. Accordingly there are
two ponds in a row east of the temple one lying to the east
of the other. The layout of the temple reveals that the
Īḷavas, the Maṇṇāns and the Taṇṭāns have separate places of
worship within the same temple complex. (See Plate Nos. 14
& 15). There are only masonry platforms where the Taṇṭāns
and the Maṇṇāns have their worship. Of these the latter
one is around a pipal tree and nearer to the place of
worship of the Īḷavas.

Two major shrines are enclosed inside the compound
wall of the Īḷava temple. One is a low thatched building
with a front porch facing east. (See Plate No.13). It has
wooden railings but there is no pratiṣṭa (image) and the
structure has no pranāḷa (water outlet from garbhagṛha).
People generally speak of this shrine in relation to
Yogīśvaran.[1] Some informants said that according to this
oral tradition Yogīśvaran was a Brahman yōgī who came to
Murukkumpuḷa from Tamil Nāṭu, built this temple and left
his body through samādhi on the spot.

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[1]As Lord of Yōgis, it denotes Śiva but the
respondents did not mention that name. There is no image
inside.

The other shrine facing north has an image of
Devī. The respondents said that there was a wooden
structure with thatched roof which was demolished about
twenty years back, to make way for the present concrete
structure. This structure has a _vimāna_ with a finial and a
praṇāla. There is a rectangular _namaskāra maṇḍapa_ in front
of this shrine on the north and a Gaṇapati kōvil on the
east of the Devī shrine. This temple does not have a
gōpura, flag staff and _balīpiṭha_.

Īḷavas of southern Kerala worship goddess
Bhagavati who was believed to have helped them in their
military undertakings.[1] The goddess is considered
traditionally as one who presides over the demons and
causes diseases like small-pox, cholera and plague. She is
understood both as inflicting the epidemics and as
protecting the village from them.

The oral tradition of Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Temple
claims that their deity (Bhagavati) is a sister of
Kōṭuṅgallūr Devī, other sisters being the deity at ʿSārkara
in Chirayinkīḷ, 7kms. to the north and at Āṭṭukāl in
Trivandrum 25kms. to the south of Murukkumpuḷa. The

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[1]Thurston, E., _Castes and Tribes of Southern India_,
II, 1909, p.400. According to Sreedhara Menon, in the
pre-Aryan and pre-Vedic religion she was worshipped as
Korravai or the War Goddess by the hill tribes and
predatory classes. Menon, A. Sreedhara., _Social and_
Cultural History of Kerala, 1979, p.189.

worship of Koṭuṅgallūr Devī (Bhagavati) is the customary cultus of all castes of Hindus, with the exception of Brāhmans, in Kerala and her temple is at Koṭuṅgallūr on the coastal areas of the old Cochin province. Traditionally each Īḷava temple, according to Thurston, was under an obligation to contribute yearly gifts to Koṭuṅgallūr temple.[1] This was also a popular place of pilgrimage for Īḷavas. Each devotee under vow carried with him a fowl which was beheaded at the shrine during the festival in February-March. Temples at Āṭṭukāl and 'Sārkara are two popular Bhagavati temples in southern Kerala. The relation of Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Devī with Koṭuṅgallūr, Āṭṭukāl and 'Sārkara is probably to signify its prominence in southern Kerala.

Marumakkattāyam was a traditional practice of the Īḷavas. This was changed to makkattāyam by the teachings of Nārāyaṇa Guru and the Īḷava Bill of 1925. However, the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Temple (owned by a family) in its ownership and administration follows the marumakkattāyam pattern handing over the trusteeship of the temple from Kāraṇavan to Anantaravan (kāraṇavan's sister's son: nephew). Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara Temple in this way reveals the earlier customs of the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa.

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[1]Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.104.

The annual <u>utsava</u> of the Irattakulaṅgara temple lasts for seven days in <u>Kumbham</u> (February-March) ending on the <u>Tiruvātira nakṣatra</u>. A few weeks before the festival commences the temple authorities send two representatives from the temple with red linen, trident and sword to the Hindu houses to announce the festival days and to collect paddy and coconuts for the expenses at the temple.[1]

The festival starts by singing religious ballads called Tōttampāṭṭu.[2] This singing takes place in a small pandal called <u>muṭippura</u> erected in front of the Devī temple outside the enclosure wall on the northern side. Menon writing about Kāḷi worship in Kerala mentions that <u>muṭippura</u> used to be constructed in the fields after harvest to sing the Tōttampāṭṭu for seven days.[3] There a group of specialists sing this song. This song is also called Bhadrakāḷipāṭṭu. It lasts for seven days and narrates the birth of Kāḷi and the killing of the demon Dāruka.

According to Choondal Chumar, Tōttampāṭṭu originated with the Kaṇṇaki legend (narrated in the Tamil

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[1] Paper Nos.50, 177. Cassette No.46.

[2] Paper No.088. Cassette No.59. This is not written down but memorized by hearing. It is not sung at a stretch, but a portion of it on every day extending upto seven days.

[3] Chelratta, Achyutha Menon., <u>Kāḷi Worship in Kerala</u>, I, Madras: University of Madras, 1959, p.53.

epic Cilappaṭikāram) and flourished under the influence of
the Kāḷi cult in Kerala.[1] This branch of folk songs
consists of two parts, the first part dealing with the
killing of Dāruka and the second part describing how
Kaṇṇaki became Bhadrakāḷi. The song recitals of the lower
caste Hindus who proceed to Koṭuṅgallūr Temple from all
over Kerala on the Meenam Bharaṇi festival, according to
Chumar, support the traditional belief that the Goddess
Kaṇṇaki is installed at Koṭuṅgallūr Temple.[2] The
respondents at Murukkumpuḷa were not able to explain the
meaning of the Tōṭṭampāṭṭu. The specialists who knew the
song by heart were singing portions of it each day and they
revealed that they memorized the song by hearing.[3] Upon

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[1]According to one version of the story Kaṇṇaki gave
her anklets to her husband Kōvālan to sell them and start a
business to get rid of their poverty. He took them to a
goldsmith and asked him to fix a price. It was a time, the
Queen of Madura had lost her anklets. The goldsmith
reported the matter to the king who in a fit of rage
executed Kōvālan. Kannaki in her grief proved to the king
that her anklet was filled with jewels while that of the
queen contained pearls. Realizing the irreparable error,
the king committed suicide. Fire vomiting from her eyes,
Kaṇṇaki ran to the goldsmith, plucked off her left breast
and threw it there reducing the whole city to ashes. She
then entered Kerala and committed suicide in
Western-ghats. Chumar, Choondal., Studies in Folklore of
Kerala, Trivandrum: College Book House, 1978, pp. 21-22.

[2]According to Menon the Cilapatikāram mentions the
consecration of the Kaṇṇaki Temple at Koṭuṅgallūr by the
Cēra ruler Senkuṭṭuvan. Menon,A. Sreedhara., Cultural
Heritage of Kerala-An Introduction, 1978, p.123.

[3]Choondal Chumar agrees that Tōṭṭampāṭṭukal is
never written down but learnt orally. Chumar, Choondal.,
Studies in Folklore in Kerala, 1978, p.23.

enquiry they interpreted the song in line with the story in Liṅga Purāṇa about the slaying of Dāruka by Kāḷi.

According to Liṅga Purāṇa,[1] Dāruka the demon attained heroism through his penance. Gifted with the boon that he would be killed only by a female, he killed gods and Brāhmans. At this instant Pārvati entered the body of Śiva and reappeared as Kāḷi from the poison of Śiva's throat.[2] She slew the demon Dāruka. Before the blood-thirsty Kāḷi, Śiva appeared as an infant in the battlefield. Kāḷi seeing the infant nursed him and the boy quaffed her wrath along with her breast milk. Śiva assuming his original form, then danced with Kāḷi.[3]

While this song is sung in the muṭippura over seven days, several other activities take place in the temple. Apart from the daily worship at the temple (Devī temple) there is a function called ilapāṭum pūjā on the night of the sixth day. In this function, the women of the locality bring a harvest- basket containing malar (rice-pop), aval

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[1]The Liṅga Purāṇa, Translated by a Board of Scholars, 2 parts, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973. p.579.

[2]Pārvatī is the daughter of the mountain Himalaya and wife of Śiva.

[3]See Kinsley, David. Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition, Los Angeles: University of California Press,1986,p118.

(pressed rice), plantain, coconut, jaggery and the like as offerings to the goddess and the priest conducts the pūjā.[1]

Early in the morning at 3 a.m. on the seventh day there is a celebration called Gurussi, as an offering to the Devī. For this function three spots outside the enclosure wall are cleaned and sprinkled with puṇyāham (holy water). At each spot certain columns are marked on the ground (Śrīyantrā)[2] with tender coconut leaves. The temple priest who is a Brāhman (since 1984) does not participate in this. Instead an Īḻava priest assisted by another conducts a pūjā by ringing the bell and waving a camphor light towards the deity. The priests sprinkle water on the materials kept there. Then a cotton wick tied to the tip of a piece of coconut stipule is lighted and placed on the spout of the kiṇṭi. Taking a cucumber and a knife and showing them to the goddess, the priest cuts the cucumber into two at one blow and drops them into the water in the basin. The juice of the fruit together with some lime paste and yellow powder (turmeric powder) are mixed with the water (the combination gives red colour). The water is then splashed with both hands towards the goddess and the basin is turned upside down allowing the entire water to flow on the ground. While the ceremony is

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[1]See Plate No.16.

[2]See James J. Preston, Cult of the Goddess, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980, p.52.

in progress the assistant throws camphor powder called

Telli into the lighted cotton wick intensifying its flame

from time to time.[1] A coconut is broken into two on top of

the basin and a cotton wick lamp is lighted in one of the

broken coconut pieces with which dipārādhana is conducted.

This concludes the ceremony at that spot. This is repeated

at the other two spots. There are two columns on the

second spot and three columns at the third spot.

The third spot is arranged in a slightly different

manner. An area is fenced on the east, north and west. A

plantain tree is planted with branches of several other

trees at the northern end.[2] A wooden stool covered with

red linen is placed in front of it and the sword of the

deity from the garbhagṛha is placed on it. At the open

side on the south three drawings are done with the one at

the centre having 20 small columns. Inside the fence at

seven spots malar (pop rice) is kept on tripods made out of

the midrib of the coconut leaf. The priest and his

assistant conduct the ceremony as described earlier.

Following this, the chief priest worships the sword and

takes it in his hand while the music (Cenḍamēlam) is

played. He then circumambulates the plantain tree with the

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[1]The lighted cotton wick on a piece of coconut
stipule represents the Goddess.

[2]It gives the appearance of a shrub.

raised sword three times and cuts the tree into two with
one blow.[1] The sword is placed back and the priest takes
the lighted cotton wick at the end of the coconut stipule,
enflames it with camphor powder and throws it to the
northern side over the cut plantain tree to indicate that
the goddess has gone to Koṭuṅgallūr. The priest then takes
the sword and hands it over to the manager of the temple.
The manager receives it after giving dakṣiṇa to the priest
and takes it back to the temple.

According to Thurston, the object of Gurussi is to
appease the wrath of the goddess.[2] Several respondents
said that till about 55 years back calf, goat and fowls
were sacrificed at Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara temple.[3] In the earlier
days while blood-sacrifice was done, the pūjāri sat in the
courtyard outside the temple garlanded with red flowers and
wearing a red cloth. People brought goats and fowls and he
sprinkled holy water on them. He sprinkled holy water on
them. The priest then worshipped the sacrifical sword
while the music of the drums were increased to the highest
pitch. With a single well sharp placed stroke of the sword

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[1] It is auspicious to cut it with one blow. See
Srinivas, M.N., Religion and Society among the Coorgs of
Southern India, 1952, p.229

[2] Thurston, E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India,
VII, 1909, p.319.

[3] Paper Nos. 371, 104, 002. Cassette No.46.

he sacrificed the animal and its blood was collected in a
vessel. After killing all the animals and birds he baled
out the blood towards the deity and turned the vessel
upside down and that ended the ceremony. Devotees took the
carcass for a feast in their homes.[1]

This traditional practice is seen reflected in the
present Gurussi ceremony.[2] This has significance for the
story of the goddess Kāḷi killing Dāruka. Kāḷi is a blood
thirsty deity and Gurussi recognizes her strength over the
demon Dāruka. The three spots where Gurussi is conducted,
represent three incidents: the killing of Dāruka, the
dance with Śiva and the departure of Devī to Koṭuṅgallūr
after leaving the sword and blessings in the temple.

Nārāyaṇa Guru did not like the idea of killing
animals and splashing the blood to propitiate the deities.
Though he spoke against it some people were reluctant to
change their practices all of a sudden. Sētu Lakshmi Bāi
(Regent of Travancore) (1924-1931) stopped animal
sacrifices in temples by a law. The tradition-bound people

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[1]See Haimendorf, C. Von Fürer, Tribes of India, Los
Angeles: University of California Press, 1982, pp.169-171
and 180.

[2]The agricultural people had another meaning for
this rite. To the goddess, who gave her vitality to
nourish the crops, the devotees give blood, in the form of
gurussi and tukkam, to reinvigorate her so that she will
continue to give them food every year. See Kinsley,
David., Hindu Goddesses, 1986, p.113.

satisfied themselves by cutting a cucumber, making a
reddish liquid from lime and turmeric powder and splashing
it towards the deity. Although there was a great crowd in
the temple compound when this ceremony was observed in
1985, very few attended this ceremony. Clearly once animal
sacrifice was only simulated there was a decline in the
significance of this ceremony in the life of the Ῑlavas at
Murukkumpula.

By the time Gurussi is over on the northern side,
Tantan tara on the eastern side gets ready for the
velicappāt tullal. The term velicappāt means one who
throws a flood of light on any problem and tullal simply
means 'dance'.[1] According to Samuel Mateer velicappāt
tullal is a common feature of lower caste worship in Hindu
society.[2]

The veliccappāt with the Tantān priest comes before
the Yogῑsvaran shrine and worships the deity. After that
the priest places his hand over the head of the velicappāt
while centa music is played.[3] Gradually the velicappāt
starts shivering and then starts his tullal in a rhythmic
choreography. He gets a cane from the garbhagrha of

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[1]Choondal Chumar, Studies in Folk-lore of Kerala,
Trivandrum: College Book House, 1978. p.29.

[2]Mateer, Samuel., The Land of Charity, 1871, p.215.

[3]See Plate Nos.17 to 19.

Yōgiśvaran temple and puts it around his neck and proceeds
to the Taṇṭan tara. His tullal is continued there with the
accompaniments of ceṇṭamēlam. The people garland him one
by one and some offer fruits, flowers, grains and fowl.
Then the attendant at the taṇṭan tara boils water in a
large bell-metal vessal. When the water boils, oil is
poured on top of it. Velicappāṭ then takes the boiling
water and oil in his hands and pours them over his head and
body. He repeats it later with the bunch of flowers of the
arrack palm smearing it all over his body. In between he
is given a drink of tender coconut juice and that too is
poured over his body. He then turns the bell-metal vessal
(vārppu) upside down with his bare hands and dances on the
vessal on his bare feet. The velicappāṭ then approaches
the devotees and makes his prophecies. He listens to the
prayers and petitions of the devotees and suggests remedial
measures or assures them of the blessings of deity. He
together with the priest blesses the devotees with bhasmam
(vibhūti). Parents bring children to receive the
blessings. When this is over the velicappāṭ together with
the priest goes back to the Yogiśvaran shrine. The priest
offers a portion of the offerings to the deity there. Then
the velicappāṭ blesses the manager of the temple and his
relatives. This ceremony concludes when the velicappāṭ
worships the deity and falls back as if the spirit has left
him. The ceremony is attended by a large crowd which is

anxious to see the velicappat dance and to receive his
prophecies and his personal blessings.

Velicappāṭ is free to declare what he thinks,
bless or curse anyone and order any particular behaviour
from any person in the region. It has already been noted
that Velicappāṭ who is from a lower caste (Taṇṭan) blesses
the manager of the temple who is from a higher caste
(Īḷava). Again when the offering from the tantan tara is
brought to the Yōgiṥvaran shrine, that is received in the
temple. In those days when caste rules were practised
these events had sociological significance. Such rituals
continue to provide a safe means of handling latent forms
of tension between the high and the low castes.

Another ceremony that is performed during the
festival at Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara temple is called tūkkam. There
were 98 boys participating in this ceremony in 1985. These
children stayed in the temple from the fourth day of the
festival and participated in all pūjās on each day.

On the seventh day afternoon the children are led to
the nearby temple Ēra by the priest of the temple who
carries the sword and the trident of Devī and is followed
by the caparisoned elephant. (Plate No.20). Once the
children dress up there, the manager of the Ēra temple
blesses them with holy ash which the children receive after

giving dakṣiṇa. The children then proceed to the Devī Temple. In this procession the temple priest carries the sword and trident, the Ambaṭṭan holds a ceremonial umbrella and the caparisoned elephant follows them. They circumambulate the temple and the children wait for their turn to swing in the tūkkavillu (car used for hook swinging).[1]

As his turn comes, each boy worships Devī and the temple priest blesses him with a garland.[2] Then while hooks are tied to his back a drop of blood is taken from his body before the Devī shrine, and he is led to the tūkka-villu. Two boys are hung at a time in front of the Devī shrine and the cart is drawn round the temple. When the cart comes before the Yōgīśvaran shrine in the east the boys worship the deity. (Plate Nos. 21 and 22.)

If the swinger is performing this ceremony on behalf of an infant child, then while the cart stops before the Yōgīśvaran shrine, the child is handed over to the swinger who carries the child a little distance before giving it back to the parents. This is called Piḷḷayeṭuttu-tūkkam. Tūkkam is performed in fulfilment of the vows made by the

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[1]If there are girls under vow they simply circumambulate the temple.

[2]Children give dakṣiṇa to the priest before getting the garland.

devotees to Kāḷi.[1] Traditionally the performer underwent strict penance for forty one days, during which period he abstained from meat, intoxicants and sexual pleasures. He worshipped the deity daily and his body was rubbed with oil every morning. On the day of tūkkam, in front of Kāḷi, an iron was run through the muscles on his back and he was hooked to the Villu (car) which was drawn around the temple.[2] Now this ceremony is no longer a self-mortification rite as it used to be earlier. Interviews revealed that some families considered it a privilege and a right to send one member from the family for tūkkam every year. As described earlier, the boys for hook-swinging ceremony observe Vṛta (penance) only for a few days and the practice of taking blood from the body is slowly dying out. The hook is not driven through the muscle these days but it is tied to the body with the help of an unbleached cloth which actually holds the weight of the boy.

Nārāyaṇa Guru was against self mortification of human beings in the name of religion and he preached against the ceremony of tūkkam. The forces of tradition were, however, strong and the people were unwilling to give

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[1]Menon, A. Sreedhara., Cultural Heritage of Kerala - An Introduction, 1978, p.101.

[2]This is understood as the devotee offering himself to please the goddess. See Mateer, Samuel., Native Life in Travancore, 1883, P.93.

up their traditional practice. Blood-shed was prohibited
during the reign of Sētu Lakshmi Bāi (1924-1931). As a
result the people continue the tūkkam in a form where there
is no bloodshed.

On the same day at night the ladies participate in a
function called poṅkāla.[1] For preparing pāyassam
(rice-pudding) in this ceremony, the ladies bring the
necessary materials, utensils and fuel from their homes and
prepare the kitchen space one after the other in rows on
the northern side of the temple, facing the Kāḷi deity.
There will also be a kitchen space for the temple priest
right in front of the namaskāra maṇṭapa. At the auspicious
hour the priest carries the fire from the garbhagrha and
lights the fire wood in his kitchen space and sets the
vessel to prepare poṅkāla. All the ladies, one by one,
light the fire wood and prepare poṅkāla with rice, coconut,
jaggery and water. When they finish cooking the priest
comes out with puṇyāham (holy water) and flowers and
sprinkles each preparation.[2] The holy poṅkāla is then
distributed to all the assembled people.

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[1]Thurston calls this Dēśakurati and describes a
woman taking all the food-stuffs to the temple and making
an offering of food to the deity before dinner. Thurston,
E., Castes and Tribes of Southern India, II, 1909, p.401.
Also see Plate No.23.

[2]See Menon, A. Sreedhara., Cultural History of
Kerala - An Introduction, 1978, p.79.

The collection of the grains while announcing the temple festival, the ceremony of ilapātum pūjā and the people participating in poṅkāla suggests that the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḻa understand Kāḷi as an agricultural deity. The temple festival is also a harvest festival and the people offer paddy, coconuts, plantain, jaggery and the like as thanks offering. Kāḷi is considered to be feeding the people and this is symbolically represented when people participate in the poṅkāla-feast and the boys preparing for hook-swinging are fed for a few days in the temple.[1]

Following poṅkāla, around midnight, there is a procession of the deity around the temple. This procession is led by young girls, who are well-dressed and adorned with gold ornaments and flowers, carring tālappoli. At the end of the procession the girls give their offerings, the priest conducts the pūjā at the garbhagrha and closes the temple for the next seven days.[2] Poṅkāla and Tālappoli celebrate the victory of the goddess in which the devotees participate.

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[1]Kurup, K.K.N., Aryan and Dravidian Elements in Malabar Folklore, Trivandrum: Kerala Historial Society, 1977, p.8. (The goddess is understood as Annapūrṇa).

[2]On the opening day the people gather again and the ladies participate in poṅkāla.

Both the Kōlimaṭa temple and the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara
temple indicate the traditional patterns of worship of the
people at Murukkumpuḷa. Initially both these temples did
not have idols. While Kōlimaṭa temple,traditionally
controlled by Nāir families, kept the Īḷavas and other
lower castes outside the temple wall, the Iraṭṭakuḷangara
temple,owned by an Īḷava family, also kept the lower castes
outside its wall. These are indicative of the traditional
stratification of the society and the pollution distance
traditionally honoured by the people at Murukkumpuḷa. The
services of the Taṇtān were required to obtain the coconuts
and firewoods for the daily worship at the temple. The
services of the Maṇṇān were required to get washed clothes
for cotton wicks (considered ritually pure by their wash)
to light the temple. Therefore they were given separate
places of worship in the same temple complex, but outside
the wall. These practices thus continue to be carriers of
traditional beliefs and practices.

A process of Sanskritization is gradually taking
place in the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara temple. This is visible in
the installation of the Devī image and Ganapati image in
the temple. The construction of the new temple structures
with pranāla and vimāna and the appointment of a Brāhman as
the temple priest since 1984 are also indicative of the

Sanskritization process. However, the services of an Īlava priest are still required for the performance of the Gurussi, as the Brāhman priest abstains from such a practice of the Īlavas. As described earlier some variations are visible in the traditional practices such as gurussi and tūkkam. These temples and the festivals thus indicate both resilience and adaptiveness as they face forces of modernization.

Nārāyaṇa Guru who wanted to reform the religious practices of the Īlavas did not like practices such as gurussi, tūkkam and tullal and the worship of deities such as Māṭan and Maṟuta. He taught the people that killing animals (in gurussi) and shedding blood (in tūkkam) to propitiate the goddess and practicing tullal are not the essentials of religion. He added that the worship of Māṭan and Maṟuta are unscriptural. He advised the people to become enlightened by wisdom. Since the force of tradition was strong and the Īlavas were not well educated, it was not easy for Nārāyaṇa Guru to stop all of a sudden all the above mentioned practices in a village temple like Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara. So Nārāyaṇa Guru decided to attempt his reforms in a separate place where he could draw the people of Murukkumpuḷa to his reformatory teachings.

(c) Nārāyaṇa Guru and the Puttenkōvil

The third temple discussed here, Puttenkōvil, is different from the previous ones because it represents the religious reform movement initiated by Nārāyaṇa Guru.

When Nārāyaṇa Guru visited Murukkumpuḷa (around 1900) the Īḷavas were becoming more conscious of Sanskritic religious practices and some of them were anxious to break the caste barriers against their worship in temples owned by the upper castes. Some of the Īḷavas started observing Vṛtas or vows of which Monday Vṛta has been significant. Married people observe this Vṛta for the welfare of the partner, and the unmarried do it in order to obtain a good marriage. This Vṛta requires the person to worship at a Siva temple and take food received from there.[1] As Murukkumpuḷa had no Śiva temple, the Īḷavas went to Kaṭhinamkuḷam Śiva temple for this observance. This temple was constructed by the ruler of Vēṉāṭ in the 13th century. The kings of Travancore regularly worshipped there and the Brahman priests continue to serve in that temple. This is the nearest Brāhman temple for the people of Murukkumpuḷa where Sanskritic deities are worshipped. The Īḷavas considered it prestigious to worship there, but restrictions were severe.

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[1]Cassette No.77.

Respondents in 1985 could still remember incidents where early in the century, Īḻavas were ridiculed or insulted at both the Kōḻimaṭa and Kaṭhinamkuḻam temples.[1] As a result of such repeated incidents, Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa desired a Śiva temple of their own. It was a time when Nārāyaṇa Guru was consecrating Śiva temples at different parts of Kerala. The Īḻava leaders asked him to consecrate a temple at Murukkumpuḻa.

In the 1920s Nārāyaṇa Guru's idea of the temple was that it should be an educational centre for the public. So when he came for the consecration of the temple at Murukkumpuḻa in 1921, he brought a disc in which was written 'Satyam, Dharmam, Dayā, Śānti' meaning 'Truth, Duty, Compassion and Peace'. The Kāḻi temple of the Pāṇur family whose deity had been represented by a granite stone was chosen as the one to be rededicated.[2] The stone was removed and the Guru installed the disc in its place. The local leaders were not quite satisfied in not having a Śiva-liṅgam. Later the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa wanted a Śiva liṅgam to be consecrated along with the disc, so the Guru reluctantly asked his disciple to do that in deference

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[1]Paper Nos.018. 028, 050.

[2]The Pāṇur family was willing to give the temple. They also supported a priest by regularly giving rice to the temple. Paper Nos. 002, 028, 104, 193.

to the wishes of the people.[1] The proper name of this
temple is Śrī Kāḷakanṭhēśvara even though it is locally
known as Puttenkōvil, literally meaning a 'new temple'.

Nārāyaṇa Guru wanted temples to be casteless
religious institutions. He exhorted the people to
discontinue the use of blood and liquor and the slaughter
of animals in temple worship and festivals. He envisaged
temples as a centre of illumination where people can
practice virtues such as Truth, Duty, Compassion and
Peace. The Guru wanted temples to have spacious rooms
where people could congregate and where discourses could be
conducted. He advised his followers to check the expenses
connected with temple festivals and utilize the money
received in the temple for the benefit of the poor. He
suggested the construction of bathing facilities instead of
temple tanks and wanted flower gardens in the temple
precincts where people could sit and meditate.

The teachings of Nārāyana Guru did not receive an
automatic response from the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa. The
process of change over the following decades can be seen by
looking at the temple lay-out as it evolved and at the
festival in the temple as it developed.

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[1]It was a <u>Siva liṅgam</u> which Guru consecrated at
Aruvippuram in the year 1888.

Puttenkōvil
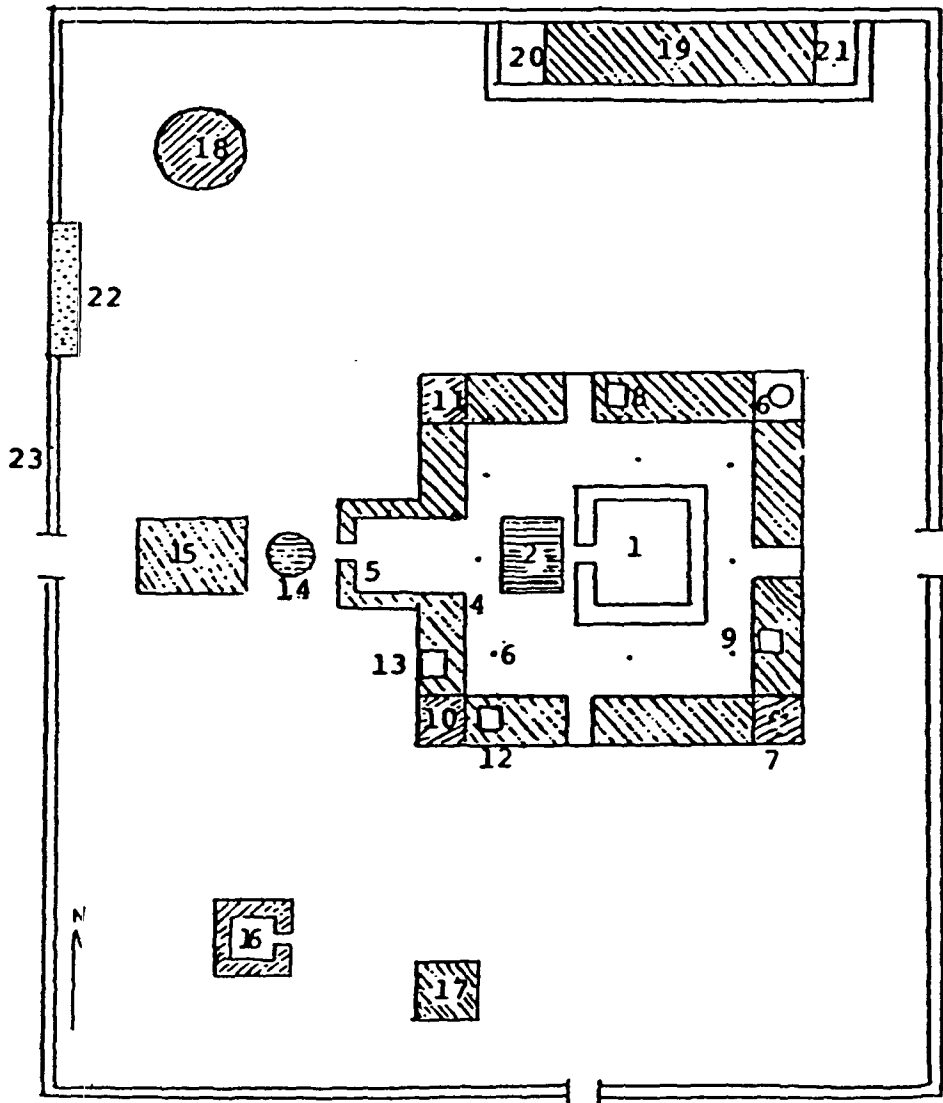
1. Garbhagṛha
2. Namaskāra Maṇḍapa
3. Aṣṭadikpālakar
4. Cuttambalam
5. Porch
6. Well
7. Kitchen space
8. Murukan
9. Dēvī
10. & 11. Store Rooms

12. Homam vēdi
13. Śrī Ayyappan
14. Flag staff
15. Ānakoṭṭil
16. Gaṇapati
17. Nāgar
18. Guru Maṇdir
19. Sadyālayam (Reception Hall)
20. SNDP Śāka Office
21. Room of the priest
22. Stage
23. Bāhyabhitti (outerwall)

The Puttenkōvil faces west and its structure is similar to the Śiva temple at Kaṯhinamkuḷam. (Plate Nos.24-26). The garbhagṛha which has a vimāna and praṇāḷa houses the Śivaliṅgam and the disc placed by the Guru. The Namaskāramaṇḍapam has Nandi, the vehicle of Śiva facing the east. The cuṯṯambalam has the idol of Muṟukan (son of Śiva and Parvati) on the north, a wooden platform covered with linen representing Devī on the east, the picture of Ayyappan (Śāśtā) on the west and a rectangular pit for conducting homam on the south. As one steps out of the porch of the cuṯṯambalam there is the newly built flag staff. Immediately on the west of it is the ānakoṭṭil (area for the temple elephant) which is also used as a place to conduct marriages. On the south of the ānakoṭṭil is the newly built Ganapati kōvil and to its east the Nagar taṟa. On the north of ānakoṭṭil is the Gurumandir (built in 1980) which houses the shrine of Nārāyaṇa Guru in his sitting posture. To its east is a large hall used as a 'Reception Hall' with an office of the SNDP Śākha. The temple had a pond on the western side near the paddy-field which is now almost filled up. Instead of that, there is a newly built well on the north-western corner of the SNDP office. Now the temple committee is making an attempt to construct an auditorium for which the foundation stone has already been laid on January 30, 1985.

The Puttenkŏvil stands as a fulfilment of the
aspirations of the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa. As an
untouchable and polluting caste they were once denied
entrance into the temples owned by the higher castes. So
when the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa established a Śiva temple,
they followed the model of the Śiva Temple at
Kaṭhinamkuḷam not only in laying out the temple structure
but also the conduct of the festivals. In the beginning
they had the service of an Īḷava priest to conduct pūjā in
their temple. It was difficult to get properly trained
Īḷava priests for the temple. The people preferred a
trained priest rather than a lay-person to minister in the
temple. Later on, after the Temple Entry Proclamation of
1936, when Brāhman priests became available, one was
employed in this temple. This was not against the teachings
of Nārāyana Guru. This process indicates that Īḷavas have
now grown into a position of social recognition where they
have not only temples of the Sanskritic model but also the
social freedom to employ Brāhman priests.

The temple structure includes a Gurumandir
constructed not in the traditional style of a temple but
following a modern pattern with concrete pillars and roof,
octagonal in shape and enclosed with glass panes. (Plate
No.27). This is a deviation from the temple structure of
the higher castes.

The Puthenkōvil has its annual festival (utsava) for ten days starting on the Kārttika nakṣatra and ending on the Utram nakṣatra in the month of Makaram (January-February). The festival starts with the hoisting of the flag on the first day evening.[1] The flag that is used in this temple is a rectangular linen, yellow in colour. Apart from the daily pūjā, the deity is taken out for circumambulation of the temple on each day of the festival.[2] Special pūjās are conducted at the temple and the Guru shrine. Devotees bring special offerings of flowers, fruits, camphor and the like to the temple and they spend time for devotions.

An important function that takes place on the 9th day night (early morning of 10th day) is called palḷivēṭṭa (royal hunt). (Plate No.28). For this ceremony one of the Īḷavas observes vṛta and comes to the temple at 3 a.m. He is given a holy garland from the temple by the priest. He covers his head with a towel and receives a bow and arrow from the temple. The temple-priest mounted on a caparisoned elephant carries the deity and accompanies the hunter who now represents the deity. Everyone moves in a silent procession to a temporarily made shrub with a cave.

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[1]Temple festival notice. See also Fuller C.J. Servants of the Goddess, Cambridge: College University Press.1984, p.18.

[2]This ceremony is locally called Śivēli.

This is considered to represent the deity going out for hunting. After the pūjā on the spot the man with the bow and arrow, who now represents the deity, shoots three arrows at the tender coconuts (placed there before hand), one after the other, making sure that the third arrow sticks to the coconut. When this is done the devotees make a loud noise of victory and the drum-beaters play the music (centamēlam). The hunter carries the tender coconuts on his head and the group with shouts and rejoicing returns to the temple.

Once the group reaches the temple, the deity, who is considered tired from the hunt, is kept at a particular spot for sleep and the area is enclosed by hanging clothes on all the four sides. The priest places all the auspicious objects near the bed for the deity to see as kani (the first sight) in the morning. At day break, a calf is also brought in for the deity to see. The deity is then given a bath and food and the priest conducts the pūjā.

Another function that takes place in the evening on the 10th day (final day of the festival) is called ārāṭṭu. The deity is taken to the lake in a solemn procession by the temple priest. At the auspicious hour the priest conducts pūjā at the spot. The priest accompanied by another person carries the deity together to the lake and

plunge several times in the water. (Plate No.29). After
giving a bath to the deity, the priest covers the body of
the deity with his hand and returns to the temporary shed.
There the priest gives the deity a loin cloth (pāvāṭa) and
conducts the pūjā. The deity is given a flower garland and
then is taken on the mount of the caparisoned elephant.
The ceremonial umbrella is held on top of it and the
Ambaṭṭan carries the holy lamp. (Plate No.30). The
trustee of the temple carries a plate with bhasmam (holy
ash) and the deity is taken in procession with the
accompaniments of torch, music and dance (neyyānti mēlam).
The procession with the deity is given a reception by the
Hindu families along the way by offering nilaviḷakku,
niṟapaṟa and katir, plantain, coconut and jaggery. Some of
the Īḻava families also place the pictures of Nārāyaṇa Guru
along the way. When the procession arrives at the temple,
the procession is received by the temple authorities and
the priest carries the deity back to the garbhagṛha. After
conducting the pūjā there, the priest lowers the flag from
the koṭimaram (flag staff). It marks the conclusion of the
ten day festival.

The palḷivēṭṭa and āraṭṭu (royal hunt and bath) are
ceremonies commonly found in all major Sanskritic Hindu
temples of southern Kerala. These are done at the Śiva
temple at Kaṭhinamkuḷam and probably it is from there that
the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḷa became familiar with such

ceremonies. These ceremonies, palliv̄eṭṭa and āraṭṭu, have received royal patronage. At the Padmanabhasvāmi (Viṣṇu) Temple, Trivandrum where the kings of Travancore worshipped, both these ceremonies are still performed with great flourish. Rev. Samuel Mateer describing vēṭṭa reported in 1871: "...his Highness [King of Travancore] takes a bow, and fitting an arrow in it, shoots three times into the nuts."[1] According to him this is probably a relic of great hunting expeditions which the sovereigns of southern Kerala indulged in, in former times. Similarly in the āraṭṭu festival of Padmanabhasvāmi Temple, even now Ŝrī Chittira Tirunāl the last king of Travancore, walks on foot to the beach leading the procession and takes a bath with the deities in the sea.[2] The adoption of these celebrations at Puttenkōvil is an effort to keep the SNDP Temple in line with other temples of the State and an assertion that Īḻavas have also the same rights and privileges as the highest castes of Kerala.

The Guru pūjā and hoisting the yellow flag at the temple festival are unique features of Puttenkōvil, as are the observances of Guru Jayanti and Guru Samadhi. On the birthday of Nārāyaṇa Guru (the Guru Jayanti on August 20), the Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa assemble at the temple in the

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[1]Mateer, Samuel, The Land of Charity, 1871, p.167.

[2]See Hatch, Emily Gilchrist, Travancore, London: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1939, p.154.

morning and go out in procession carrying the enlarged photograph of the Guru in an open truck to the nearby places singing songs.[1] The Saṃnyasa Saṃgham of Śivagiri Maṭh organizes meetings at Aruvippuram, Chempaḻanti and Varkala on this day. The Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa generally go to Chempaḻanti to attend the devotional discourses.

On the Samādhi-day (the Guru died on September 12, 1928), they assemble at the Puttenkōvil and prepare rice gruel and participate in a common meal. This gruel is given to all the people who assemble on the occasion. A special pūjā is conducted at the temple on that day. Some respondents said that they prepare the rice gruel in their houses on that day and share it with the poor people in the locality. The interview revealed that 59.89 percent of the Ilavas at Murukkumpuḻa assemble at Puttenkōvil on Guru Jayanti and Guru Samādhi days. At Murukkumpuḻa the Īḻavas are also interested in attending the annual pilgrimage conducted at Varkala. The interviews reveal that 91.43 percent of the Īḻava respondents have attended this pilgrimage.

While the Kōḻimaṭa or Iraṭṭakuḻaṅgara temples do not have any specific welfare programmes for the community, Puttenkōvil in accordance with the teachings of the Guru

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[1]Now cassettes containing devotional songs of the Guru are available in Kerala. Paper Nos.372,373.

has some programmes in that direction. At times of crisis,
the members of the temple committee (SNDP committee) visit
such families and in cases like death they give Rs.101/- to
the mourners of the deceased. Towards this cause, the
Īlavas at Murukkumpuḷa contributeRe.1/- per month. In the
year 1982, the temple committee disbursed Rs.1,515/- for
this cause alone. The annual report indicates that the
Śākha helped certain families at the time of the severe
drought in 1982. When disputes arise among Īlava members,
they seek the help of the temple committee who mediates and
helps them to solve their problems.[1] This is a new
development among the Īlavas of Murukkumpuḷa.

(d)   Keeping Religious Traditions while Reforming

The three temples of Murukkumpuḷa - Kōḷimaṭa,
Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara and Puttenkōvil temples - show different
forms of religion. In these temples the observance of vṛta,
the collection of paddy and coconuts at the time of temple
festivals remain examples of continuity. The serpent
worship (nāgar) is found both at Kōḷimaṭa and Puttenkōvil.
The worship of Māṭan is continued by the devotees at
Kōḷimaṭa and Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara. Following the teachings of
Nārāyaṇa Guru this practice is discontinued by the devotees
at Puttenkōvil. Among the worshippers there are Īlavas who

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[1]Cassette No.5. Paper Nos. 002, 046 and 220.

go to all these temples. They include those who oscillate
between the traditional practice and the reformed one. At
the same time there are a few who worship at Puttenkōvil
and do not go to Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara and Kōḷimaṭa temples.[1]
This group represents the Īḷavas who advocate the reformed
forms of worship.

Religious action at Puthenkōvil is not an entire
reversal of the traditional religious practices of the
Īḷavas. Inspite of the reformation, Īḷavas as part and
parcel of the Hindu community live in the continuity of
their religious tradition. They remain as Hindus and
follow the same scriptures. But in a society that is
subject to change and development, Īḷavas are no
exception. In bringing about the reformation among the
Īḷavas, Nārāyaṇa Guru played a vital and specific role. In
a caste ridden society, the Guru strove for the brotherhood
of all men. In contrast to the Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara temple that
still reveals the traditional caste-pattern of the society,
Puttenkōvil stands for the caste-less ideal of Nārāyaṇa
Guru. The temple accommodates the worship of higher as
well as lower castes. While discontinuing ceremonies such
as gurussi, elapāṭum pūjā, tūkkam and tuḷḷal, Puttenkōvil
embraced Sanskritic practices like palḷivēṭṭa and ārāṭṭu.
It is to be remembered here that the Īḷavas were denied

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[1]Cassette Nos. 47, 52.

these practices once and as an untouchable caste they were kept away from the high caste temples by the Nāirs and the Brāhmans. Īḻavas challenged this discrimination by establishing a Śiva temple of their own. Now they worship like the Nāirs and Brāhmans in a temple similar to the temples of the higher castes. By this they proclaim that they are part of the larger Hindu society holding the same status as any other. Puttenkōvil is thus an expression of the sense of freedom and equality affirmed by the Īḻavas of Murukkumpuḻa. Nevertheless most people still worship at Iraṭṭakuḻaṅgara as well and it still serves as the base temple in the society.

The role of the Ambaṭṭan is found in almost all religious ceremonies of the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa.[1] About a century back his role in the religious ceremonies was dominant and inevitable. Though he is primarily a barber of the Īḻavas, he acts in the capacity of a quasi-priest at all important rites.[2] Traditionally he was an assistant to the chief of the Īḻavas in his executive functions and followed him wherever he went on caste business. He and his wife played their role in ceremonies such as tālikeṭṭu-kalyāṇam, tiraṇṭukuḷi, puṭavakoṭa, puḷikuṭi, sañjayanam and pulakuḷi. Traditionally they were in charge of all the

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[1] The Ambaṭṭan is also known by the name Vātti.

[2] He has a barber-shop at Murukkumpuḻa.

religious and purificatory ceremonies connected with the rites of passage of the Īḷavas.[1] But now the SNDP Śākha takes the initiative and the Ambaṭṭan works under their guidance. The Ambaṭṭan continues his role in the temple festivals. He prepares the wicks for the oil lamps and keeps ready the flowers and garlands. He follows the temple priest in the temple procession holding the ceremonial umbrella at Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara and leads the palliveṭṭa and ārāṭṭu by holding the ceremonial lamps at Puttenkōvil. Thus, as seen in the chapter, the role of the Ambaṭṭan in the religious life of Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa is an example of continuity in spite of extensive change in the pattern of worship.

It appears ironical that an Īḷava temple like Puttenkōvil has a Brāhman priest since 1954. Traditionally it was unheard that a Brāhman goes to a temple of the Īḷavas. In those days Nārāyaṇa Guru trained lower caste men to perform religious ceremonies in the Īḷava temples. But after the temple entry proclamation of 1936 it became possible for all caste persons to visit any temple in southern Kerala. Economic reasons compelled Brahman priests to accept employment in temples belonging to the lower castes. Nārāyaṇa Guru who preached the ideal of 'One Caste' was not against employing Brahmans in Īḷava

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[1] Aiyappan, A., _Iravas and Culture Change_, 1945, p.58.

temples. By employing a Brāhman priest Īlavas also improved their social status. Now both Puttenkōvil and Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara temples employ Brāhman priests. But the uniqueness about Puttenkōvil is that along with other rites in the temple the Brāhman priest conducts Gurupūjā at the Nārāyaṇa Gurumandir each day.

The yellow flag used at Puttenkōvil is a symbol that represents the Nārāyaṇa Movement. Around 1928 Nārāyaṇa Guru exhorted the pilgrims to Śivagiri (Varkala) that they should wear yellow clothes and this colour has since become a symbol of Īlavas in Kerala. Hence, instead of a red flag that is usually used in other temples, Puttenkōvil uses the yellow flag.

The Gurupūjā that started after the death of Nārāyaṇa Guru is an expression of the gratitude the Īlavas show to their leader. The observances of Guru Jayanti and Guru Samādhi are also such expressions. Though the priest conducts the traditional Gurupūjā (Sanskritic), the Īlavas see Nārāyaṇa Guru in a new role as their leader who liberated them from the clutches of the caste hierarchy and granted them religious freedom and social status. A Guru is one who removes the ignorance of a person and enriches him with knowledge. He is a source of enlightenment. The worship before Gurumandir inspires and reminds them of

their freedom and responsibility. It rekindles in them the spirit of liberation and reminds them that Nārāyaṇa Guru liberated them from caste bondage. The daily pūjā and the annual religious observances and the devotional discourses act as forces of coherence (centripetal force) that bring the Īḷavas together. It grants them a sense of identity (self identity and shared identity) and renews their commitment. It propagates the Īḷava movement and holds the community together.

A transition toward a completely democratic organization is another feature that we see at Puttenkōvil. It has been noted that a village temple like Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara is still owned and managed by a family. A significant change related to the Puttenkōvil is the emergence of the SNDP Śākha as an organization of the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa. On the State level, the SNDP Yōgam is a political pressure group in contrast to the exclusively religious role played by the Saṃnyāsa Saṃgham of Śivagiri Maṭh. But the SNDP Śākha at Murukkumpuḷa is a religious organization and has minimal political involvement. The Śākha committee is elected by the Īḷava members in a democratic manner. The committee appoints the temple priest, gives him a salary and regulates all the ceremonies in the temple. The interest of the Śākha in the development of the temple and the welfare of the society is

conspicuous in their initiative in constructing a new
Gaṇapati-kōvil and flag staff for the temple, and Marriage
Reception Hall and auditorium for the benefit of the
people.[1] As a religious organization the Śākha binds the
Īḻavas together and grants them a sense of identity and
strength.

In short, institutional life and organizational
principles of modern life are found even in the management
of temples and celebration of festivals. New temples of
Īḻavas are owned and manged by the SNDP, rather than by
individuals or families as happened in the past. SNDP,
being an association of all Īḻavas, provides the
opportunity for the participation of all people along
democratic lines. Equality has become a central notion in
organizing religious activities. Human oneness beyond all
caste divisions has been established by Nārāyaṇa Guru. The
weak and the oppressed are not pushed aside or forced to
remain in their own situations. Rather, they are given
special attention and care by the organization of all
people, the SNDP. The well-being of everyone has gained
acceptance. Temple life and festivals continue not to
reinforce hierarchy and special privilege but on the new

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[1]Even though Iraṭṭakulaṅgara temple is older than
Puttenkōvil, such developments are not very much seen
there. Puttenkōvil being a temple of the people, it meets
their requirements.

basis of 'One Caste, One Religion and One God for Man'.
The temple observances, though continued in the Hindu
religious tradition, have been modified as demanded by
modern times.

Beyond the action of the rituals, festivals and
temple worship, there was an added dimension to the
consecration of the temple by Nārāyaṇa Guru at
Murukkumpuḷa. That Nārāyaṇa Guru chose to place a metallic
disc with the inscription 'AUM, Satyam, Dharmam, Dayā,
Śānti' at Puttenkōvil and repeatedly asked his followers to
grow in wisdom (by vidyā) points to the higher ideals he
had in mind for the reformation. He was not against the
consecration of Śiva Temples for the Īḻavas. So he
conceded to the request of the people to install a
Śivaliṅgam. But that he came with a metallic disc with an
inscription on it indicates that he had a plan (not simply
the intention of consecrating a temple) and had a definite
purpose in his act of installation. Further in our
analysis of rituals and temple worship we have noted that
the reformatory measures of Nārāyaṇa Guru discarded some of
the traditional practices and modernized the religious
tradition. In this he was drawing a line between the
essentials and non-essentials in the religious practices
which he thought was necessary for the modernization of the
religion of Īḻavas. The criterion behind this
differentiation was the importance given to reason. Hence

the Guru's attempt to introduce a rationality which, however, conformed to the spiritual rationality based on religion.

Any person begins his religious experience with the patterns he receives from his religious tradition. It enables him to mould his life to carry out his dharma in the best possible manner in his historical context and assures him the possibility of embracing the Ultimate (Transcendent Reality). Nārāyaṇa Guru and the Īlava Community of southern Kerala shared the Hindu religious tradition. But the caste order (varṇāśrama) designed for the flowering of human personality and maintenance of social order was not satisfactory (meaningful) to Nārāyaṇa Guru because he and his caste community were not treated as equals with other caste groups of Kerala. The religious and social system of his day considered them as untouchables and outcastes. This social system did not give satisfactory direction and meaning to the life of the Īlavas in a modernizing world. A change was found to be necessary to this order of society. Towards this end Nārāyaṇa Guru adopted the means of reformation to the existing Hindu Religious Tradition. He questioned the existence of the caste order and said emphatically that mankind is one. According to him Īlavas as Hindus can have significance in society only when they have an active participation in the larger Hindu Society. Knowing that

the problems were rooted in ignorance (avidyā) he exhorted the people to seek wisdom (vidyā) and emphasized the inculcation of virtues in individual and social life. He understood temples as places of learning and recognized worship at temples (places of spiritual birth) as a transcendental experience of virtues such as 'Satyam, Dharmam, Dayā, Śānti' (Truth, Righteousness, Compassion and Peace). He advocated not only regular worship but also frequent study classes (religious discourses). He repeatedly said: 'what we need today are not temples but educational institutions'. His religious reform brought with it a social awakening. The reforms of Nārāyaṇa Guru (his dharma) which he started among the Īḷavas was aimed at the restoration of the whole world (saṁsāra) as indicated by his dictum 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man'. He wanted all of life to be made meaningful. In a world of vested interests the Guru advocated the cultivation of moral values. He considered religion as having both spiritual and social dimensions. It helps persons to march toward final liberation (mokṣa - the Ultimate spiritual destiny) and also to carry out meaningfully their dharma (maintenance of cosmic and moral order).

The reformed rituals and the worship at Puttenkōvil (instead of Iraṭṭakuḷaṅgara) often serve to bring an awareness to the Īḷavas at Murukkumpuḷa that they are a part of a particular reformed community. In worship, not

only does one experience his membership in the new community but also transcends the socio-political boundaries to the cosmic reality that in turn gives meaning and a new perspective to all the mundane realities of which one is a part. Worship and rituals can therefore catalyze change. Rituals and festivals that are performed with interest grant both identity and transformation. Ritual renews the person with moral demands in the context of his mundane life. On the other hand the meaning, significance and effectivness of ritual is enhanced by one's historical context. Thus participation in the ritual, temple worship and festival can become means for the devout to become new persons possessed with new visions relevant in his context and meaningful in his quest for the 'beyond'.

The temple and the particular form it has enables the reaffirmation of 'roots' in the lives of the devotees. In the case of the Puttenkovil at Murukkumpuḻa even though the new temple structure is more Sanskritic, it reassures the Īḻavas that they as a Hindu community share the Hindu religious tradition. Thus Sanskritization brings meaning in the process of modernization. The festivals remind the Īḻavas that the Divine is active in the mundane world. The palḷivēṭṭa and the ārāṭṭ of the Puttenkōvil serve this purpose. Further, the temple procession where the symbol of the Ultimate is processed through the streets is a meeting point of the Divine and the Mundane. Here the

Divine is conceived as blessing the world of his domain while the onlookers adore the Divine.

Nārāyaṇa Guru reaffirmed that Hinduism can take serious account of human values and secular interests and give spiritual support to them. This he made a practical experience in the lives of Īḻavas, a once outcaste community. This to the Īḻavas proved a modernization process. This modernization movement within Hinduism initiated by Nārāyaṇa Guru has two particular aspects:

1. A search for a new humanism.

2. An ethical and spiritual approach to the problems of life.

The awakening of the Īḻavas of southern Kerala was a spiritual and radical demand for a meaningful human existence. The untouchable community (Īḻavas) realized that they are not untouchables but have personalities (manhood) like any other persons belonging to the high or low castes. They were awakened to a new sense of human dignity and rejected the idea of untouchability. Their search for new humanism was a spiritual awakening within their religious tradition. At the same time the reformed religious history recognized the enhanced individuality of a person and a new sense of his social and cosmic

relatedness. For instance, when the joint family was divided into nuclear families individuals became more significant and each member had to engage in relationships with the outside world (no longer was it done for him) on his own. In this process he became conscious of his individual existence and his responsibility in the world. His self (ātman or personhood) therefore was not only an individual self but also an extension of the Universal self (Brahman). In this humanism man has a sense of his rights. He also has the responsibility to participate in the formation of a new society where there is economic development, social justice, political participation and respect for the dignity of the human person.

Man needs a positive note on which to approach the problems of his life. The sense of moral responsibility that a man has (about himself and society) enables him to be involved actively in the human struggle. The authority of his moral responsibility (an ethical and spiritual approach to the problems of daily life) is derived from his religion. In this spiritual struggle, which is transcendent and immanent, he confronts the Ultimate Reality (AUM) and finds meaning in virtues such as Truth, Righteousness, Compassion and Peace'. This becomes the summum bonum of his life and the object worthy of his worship. This the Īḷavas of Murukkumpuḷa learned from Nārāyaṇa Guru.

VIII. CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The Īḻava awakening is an unbroken continuity with
the Hindu religious tradition. It is not a 'break through'
or a 'take off' from Hinduism. It is an affirmation of
their identity as Īḻavas, a group of the Hindus of Kerala.
Their religious tradition has grown from its ancient roots
and now the Īḻavas admire and entertain their tradition
with great interest. The result of their awakening was not
a conversion from one religion to another but a reformation
of the same religious thought and practice. Nārāyaṇa Guru
in advocating reforms sought the support of the Hindu
Scriptures. His philosophy was in line with the advaitic
teachings of Śrī Śankarācārya. The Guru restated the
fundamental principles and concepts of Hinduism. In this
he taught that mankind is one and caste distinctions are
unnecessary. He emphasized the dignity of man and the need
to take his world seriously. By his teaching of 'One
Caste, One Religion, One God for Man' he discouraged all
tendencies toward conversion and wiped away the distinction
between the high and the low castes. He contextualized

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religion and gave a deeper theological and spiritual
insight into the common urge of the Īḻavas for human
dignity, development and of unity.

Along with continuity there is change in the
awakening of the Īḻavas of southern Kerala. We have seen
in the earlier chapters that the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa
discontinued some of their practices that ceased to be
viable in the modern context and continued others that they
could find meaning in. In the ritual of marriage they
discontinued tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam, retained the tāli rite and
incorporated new elements such as kanyādānam and
pāṇigrhana, while in the funeral ceremonies they gave up
practices such as vāykkari and kōtiyituka. In the
reformation of temple worship, the worship of Māṭan, Maṟuta
and Yakṣi was given up and the worship of Sanskritic
deities and modern symbols were adopted. Likewise in
temple festivals they gave up gurussi, tūkkam and tuḷḷal
and embraced vēṭṭa and ārāṭṭu. In this pattern of change
among the Īḻavas one observes a process of selection,
interpretation and integration. As an advocate of change
Narayana Guru interpreted the meaning and relevance of

these changes. Later through the SNDP Yōgam Nārāyaṇa Guru
sent out able leaders to speak and interpret these reforms
which were aimed at the progress of the community. The
maintenance of an unbroken relationship between the
traditional and the modern while assisting the progress of
the community is here seen as the process of modernity.

The changes among the Īḻavas that fit with the
concept of modernity have the following characteristics:

1. A Leadership of the Elite and
Reorientation of Values

The process of change among the Īḻavas became
intensified under the leadership of elite persons such as
Nārāyaṇa Guru, Dr. Palpu and Kumāran Āśān. They were all
Īḻavas of southern Kerala who shared the common religious
tradition. They became conscious of the backwardness and
low status of their community and questioned the existence
of the hierarchical caste structure. Nārāyaṇa Guru
interpreted the scriptures and attempted to bring about a
spiritual awakening and social movement among the Īḻavas.

The Guru helped the Īḻavas to adopt practices that were modern, while preserving the core values of things that were traditional. In reforming the ritual the Guru attempted both simplification and revitalization of the traditional practices. He played the role of an ascetic Guru and led an exemplary life. His life was an example of openness both in his attitude to all castes of people and in his attitude to other religions. He mingled with the ordinary people and knew directly their struggles and pains. His moral and spiritual discipline with its simplicity influenced a large number of people. He recognized three immediate needs of the Īḻava society, viz., removal of ignorance, eradication of economic backwardness and regeneration of the community.

Dr. Palpu, a medical practioner, drafted the Īḻava Memorial. He made both the people and the government conscious of the privileges that had been denied. He concentrated his efforts on providing educational facilities for the Īḻavas of both sexes and seeking equal opportunities of employment for them along with the other religious communities. He spent his time, money and energy to fight for these causes.

Kumāran Āśān through his literary works awakened
the public to evaluate the existing religious and social
values. He said that a spiritual awakening of Hinduism is
possible by virtue of its inherent strength. He spoke at
the Śrī Mūlam Assembly for the due rights of the Īḻavas and
other low castes of Kerala. He advocated the need to start
local industries and encouraged the lower castes in
technical education. He said that the lower castes, given
an equal opportunity, are capable of progressing in
society. He spoke at the Assembly for proper
representation of the lower castes at the State level and
providing equal opportunities for all in the public
services. He initiated discussions on the law regarding
marriage, succession and prohibition of pollution practices.

Though these three leaders had their individual
roles to play, they together awakened and organized the
Īḻavas under the new banner of the SNDP Yōgam. All three
of them died in the 1920s, but the Movement that began in
the latter half of the nineteenth century continued with
new leaders such as T.K. Mādhavan, C. Kēśavan and R.
Śankar. At Murukkumpuḻa, the Pāṇur family took the

leadership in giving their family temple to Nārāyaṇa Guru
as a base for his reformation and later a few families
initiated a movement to expand its activities. Soon the
SNDP Śākha, with its committee of elected members took over
the activities. The educated leaders maintained a sense of
cultural continuity and worked as effective carriers of the
process of modernity. They perpetuated a modified system
and a different ideology and devised regulative mechanisms
to sustain the process of change. At the same time they
did not alienate themselves from the mass of people.
Instead they maintained their affinity and compatibility.
In the words of Robert Bellah, these personalities
'absorbed' change without risking either stagnation or
breakdown.[1]

The pattern of change among the Īḻavas exhibits a
reorientation of values. As seen earlier the traditional
hierarchical caste structure subjugated the lower castes
including the Īḻavas. The leaders found the caste
observances to be stumbling blocks that stood against the
progress of the individual and society. The 'One Caste'
ideal of Nārāyaṇa Guru was to let loose the bonds of

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[1]Bellah, Robert. N., Beyond Belief, New York:
Harper and Row Publishers, 1970, p.67.

hierarchical caste structure and emphasize the equality of

man. The elite leaders of the Īḻava community by their

social and religious reforms tried to create an environment

where each person would feel the worth of his individuality

(personhood) to act, choose, control and direct his life.

For instance in reforming the system of marriage, the Īḻava

leaders spoke against both polygamy and polyandry. They

held that the individual whether man or woman is important,

he or she is not to be taken for granted and human life is

to be respected. In the Īḻava movement man was seen as a

responsible social being who has a moral responsibility

towards other members of his family and society. This

position has various nuances. It may not have always

worked in the same way in their attitudes towards castes

conventionally higher than themselves and towards castes

lower than themselves. The principal implication of it is

the freedom and the equality in temple worship and

attendance at religious rites. Here the attitude toward

groups traditionally below themselves was open, positive

and clear cut. In other respects too, in principle, the

same attitude applies, although the expression of it has to

be concededly more gradual.

2. A Rationalisic and Democratic Approach
that Determines the Direction of Change

The process of change put a stop to the traditional practice of having a privileged class at the top dominating over a vast majority of submissive followers. It has democratized the religious and social structure of the Īḷavas. Now their organization is constituted by the people and for the people. Speaking about the process of modernity, Robert Bellah says: "The direction of change was not to be decided by reference to any fixed or given authority in the past, but only through reason and discussion..."[1]

In the case of the Īḷava awakening the leaders met often to discuss and evaluate the courses of action soon after the temple at Aruvippuram was consecrated in 1888. A committee was then constituted which discussed and determined its activities. Later when more temples were consecrated, the SNDP Yogam was formed in 1903 and it encouraged an even wider participation of the people. The process of change thus became a movement of the people. In

[1] Bellah, Robert. N., Beyond Belief, 1917, p.66.

the case of the Īḻavas at Murukkumpula it is the SNDP
Śākha, a committee elected from the people and by the
people, that determines the activities of the community.

A rational attitude results in the readiness of the
people to give up customs or attitudes that do not appeal
to them. If a rational attitude is not the basis of
change, superstition will creep in even in the reformed
practices. Again if rationality is not the basis the
people will be reluctant to give up customs and will
continue to practice the same until the change appeals to
them. The case of the Īḻavas at Murukkumpuḻa who asked for
the consecration of a Śiva Linga at Puttenkōvil is an
example. At that time, the local people could not envisage
a temple with only a disc containing the sacred words
engraved on it. So while accepting the innovation of
Nārāyana Guru, they asked for the installation of the Śiva
Linga. The Guru who wanted only the disc to be placed in
the temple did not object to the popular demand. Instead
he listened and allowed them to have a Śiva Linga in
addition.

3. An Expression of Freedom and
Responsibility among the Members

In the process of change, the Īḻavas revolted
against the authoritarianism of the traditional caste
structure. The Īḻavas as a community were enslaved as an
untouchable group. In their awakening they broke their
traditional dependance on the higher castes and moved
towards the freedom of the community. Traditionally the
Īḻavas were considered ritually impure and therefore they
were kept away from the temples and homes of the higher
castes. Practices such as untouchability,
unapproachability and unperceivability were all done in the
name of ritual purity and religious practices. Again only
Brāhmans could consecrate temples and conduct pūjā
therein. The Īḻavas questioned the superiority of the
higher castes and broke the monopoly of the Brāhmans by
consecrating temples of their own and appointing Īḻava
priests to minister there. Further they questioned the
concept of ritual purity by speaking against it at the Śrī
Mūlam Assembly, and organizing agitations before the caste
temples at Vaikkam and Guruvāyūr. They pressurized the

government to bring legal measures against the practice of
pollution distance. The Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936
was the result of this struggle.

While the Īḻavas sought religious and
socio-economic freedom they were also shouldering higher
responsibilities. In breaking the caste hierarchy, they
became conscious that on the one hand they were losing
their traditional dependence on the higher castes and on
the other hand were assuming responsibilities in order to
fortify their freedom. In consecrating the temples they
had the responsibility of administering them, training
Īḻava priests to minister there and keeping the devotees
united. In dividing the joint-family into nuclear familes,
the individual members felt the responsibility of
maintaining mutual care and service in the family. In
seeking freedom from caste occuptions, the Īḻavas felt the
responsibility of learning new skills to seek employment
and to start industries. In this process of change,
Nārāyaṇa Guru exhorted the rich to care for the poor and
the educated to educate the uneducated. Thus along with

freedom each individual felt a responsibility to participate in the formation of a new society where there would be economic development, equality, social justice, political participation, and respect for the dignity of the person. The new order freed the individual and opened avenues for a more individualistic,egalitarian and cosmopolitan society.

4. A Social Mobility based on Equality and an Overall Development

The Īḻavas who wanted freedom from the enslaving caste structure desired equal status not only with other caste Hindus but also with other religious communities. When the Nāir community demanded the rights of the natives of Kerala through the Malayāḷi Memorial, the Īḻavas supported it; but soon they became conscious of their own need for freedom and submitted an Īḻava Memorial. The fact that the Nāir, Īḻava and the St. Thomas Christian leaders such as Paṭṭam Tānu Piḷḷai, C. Kēśavan and T.M. Varghese respectively (leaders of the State Congress), soon thereafter moved together and spoke from the same platform

was an expression of equality that the Īlavas were seeking in southern Kerala.

The traditional worship had its own characteristics which kept them closed within the caste boundaries. Their temples had only masonry platforms or pītha for their deities and their temple festivals consisted of animal sacrifice, tūkkam and tullal. The Īlavas got liberated from these caste boundaries by adopting more rational forms of worship and developing temples of their own. In this they sought equality with higher castes of Hindus and this found expression even in employing Brāhman priests in the Īlava temples.

Nārāyana Guru accepted the process of Sanskritization as far as it involved the worship of deities according to Hindu religious literature. But he rejected Sanskritization as far as it imposed a caste system and the hierarchical stratification of society. Like wise, Nārāyana Guru accepted the process of Westernization as far as it helped humanization and the progress of the society but he rejected it as far as it

imposed foreign culture and created a new caste within the
indigenous society. Nārāyaṇa Guru in reforming the
religious rituals attempted a process of modernization by
reforming the traditional practices. He simplified and
revitalized some of the rituals and helped the Īlavas to
adopt practices that are modern.

According to Eisenstadt, "there is no single road
to modernity".[1] The overall development of the Īlava
community is visible in the social, religious, educational,
political, and economic spheres. In the reform movement,
Nārāyaṇa Guru did not segregate religion entirely from the
socio-economic environment. He saw social justice as part
of the religious life and honouring the dignity of the
individual person (man and woman) as religious action. He
recognized spiritual objectives in the socio-economic
change. Issues of an economic, social and political nature
were brought repeatedly to the surface and they were
evaluated from time to time along with questions of
religion.

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[1]Eisenstadt., Modernization: Protest and Change,
1966, p.45.

5. A Network of Institutions that Propagate
the Movement and Hold the Community Together.

The development of organized living that holds the
community together is another aspect of the process of
modernity that one finds among the Īḻavas of southern
Kerala. The organization of the SNDP in 1903 marked the
beginning of this venture. Subsequently the SNDP Yōgam
turned its attention to the establishments of temples,
educational institutions and charitable organizations. The
Yōgam also focussed its attention in the field of politics.

Education is a modernizing agent. It confers on the
lower castes a respectability which is otherwise difficult
to achieve. Education disrupts the harmony of a
traditional society as the young educated people question
the accepted practices of the society. It provides the
society with elite leaders who speak on the importance of
education and the need to reform the traditional
practices. Nārāyaṇa Guru spoke on the importance of
education for the emancipation of the Īḻavas; Kumāran Āsān

fought for the right of the Īḻavas to study in government schools and the SNDP Yōgam started several educational institutions mainly for the benefit of the Īḻavas.

Politicization is part of the process of modernity and an alternate form of social mobility. We have already noted the significant role the Īḻavas have in the political life of Kerala. In the present political set up every person, irrespective of wealth or status has one vote. The Īḻavas form the largest religious group in Kerala and hence they are powerful. We have noted that they had a significant role to play in the Joint Political Congress and the State Congress. 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 licences and permits necessary for trading and undertaking other economic enterprises. Since Independence, the SNDP Yōgam has been a political pressure group trying to attain greater status and political opportunities for the Īḻavas.

As we have noted earlier there are other
institutions such as the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Saṁgham, the
Śrī Nārāyaṇa Gurukulam, the Śrī Nārāyaṇa Cultural Mission
and the Śivagiri Pilgrimage. These are functionally
different institutions and they specialize in their
specific functions. The habits and attitudes of the Īḻavas
have also found expression in the institutionalized
celebrations such as Guru Jayanti, Guru Samādhi and
Guru-Pūjā. All these institutions give variety, division
of labour and stability to the movement. They modify the
existing traditions, prevent breakdown or regression and
create room for new and better traditions.

Thus the general pattern of the process of
modernity among the Īḻavas of southern Kerala is a process
of continuity and change. It has the characteristic
patterns of change such as (i) a leadership of the elite
and reorientation of values, (ii) a rationalistic and
democratic approach that determines the direction of
change, (iii) an expression of freedom and responsibility
among the members, (iv) a social mobility based on equality
and an overall development and (v) a net work of

institutions that propagate the movement and holds the community together. These characteristics prevent stagnation and breakdown and sustain the process of modernization. As the tradition of today was the modernity of yesterday, so the modernity of today will be the tradition of tomorrow.

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Plate: 2 Guru Samādhi Mandir, Śivagiri

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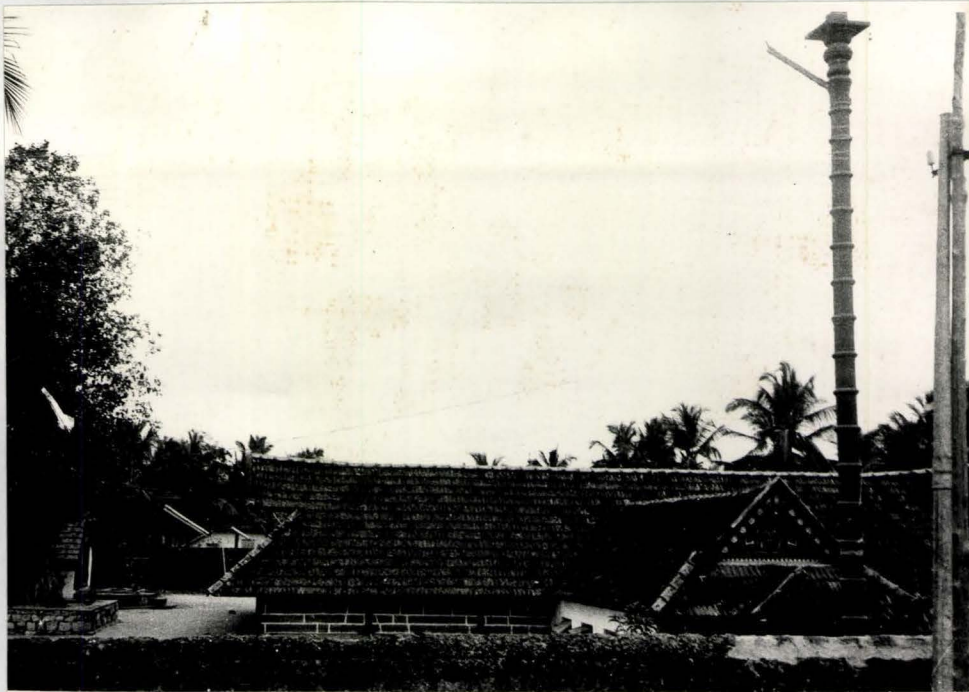
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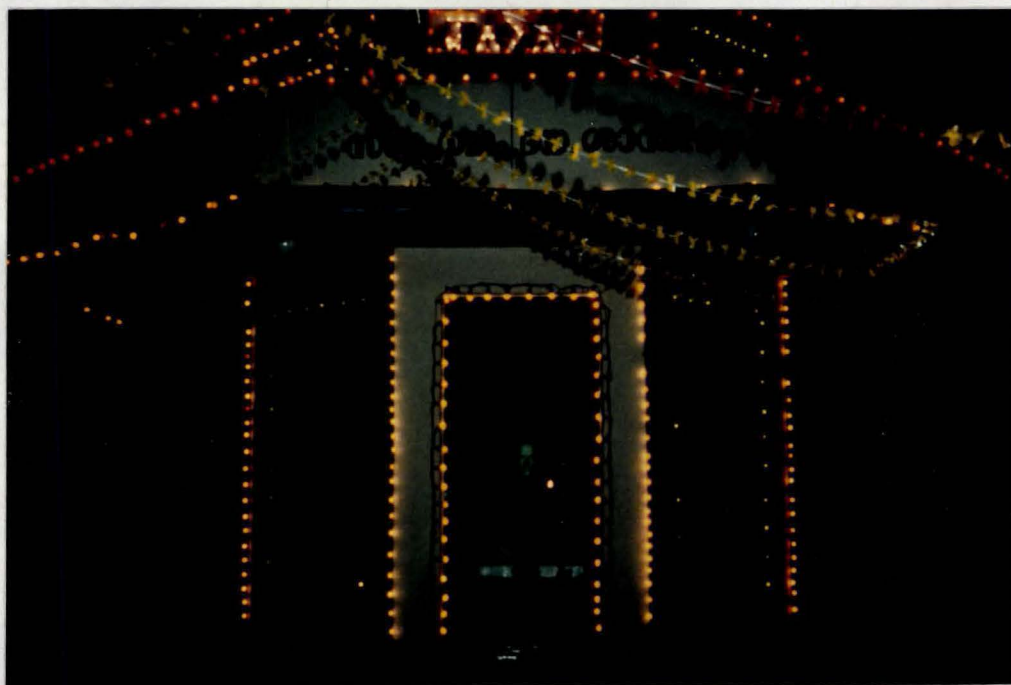
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Plate: 30   Temple Procession: Puttenkōvil

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Acre	– Measurement of land. 1 Acre = 100 cents.
Advaita	– Non-duality; name of a major philosophical school set forth by Śrī Śankara in the eighth century.
Agarbatti	– Sandalwood wicks.
Aluvancēri-Tamprākkaḷ	– Chief of Nambūtiris
Ambalavāsi	– A caste group attached to the temple and below the Brāhmans in rank.
Ambaṭṭan	– Barber. He has the role of a quasi-priest in all rituals of the Īḻavas.
Ambaṭṭatti	– Wife of Ambaṭṭan.
Ammāi	– Wife of the Kāraṇavan (eldest male of a joint family).
Aṁśam	– Village
Antarāḷa	– Inner passage way in a temple complex.
Arattam Uḻiyuka	– A ceremony done with a lamp in a plate (tālam) to ward off all mishaps of a new member (bride) entering the house (of bridegroom).
Artha	– Material well being. The second of the four 'ends of man' in Hinduism.
Aṭiyān	– Servant; bonded labourer.
Avarṇās	– Lower class among Hindus; opposite of savarṇa.
Avidyā	– Ignorance; that which distorts man's view of reality.

Ayyappan	– Name of the deity at Śabarimala.
Ayyanār	– A folk/rural god in Tamil-Nāṭu.
Ācārā	– Traditions.
Ācārya	– Spiritual leader. Ācāram = custom, ritual
Āltara	– Ritual floor around a pipal tree.
Ānakkoṭṭil	– Shed for the temple elephant.
Ārāṭṭu	– Ceremonial bath of the temple deity, – conducted on the last day of temple festival followed with procession.
Āryar	– Members of the temple committee.
Āśram(am)	– Religious order, hermitage, school.
Āśramās	– The four stages in the development of the life of man: student, householder, forest dweller and ascetic.
Ātman	– The permanent self realized on both the cosmic and individual levels
Bāhyabhitti	– Outer wall of the temple-building
Bali	– Sacrifice, religious rite, ancestral rite
Balikkāran	– The Chief mourner. When there are more people they are together called balikkar.
Balipīṭham	– Platform for offerings.
Balippura	– The shed (booth) where bali is performed.
Bhadrakāḷipāṭṭu	– A song in praise of the goddess Bhadrakāḷi
Bhagavati	– Goddess.

Bhikṣu	– A Buddhist monk.
Bhakti	– Devotion (to the deity)
Bharaṇi	– Earthern jar.
Bhasmam	– Holy ash, Vibhūti.
Brahman	– The usual name for Ultimate Reality.
Brāhman	– The highest caste made up of priests and scholars.
Brahmasvam	– Property belonging to Brāhman janmi
Cādjan	– The dried leaf of the palmyra tree
Ceṇta	– A musical instrument; drum.
Ceṇtamēlam	– Music of the instrument Centa
Chaṭṭampi	– Class leader.
Chāver	– Suicide squads; literally means 'dying men'.
Chowki	– Custom-house.
Cita	– Funeral pyre
Crore	– 10 million
Cuṭṭambalam	– rooms and wall around the inner sanctum of a temple.
Dakṣiṇa	– Religious fee offered to the priests performimg rituals.
Dalava	– The title used in Travancore to signify the office of the Chief Minister till the early 19th Century.
Dānam	– Gift.

Darbha	- Kuśa grass; a leaf used for Hindu religious rituals.
Darśana	- Philosophy; literally 'a view' of reality.
Dēśam	- A territorial division.
Dēśavāli	- A local chieftain
Dēvasvam	- Property belonging to temple.
Dēvī	- Goddess.
Dharma	- Cosmic, ritual and moral order, a comprehensive term denoting duty, religion, morality, law, etc.,
Dharma-pālaka	- Protector of Dharma
Dharma Śāstra	- Hindu canonical books on Dharma.
Dīkṣā	- Consecration/religious initiation; in the text it means a religious observance of growing hair and beard.
Dikpālakar	- Guardian deities of the eight points.
Dipārādhana	- Worship by waving the lamp in circles.
Divān	- Chief Minister of a princely State. He is also called Daḷava
Eṭṭarayōgam	- Council of eight trustee at Padmanābhaśvāmi Temple, Trivandrum.
Gaṇapati	- An elephant headed deity, eldest son of Śiva.
Garbhagṛha	- Sanctum Sanctorum of a Hindu temple; literally 'womb-house'.
Gōpura	- The entrance tower of a temple.

Grāmam	- Village.
Gurumandir	- House of the Guru-shrine.
Guru	- Spiritual leader,religious teacher.
Guru Jayanti	- Birthday of a spiritual leader.
Guru Samādhi-Mandiram	- A house built on the burial place of a spiritual leader.
Gurussi	- Ceremonial sacrifice before the deity.
Hariharaputra	- Son of Siva and Visnu i.e. Ayyappan.
Harijans	- The name literally means "Man of God" (Children of Visnu) coined by Mahatma Gandhi to the untouchables; or the members of the lowest castes among Hindus.
Hōmam	- Oblation by burning the materials in fire.
Iḷayat	- Family priest of Nāirs.
Illam	- House of a Nambūtiri Brāhman
Irumuṭikeṭṭu	- A bag having two cells carried by the pilgrims to Sabarimala.
Ilapāṭum pūjā	- Worship with harvest basket
Jātha	- Procession
Janmi	- Landlord.
Janmikaram	- Rent due to the landlord from the tenants.
Jñāna	- Knowledge, saving wisdom or divine vision.

Kacca	- A piece of cloth
Kaikoṭṭi-kaḷi	- A group game in which girls clap their hands and dance.
Kaḷari	- Gymnasium or Military Training Centre.
Kāṇam	- A system of land tenure under which the tenant holds land by paying a fixed sum to the Janmi for a specified period.
Kaṇi	- First sight in the morning.
Kāṇikka	- Money offering
Kaṇiyān	- Astrologer caste.
Kanyādānam	- Gift of the girl (bride), part of the marriage ceremony.
Kañji	- Rice gruel
Kara	- The subdivision of a village.
Karam	- Tax.
Kāraṇavan	- Senior male member of a joint family (generally matriarchal family)
Karayōgam	- Branch office of the Nair Service Society in a locality.
Karma	- Action; also the law by which actions receive their due reward in successive modes of existance.
Kaṭavu	- Ferry.
Katir	- Efflorescence of the Coconut tree.
Katirmaṇḍapam	- Marriage booth
Kaṭṭacōr	- A large ball of rice.
Kaṭṭappaṇam	- Gift of money to the bereaved family

Kaṭṭil	– A special cot
Kāvaṇam	– Marriage booth also known as katir-maṇḍapam
Kāvu	– wood
Keṭṭuvaḷḷam	– A small version of dhow, masula boat.
Kiṇṭi	– Spout vessal
Kīrtan	– Devotional hymn
Koḷḷi	– fire-brand
Kōṭi	– Unwashed cloth.
Koṭimaram	– Flag staff in a religious place.
Kōṭiyiṭuka	– Putting a new cloth, part of death ritual
Kōvil	– Temple
Kōyiladhikārikaḷ	– The officer in charge of the temples
Kṣatriya	– Warrior caste
Kumkum	– Red-powder
Kurava	– Shrill sound made by the women on auspicious occasions.
Kuṟi	– Dot put on the fore-head, Tilak mark
Kūtāram	– Tent
Kuṭikiṭappukār	– Hutment dwellers in the land of a landlord.
Kuṭiyāns	– Tenants.
Kūṭṭam	– Assembly of elders in a local area.
Kuṭṭipandal	– Small pandal

Lakh	- 100,000
Liṅga	- Representation of Siva.
Lōk Sabha	- Lower house of the Indian Parliament.
Maccambi	- Son of the maternal uncle
Madhuramkoṭukkal	- Giving the sweets; part of marriage ceremony.
Mahārājā	- Great king.
Makkattāyam	- Patrilineal system of inheritance
Malar	- Rice pop
Malayāḷam	- Dravidian tongue spoken in Kerala.
Mangaḷasūtram	- Auspicious thread tied around the neck of the bride in marriage ceremony
Mangaḷasūtra-bandhana	- Tying of the tāli (Mangalasutram).
Maṇṇān	- Washer-man, caste name
Maṇṇāppēṭi	- Fear from Mannan, an untouchable communtiy.
Maṇtram	- Prayer, Vēdic formula
Mārga	- Conventions; literally means 'path'
Marumakkattāyam	- Matrilineal system of inheritance
Maṟuta	- A deity said to have control over the spirits of small pox.
Maryāda	- Customs, limit, boundary.
Māṭampimār	- Nair nobles
Māṭan	- A god worshipped out of fear.

Maṭham	– Monastery/Hindu religious institution.
Māṭṭukacca	– Washed clothes given by washer woman (called Maṇṇātti) for purification.
Māyā	– Mysterious veiling power of the world; 'Illusion'
Mēlkōyma	– Over lordship; taxation right
Mōkṣa	– Spiritual salvation.
Muhūrtam	– Auspicious hour
Muṇṭu	– Loin garment.
Mūrti tara	– Shrine
Muṭippura	– Small pandal
Nādasvaram	– Music of a group of wind/pipe instruments.
Nāgakallu	– Stone for snake worship.
Nāgar	– Serpant
Nāir	– A caste of Kerala whose traditional occupation was fighting in battles.
Nakṣatra	– Star
Nālambalam	– Temple houses enclosing the Śrī Kōvil on its four sides.
Nālukeṭṭu	– Architectural structure of a traditional joint-family having rooms on all four sides enclosing an open space at the centre.
Namaskāra-maṇḍapa	– A particular place in the temple where people worship.

Nambūtiri	- A Brāhman caste in Kerala
Nandi	- Mount of Śiva
Naṭumuttam	- Central courtyard of a Nālukeṭṭu house
Nāṭ	- A district; a territorial division
Nāṭuvāḻi	- A local chieftain or king.
Nēriatu	- A long cloth of fine texture worn by ladies.
Neyyānti mēḷam	- A type of dance with instrumental - music
Nilaviḷakku	- A wick-lamp made of brass
Nirakuṭam	- Earthern pot filled with water
Niranāḻi	- A measure of rice
Nirapara	- Bushal of paddy
Nīrum pālum	- A combination of fruits, cakes, flour, milk, ghee and saffron powder given for snakes as part of snake worship.
Nivarttana	- Abstention.
Nivēdyam	- Food offering to the deity.
Ōṇam	- The National festival of Kerala which falls in August-September every year.
Pañcagavyam	- Combination of five products of the cow - cowdung, cow-urine, cow-milk, butter milk and clarified butter.
Paḷḷivēṭṭa	- Royal hunt, part of the temple festival.

Panchāyat	– Literally 'the council of five', arbitrators who settle disputes and govern the community in minor affairs.
Paṇṭāravaka	– Belonging to the government
Paṟa	– A grain measure in Kerala 1 paṟa = 10 Iṭangaḷi 1 Iṭangaḷi = 4 Nāḷi
Paraśurāma	– An 'avatāra'of Viṣṇu; Rāma with an axe, a brahman hero of the epic Mahābhārata who cleared the earth of Kṣatriyās and gave it to Brāhmans.
Paratavar	– A fishing community of Kerala also known as Bharatavar
Paṟayeṭuppu	– Collection of grains for the temple expense
Paṭippura	– Porch
Paṭṭayam	– Title-deed given to land-owners specifying details of their property
Paṭukka	– Harvest-basket
Paṭṭini kañji	– Starvation-gruel
Pācaka-śāla	– Kitchen space
Pāṇigṟhaṇa	– Holding the hands, part of the marriage ceremony
Pāṭṭukaḷ	– Songs or ballads.
Pāvāṭa	– loin cloth; lower garment of women.
Pāyassam	– rice pudding.
Perumāḷ	– King of Kerala
Pilāvu	– Jack-tree
Piḷḷayeṭuttu- tūkkam	– 'Hook hanging' with a child in hand
Pīṭham	– Slightly raised platform

Poṅkāla	– Ceremony of preparing rice pudding
Potuvāḷ	– Secretary of the temple
Praṇāḷa	– water spout of the garbhagrha.
Prasādam	– Sacred items distributed after worship
Pratista	– Idol
Pūjā	– Worship, offerings to a deity
Pūjāri	– Priest
Pula	– Period of bereavement and pollution
Pulakuḷi	– Ceremonial bath for purification connected with death ritual.
Pulappēṭi	– Fear from Pulayas, a lower caste community
Pulayan	– Lower untouchable caste working in fields.
Puḷi	– Tamarind
Puḷikuṭi	– Pregnancy-rite drinking the tamarind juice
Puṇyāham	– Purificatory liquid.
Purāṇās	– Sacred books of the Hindus recording the pantheistic form of religion which followed the vedic period. Purana= ancient
Puṭava 'saree'	– Loin cloth; very much similar to 'saree'
Puṭavakoṭa	– Giving of the cloth as part of marriage ceremony. locally this denotes 'marriage'
Quintal	– A measurement 1 Quintal = 1000 kilograms

Rājā	- King
Rakṣas	- A fierce god whom people worship with fear
Rāmaccam	- A herbal root
Rāṇi	- Queen
Rupee	- Major denomination of Indian currency
Sabha	- Temple Committee
Sadyālayam	- Marriage - reception hall
Śākha	- Branch
Śālai	- Vedic school/college
Samādhi	- Term used to denote the death of a religious leader.
Sambandham	- Alliance between a man and a woman; it usually denotes the union of Nair ladies with several men of their caste and/or of the higher castes.
Samnyāsi	- An ascetic
Samnyāsa Sangha	- Organization of ascetics
Sañjayanam	- Picking up bones and purifying it after the cremation of a corpse
Samkētam	- Temple Sanctury
Sangham	- Organization
Saptapati	- Taking seven steps as part of Hindu marriage ritual.
Sarasvati	- Goddess of learning.
Sarpakāvu	- Serpant grove for snake worship
Śāstā	- A deity believed to be chief of ghosts

Satyāgraha	- Non-violent resistance, protest action (first initiated by Mahatma Gandhi as Civil Disobedience Movement)
Savarṇās	- High caste Hindus
Shānan	- A toddy-drawing caste
Sirkār	- Government
Śiva liṅga(m)	- See "liṅgam".
Smṛti	- That which is remembered; second half of Vedic knowledge.
SNDP Yōgam	- Śrī Nārāyaṇa Dharma Paripālana Yōgam
Srādha	- Obsequies and sacrifices performed for the manes of deceased ancestors annually
Śrīkōvil	- Sanctum Sanctorum of a temple, garbhagrha
Śrī yantra	- Columns marked for a religious ceremony
Śruti	- That which is heard; purest level of Vedic knowledge.
Sthalapurāṇa	- Legend of the temple-site.
Svadharma	- One's own ritual and moral duty
Taḷi	- Sprinkling of puṇyāham
Tampurān	- "My Lord"
Tampurāṭṭi	- "My Lady"
Taṇṭān	- Tree-climber, caste name
Taṛa	- (a) Platform for worship (b) Tribal group of Nāirs (governing body of an area)
Taṛavāṭ	- Traditional joint family of Kerala

Taṭṭān	– Goldsmith
Tālam	– Literally means plate. It is used to carry a lamp and other things in a religious procession
Tālappoli	– A metal dining dish carrying a lamp, rice, coconut and flowers
Tāli	– A tiny neck (gold) ornament shaped like the leaf of a banian tree used as marriage badge.
Tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam	– Auspicious event of tying the tāli
Tāḷikakuṭam	– Stipule on top of the roof of inner sanctum
Telḷi	– Camphor power
Tilak	– A dot marked on the forehead
Tiṇṭal-palakās	– Sign-boards meant for untouchable castes
Tiranṭukuḷi	– Puberty rite
Tirumulpāṭ	– Person tying the tali among Nairs
Tīveṭṭi	– A kind of cotton torch on a long pole
Tōṭ	– Canal
Tōṭṭampāṭṭu	– A song in praise of goddess
Trimūrti	– Hindu Trinity; Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva.
Tuḷḷal	– Dance
Tūkkam	– Hook-hanging
Tūkka-villu	– Car used for hook-swinging
Uraḷār	– Temple trustees
Utsava(m)	– Temple festival

Ūṭṭupura	– Places for feeding the Brāhmans at the royal/temple expense.
Varagṛha	– House of the bridegroom
Varagṛha praveśa	– Entering the house of the bridegroom
Varṇa	– 'colour'. The name of hierarchical caste system ; the four castes.
Vārppu	– A bell metal vessal
Vāvu-bali	– Ancestral rite on New Moon Day
Vayaṭṭu poṅkāla	– Pregnancy rite in which rice pudding is prepared
Vāykkari	– Ceremony of putting rice in the mouth of the corpse
Vēda	– Knowledge. Store of sacred saving knowledge.
Vēdānta	– The philosophy based on the teachings of the Upaniṣads
Vēḷans	– Potter-caste
Veḷicappāṭ	– Literally means one who throws a flood of light
Vēls	– It denoted chieftains. Literally it means 'spear'
Vigraham	– Idol
Vihāra	– Buddhist Monastery
Viḷakkumaram	– lamp pillar
Villuvaṇṭi	– Bullock cart
Vimāna	– Structure above the inner sanctum
Vimōcana Samaram	– Liberation struggle
Viṣu	– A festival which falls on the first day of Mēṭam (April-May) every year.

Vivāham	- Marriage
Vṛta	- Penance, a form of religious vow
Yakṣas	- A deity of vegetation.
Yōga	- 'Yoke'. Discipline of body, mind and spirit. School of Philosophy.
Yōgakkār	- Members of the council
Yōgam	- Council, congregation
Yōgiśvaran	- Lord of Yogis (ascetics) denoting Siva
Yuva-rājā	- Heir apparent.

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