

SOCIAL EVILS IN KERALA SOCIETY: ITS EVOLUTION AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: Caste played a crucial role to the development of evil customs and practices in the society of Kerala. Social evils like slavery, untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability, and pollution were developed in parallel to the caste system. It also contributed several social inequalities cherished by social oppression and economic exploitation. Caste also denied the opportunity to choose one's occupation. Slavery, one of the inhuman practices and the bonded labor system prevailed in the society of Kerala. Untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability and pollution were the two worst form of caste system also emerged. In the medieval period, these evil systems became institutionalized. It became a part and parcel of the society of Kerala. Later, the Proclamations issued by the rulers and the intervention of the colonial powers helped to abolish such evil practices in the society of Kerala.

The socio-religious condition of Kerala during the later medieval period was more complex than in any other parts of the world. Feudalism widened the socio-economic gap among the people of Kerala. It did not change until the second half of the 19th century. The social organizations of the Hindus from the pre-British period had many oppressive and undemocratic features. Almost all foreign travelers had described the mysterious social practices of Kerala, which was a direct impact of the Brahmin settlements of Kerala. The institution of caste was deep rooted in the social structure of Kerala. It completely segregated the society into a number of self-contained groups. Each group was obliged to safeguard its own exclusive characteristics, interests and positions. They had their own governance, customs, traditions and style of living. It also brings several social evils such as slavery, untouchability, unseeability, unapproachability, pollution etc.

Untouchability was a unique phenomenon of the Hindu society. The term untouchability meant *teendal* in Tamil and *pula* in Malayalam, which generally meant "pollution". The untouchability was legitimized by the Dharmashastras, therefore the practice was followed by each and every member of the society in their day-to-day life. (Nisar and Kandasamy 2007: 270) Before the Vedic period, there existed a differentiation between the tribesmen and the "broken men" from the alien tribes. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar explained the term "broken men" as the people of unsettled communities who lived as wanderers. They were primitive and virtually outside the social system of the settled communities. (Ram 2008: 44) When the settled communities began to start cultivation, they needed laborers for the cultivation.

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Therefore, the broken men became the mercenaries of the settlers and later they became untouchables.

The Vishnu Dharma Sutra compiled between the third and fourth century B.C., coined the term “untouchable” or *asprasya* for the first time, thereby legalizing the pariah status of a vast sections of sudra toilers. (Kane 1930: 381-382) The period between 600 BC and 200 B.C., untouchability became most popular in the society of India. (Webster 1976: 2) According to Vivekanand Jha, untouchability began to take a firm and definite shape with respect to a few groups up to 2nd century A.D. (Jha and Habib, 2004, 14-31) Jha describes four phases in the early history of the untouchables. (Ram, 2008, 44) According to him, the first phase ending up to 600 B.C. with several tabooed sections of society during the Vedic period. The second phase extending up to 2nd century A.D., and the third phase ending by 600 A.D., during which, the practice of untouchability was intensified, but it was also resisted by the untouchables themselves. The fourth phase extended up to 1200 A.D. and beyond during which the ranks of untouchables swelled by incorporating several other castes and untouchability reached at its peak. (Jha and Habib 2004: 31)

Untouchability is theoretically considered as a part of Varna system, which was closely associated with the Hindu social order. In different periods that untouchables were identified by various names. In the Vedic period, they were known as *Chandalas* and in the medieval period, they were known as ‘*achhuta*’. During the colonial period, the untouchables were named as the ‘exterior’ caste whereas in the present time, generally they were known as scheduled castes by the Constitution of India. Therefore, the term “untouchability” is commonly associated with the Dalit communities of modern India. The simplest western image of untouchability is embodied in the term “outcaste”. According to this, the untouchables are beyond the Hindu culture and society and are generally characterized as cultureless.

After the Aryan settlements in India, the society was entirely divided into two categories – the Aryans and the non-Aryans. The Aryans were fair complexioned and claimed themselves as superior rank in the society. They were proud of their race, language and religion. The Aryans considered the non-Aryans as non-human or *amanushya* and also described them as *Krishnavarna* or dark-skinned. The dark-skinned non-Aryans spoke softly and worshiped the phallus. They were socially and economically suppressed by the Aryans. The birth of the non-Aryans was treated as the birth of a dog, or a hog or a *Chandala*.

The origin of *Chandala* was explained first time in the Gautama Dharma Sutra. According to Gautama Sutra, *Chandala* is the offspring of a male sudra and a Brahmin woman and is the most reprehensible among those born in the indirect order or *prathiloma*. They were always excluded from the society and their personality and dignity was degraded. The *Dharmashastras* and *Arthasastra* of Kautilya described the *chandalas* as untouchables. The untouchables of the Indian society were deeply humiliated and crushed under the inhuman custom. Though there were many attempts at Sanskritization in those times, the *chandalas* or the untouchables could not achieve social mobility fully, because of their social barrier. (Pais 2004: 321) Their low economic, political and social conditions also prevented them to achieve an equal space in the society.

After the establishment of the Varna system, a group of inhabitants of India incorporated with the Aryan culture and they claimed higher status in the social hierarchy. They also started the practice of untouchability to the people, those who were not incorporated into the Aryan culture. Majority of the early inhabitants of India did not mingle with the Aryans and they constituted the hereditary castes of untouchables.

The practice of untouchability was also legitimized by its claimed existence in South India even during the ancient period. In South India, untouchability prevailed in different forms of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. The untouchables or the Dalits have a long history of their origin in South India. On the basis of Ambedkar's thesis of the origin of untouchability, 4th century A.D. witnessed the evolution of untouchability in the South Indian society. It was institutionalized in Tamil Nadu and other parts of South India during the period of Raja Raja I (985 A.D to 1016 A.D.), the Chola ruler. (Karashima 1997: 21-30) In Kerala, the Pulayas, Parayas, Kuravas, Vedas, Nayadis were the important untouchable castes and they were denied all fundamental rights of the human beings. (Desai 1998: 263)

Untouchability is not simply a caste reflection or caste phenomenon but is one of the underlying socio-economic factors of semi feudal relations. The social oppression of the untouchables had religious sanctions. They have been the victims of brutal exploitation, local isolation, residential segregation, economic deprivation, political subjugation and cultural degradation. In the pre-Capital agriculture society, untouchability was used to maintain the exploitative relation between the feudal lords and the serfs, the tenants and the slaves, the croppers and the bonded laborers.

The concept of purity and pollution played a crucial role in maintaining the social distance between different castes. The pollution distance varied from caste to caste and from place to place. Louis Dumont holds the notion of purity and pollution interlinked with the caste system and untouchability. The hierarchy of caste was decided according to the degree of purity and pollution. In the social structure of India, Sudras were of the lowest rank in the social ladder and they were forced to render services to the other three varnas. The higher varnas—Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas kept their ceremonial purity from the Sudras.

Dipankar Gupta observes the notion of purity and pollution as integrally linked with the institution of untouchability. But unlike untouchability, the notion of purity and pollution is also historical accretion. Over time this notion freed itself from its specific and original task of separating the untouchables from others. The idea that impurity can be transmitted by the mere shadow of an untouchable or by his approaching within a certain distance created pollution to the higher castes. (Ghurye 1963: 8) Because of the pollution, the untouchables were not allowed to enter public places.

Various forms of subordination of one class of human beings by another were swept away in India not by any revolutionary upheaval; on the contrary their characteristics accumulated and mutated sometimes under the impact of capitalism to produce an extraordinary amalgam of the modern and the archaic. (Patnaik and Dingwany 1985: 1) While subordination and bondage were the characteristics of many aspects of social life, agrestic servitude has formed historically the most important

component of slavery. The history of the agrestic subordination of one class by another inevitably resulted in the evolution of agricultural laborers in India. (*Ibid.*)

In Kerala, the concept of pollution was refined to unique complexity and was capable of being transmitted not nearly on touch, but from a distance. (Hutton 1963: 79-85) Pollution was in two way- untouchability and unapproachability. The first was the prevention to touch another person and the second was to keep certain distance to the high caste people. If a high caste was polluted by the *avarnas*, the *savarnas* had the right to kill the *avarnas* whereas the high caste can be purified by the bath. (Jose 1982: 77) The untouchables had to cover their mouth with one hand while speaking to the caste Hindus; otherwise, it would cause pollution to the higher castes. (Samuel 1982: 23) If any low caste violated the law of distance, otherwise he must kill on the spot with impurity. (Sobhanan 1978: 72)

The polluting castes of Kerala are Ezhavas, Shannars, Pulayas, Parayas etc. The low castes also practiced pollution among themselves. The different castes of slaves kept a distinction between each other and did not marry or eat together. The Pulayan was to remain 10 paces from the Vettowan, the Parayan, the same distance from the Pulayan and the Nayadee, who was not a slave, but of a caste lower than the lowest of the slaves, 12 paces from Parayan. (Saradamony 1974: 456) "They meet and work together on all working days, but on leaving work the Vettowans invariably bathe before they return to their houses or taste food. After bathing they utter the usual cry and warn the coming Pulayan to quit the road and retreat to the prescribed distance (Mohan 2015: 128). The Ezhavas and Pulayas kept distance from each other like that and the Pulayas and Parayas also followed the rules of pollution among themselves.

This elaborate and almost perfect system of keeping man away from man, caste from caste, prevented the birth of any kind of solidarity among the slave castes. The beliefs, practices and ideology of the times were such that each caste, however low it was, developed pride in its own status. Buchanan makes this clear when he writes that "even among those wretched creatures, the pride of caste has its full influence; and if a *Cherman* or Pulayan be touched by a slave of the Parayan tribe, he is defiled". (Buchanan 1807: 491)

It is obvious that the Brahmins propagated the concept of ritual cleanliness or pollution. It can be safely assumed from the Census Reports and other published descriptions that a vast majority of the low castes suffered greatly due to the ritualistic system of untouchability. The low caste had any type of liberties and they could not walk freely on the roads. They could not get their daily essentialities from the market because their free entry into the market was curtailed by the customary taboos imposed upon them. (Nisar and Kandasamy 2007: 31)

The social evils such as *pulapedi*, *parapedi* and *mannapedi* that existed in Kerala were closely connected with the system of pollution. It is believed that the evil system was practiced once in a year in Kerala. *Mannapedi* was practiced in the Southern part of Kerala, whereas *pulapedi* and *parapedi* were practiced in the Northern part of Kerala. In this system, during the night of the Malayalam month *Karkidakam* (July-August), if a high caste woman, especially the Nair women, may touched or loudly said that he saw the higher caste women, the women would be polluted and she would be outcastes. She would have to go either to the Pulayan or Mannan, otherwise, she

would be killed by her relatives. The first reference of *pulapedi* and *mannapedi* was found in the descriptions of Durate Barbosa. In 1696, Unni Kerala Varma, the ruler of Venad, issued a Royal Proclamation ending the social evils of *pulapedi* and *mannapedi*.

Unapproachability was another social evil rigidly practiced in Travancore. There was an unwritten law about the approachable distance of the people. Different travelers of Travancore have given detailed accounts of the system of unapproachability. Each caste had their approachable distance to other castes. The Ezhavas must keep 36 paces from the Brahmins and 12 paces from the Nairs, while a Kaniyan would keep the distance to a Namboothiri at 24 paces. (Day 2006: 322) Samuel Mateer mentions that the Shannars must keep 36 paces from the Brahmins and 12 paces from the Nairs. The Pulayas must keep 96 paces from the Brahmins. (Mateer 1991: 32)

Among the higher castes, according to Wilson, Nairs must not come within 3 paces of the Namboothiri Brahmins. In the *Malabar Gazetteer*, C. A. Innes writes that the artisans must keep 24 feet from the Brahmins and the Nayadis must keep 74 paces from the Brahmins. A. Ayyappan gives a scale of distance to the pollution for various castes. According to him, a Nair keeps 32 paces, Cheruman 64 and Nayadi from 74 to 124 paces from the Brahmins. (Aiyappan 1937: 18) All of these references show that the untouchables had to stand at a prescribed arithmetical distance from the higher castes. Even the law of justice was totally against the slaves. The untouchable could not enter into the courts for justice; he had to shout from the appointed distance and take his chance of being heard and receiving attention. A policeman sometimes stood halfway between the untouchable witness or petitioner and the high caste magistrate to transact question and answers. Duarte Barbosa, who visited the Malabar Coast in 1514 AD, described eleven sects or excluded castes that prevailed in Malabar then, who 'polluted' the higher castes by touch or by proximity or even by visual contact. (Barbosa 1866: 143)

Unseeability was also practiced in Travancore, which swept away the low caste from the mainstream of the society. The high castes always used the term "*po*", "*po*", in times of their travel on the public roads which was the warning to the low castes to move away from the public road. When they heard the sound "*po*", "*po*", the low castes used to run away from the roads and hide in the bushes of the roadsides. Some of the low castes were not allowed to appear before the public in the day time, because they feared that their sight would cause pollution to the higher castes. (Hutton 1963: 82) In some places, they had to go seeking shelter in the jungles immediately on seeing caste Hindus. M. S. Appadurai Iyer writes that the unpleasant sound '*hoi*', '*hoi*', used to be repeated in order to avoid pollution from seeing the caste Hindus. (Thurston 1975: 51)

Slavery is another deep-rooted social evil in the society of Kerala. It was widely prevalent throughout the region. There were many "slave castes" that were owned, bought and sold like any other property by the masters and landlords. (Saradamony 1973: 217) In Kerala, slavery was purely a hereditary system and a person born in a slave caste, could not change his caste throughout his life. (Kusuman 1973: 24)

In Kerala, slavery was closely connected with the system of caste. Inscriptions, *kolezhuthu* records, foreign accounts etc., found in different parts of Kerala, have brought into light the evil practice of slavery. (Nair 1986: 12) The first references about slavery were found in the inscription of 849 A.D. According to this inscription, the Venad ruler Ayyan Adikal Tiruvadikal granted certain privileges to the congregation of the Tarisa Church at Quilon. (*Ibid.*) The inscription also mentions the prices of the slaves. According to the inscription, the price of the male slave was fixed at 100 *fanams* and that of the females at 70 *fanams* in the 9th and 10th centuries A.D.

References to slavery in early colonial documents prove its existence well into later historical records. The term *adima* meaning slave, referring to an individual slave, repeatedly occurs in the documents in Malayalam that deal with land and slave transactions from ancient to the modern times. The system of control and ownership of the *adima/adimathavam* was equivalent to the word slavery. (Mohan 2015: 38) In the traditional caste hierarchy, the untouchable castes, referred to as Dalits today, were relegated to the status of *adima* and had to perform most arduous physical labor in agriculture. (Varier and Gurukkal 1991: 261) Their labor was central to the wetland paddy cultivation and the later expansion of dry land farming. Untouchable agrestic serfs were the part and parcel of the agricultural field where they were born. The land owner had the right to sell them along with the soil and could dispose them when he pleased. The slave's children lived as slaves, just as their parents. They lived from hand to mouth the whole year round and rarely knew when they could procure food for the next day. The contempt and aversion with which the other castes regarded these unfortunate people were carried to such an excess that in many places, their presence or even their foot prints were considered sufficient to defile the whole neighborhood. The presence of the untouchables was treated with mixture of alarm and indignation and even towns and markets were considered as defiled by their approach. (Ponnu 2000: 38-39)

The untouchables suffered various socio-political and economic disabilities, many of which were traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by their castes. (Majumdar and Madan 1976: 148) Socially, they possessed low status in the society and had no right to enjoy any privileges. They lived outside of the villages with their lowest kind of occupation. (Dumont 1980: 93) The untouchables were not allowed to enter public places and temples. They were prohibited from drawing water from the public wells or the wells of the higher castes. When even they spoke to higher caste persons, they had to hold their hand before their mouth for fear contaminating the higher caste with their breath. The women of the untouchable were prohibited to cover their breasts and were sexually exploited. The *Yellamma* cult in South India, especially in Andhra Pradesh, is one of the examples of such exploitation.

The economic condition of the untouchables was deplorable. They did not have any rights in property and were mere landless labor to the higher castes. The untouchables also had no right to choose their occupation and were always forced to do ugly and unclean duties. In the functioning of the Hindu social order, the untouchables were used in certain polluting occupations. The impure occupation was the basic characteristic of the untouchability. Von Furer Haimendorf, an eminent ethnologist, described untouchability as the outcome of unclean and ritually impure

occupations. According to *Manusmriti*, people who followed the unclean and lowest kind of occupations such as scavenging leatherwork and removal of carrion were to be treated as untouchables. The higher castes could not behold them, and they were obliged to flee when they appeared. If they were employed in any work inside a high caste household, a door was purposely made for them, but they had to work with their eyes on the ground; for, if it is perceived they have glanced at the kitchen, all the utensils must be broken". (Thurston 1975: 78-79)

The untouchables were forbidden from receiving any type of knowledge. Education was totally denied to them and doors of no educational institutions were opened before the untouchables. Their language was unpolished and they followed a primitive form of worship. Politically, the untouchables were a suppressed lot and had no right to engage in political activities. Therefore, within the frame of Hindu social order, which was completely based on the four-fold *Chaturvarnya* system, the untouchables occupied the lowest position and suffered all sorts of exploitation.

The division of labor prevalent in the society of ancient South India and the society was divided on the basis of occupation. Different social categories like Eyinar or hunters, the Umanar or the salt sellers, the Maravar or the martial community, the Konar, Haiyar or cow herds, the Utavar or peasants, the Valainar or the fishermen, the Kuyavar or potter and Ilicinar or low caste people were existed in the society. All these social categories were associated with the low level and unclean occupations. (Subrahmanyam 1968: 198-206) The Ilicinar was considered as the untouchables, who lived in their segregated *cheries* in both the rural and the urban areas. During 1000 AD, some groups, or possibly castes, in the Chola integration were very low; particularly whose occupation was associated with leather and with other polluting substances. (Moffatt 1979: 40)

The period between the Aryan migration and the colonial expansion in South India witnessed a transformation. Certain functional groups began to climb upward in the society. "The artisans began to pursue a strategy of collective upward mobility, supported by an urbanizing trend and by new warrior kings, whose wealth contribution was important and whose protection they enjoyed." (Stein 1968: 91) During the present time, the artisans in South India usually hold middle ranks in local caste hierarchies, following 'minimizing strategies' transactionally and claiming Brahmin-like identities. (Moffatt 1979: 40)

In the Sangam period, untouchable communities were small specialized groups in the society. Most of its members made their living from performing low functions. The contemporary untouchables had a 'right' to perform their caste-based occupation and most of them survived by working as agricultural laborers. (*Ibid.*)

Subsequently, some non-peasant people were integrated into the system of caste and others may have acquired or retained tribal lands and established as dominant castes. But most of the new tribal people were brought in at the lowest level in the society due to the stigma attached to their previous non-peasant way of life. (Stein 1968: 243)

The new tribal group Paraiyah might have come into the society as a low laboring status group, and the new group might have assimilated by agreeing to serve as an agricultural work force. The Parayyas were the major untouchable caste in South India.

The word Paraya is closely connected with the “*para*” or drum, derived from the Tamil name of the untouchable caste. The word has accordingly moved into the English language as a synonym for the socially ostracized and morally deprived. (Moffat 1979: 17)

The ornaments of the untouchables were made by stone or shells, which was considered as “the caste symbols of the low castes”.¹ The ornaments of the untouchable castes must be no more valuable than brass or stone. They were not permitted to use gold or silver ornaments. They could use only stone and shell for making ornaments. There were different types of hair styles among the untouchables. Both men and women did not cut their hair. Like the dress, hair style also identified the caste. The high caste used different types of tuffs or *kudumis* like *pappada kuduma*, *chakkarakuduma* etc., but the untouchables were not allowed following such hair style.

The untouchables were not treated as human beings and they were bought and sold like cattle. They had to keep 96 paces from the Brahmins and he about half this distance from a Sudra. (Mateer 1991: 46) Even his near approach or his shadow would cause pollution to the higher castes. They were not allowed to use footwear for protecting their feet from the thorns and sharp stones on the jungle path. (*Ibid.*)

The untouchables were lived in hopeless poverty and a great number lacked sufficient means to procure even the coarse clothing. They went out almost naked, or at least clothed in the most hideous rags. They were in the habit of carrying off carcasses of bullocks and cows left dead by the roadsides and in the fields, which they regarded as their peculiar perquisites. Their habits generally were most filthy and disgusting and had sometimes been suspected of kidnapping and entrapping the women of high castes. (Mateer 1991: 42)

The untouchables were also denied the right to use polished languages. They, when speaking about parts of their body such as eye or ear, to a superior, had to prefix it by the epithet “old”. Thus, they had to use mean and degrading words like *pazhamchevi*, old ear or *pazhamkannu*, old eye. They were not supposed to say ‘I’ but ‘*adiyan*’, (your slave). His rice was not “*choru*” but “*karikkadi*” or dirty gruel. While speaking to caste superiors they had to begin by saying “your slave has received permission to observe”. They had to call the higher caste members as *yajamanan* or king while they could not approach the Brahmins.

The untouchables did not have a proper hut to live in. Buchanan found that the untouchables lived in temporary huts, which were no better than “large baskets”. These were put up in the rice fields while the crop was on and near the stacks while thrashing. Ward and Connor saw them living in hovels perched on the sides of the fields or nestle on the trees by the fields to watch crops after day’s toil. They were discharged from erecting better accommodation. Anantha Krishnan Aiyer also says that the untouchables were permitted to erect temporary huts as the masters wanted them to move about when work was demanded in different places. (Iyer 1909: 80) The

¹See Manu Bhaskar, *Dalit Movement in Kerala*, p.137.

home of the untouchables called ‘*madam*’ and their children were monkeys or claves. (Yesudas 1975: 8-9)

The untouchables could not give their children those names which resembled the names of the higher castes. Thus, they had primitive names. Kali, Chathan, Chadayan, Veluthan, Killiyan, Chakki, Eivi etc. were some of the names prevalent among the untouchable castes. The untouchables were not allowed to enter the public places like roads, schools, temples, hospitals, public offices and even the courts and *catcheris*. There was widespread discrimination in laws to the low castes. If the low caste trailed in a petition, the court heard him through a peon, who would be a high caste. It was very difficult to judge the petition in a proper way. (Manavalan 1990: 95) The punishments were decided based on the person’s caste. (Pillai 1970: 318)

They paid different kinds of taxes like *talavari*, *valavari*, tax for fishing, loom, oil mills, boats and nets. They were also obliged to pay dues at the festival of *Onam* harvest and occasion of royal marriage, birthday etc. In 1865, in Travancore, there were hundreds of such taxes imposed upon the lowest sections of the society. Therefore, in Travancore, everything was taxable, and every occasion made an excuse for squeezing the labor class of their hard earnings.

Under the system of slavery, the poor servants were obliged to render bonded services on all days as required by the government officials and the higher castes. It was a paradox that the people who toiled for the construction of the roads could not walk along the same. The higher caste led a luxurious life on the sweat and tears of the low castes. The main force behind the system of *slavery* or forced labor was the coercive authority of the government and the privileged class. Nobody dared to evade the services demanded by the government. Only on the days of the *oozhiyam* services did the labors receive minimum quantity of food to keep their body and soul together.

There was much suffering from sickness. The dust of the house produced vermin and made them itchy, which deprived them of rest by day and sleep by night. A respectable native was forced to cover his nostrils with his cloth when he entered amongst them, for the stench and filth. The aged, if there were any, suffered from debility, and might lie helpless day after day until they died; infants suffered from sores, diarrhea, worms and want of food, adults from headache and indigestion, ague, dysentery and intermittent fever”. (Mateer 1991: 191) The disobedient slaves would be beaten and sometimes yoked to a plough along with the buffalos which resulted in death.²

The public roads and streets were closed before the untouchable castes. There was a number of *teendal palakas* or sign boards regarding untouchability placed near all the roadsides, forbidding the lower and outcastes from travelling through the roads. Caste played an important role in maintaining the social relationship in Kerala. (Gladstone 1986: 46)

Education and knowledge were denied to the untouchables and they feared even the touch of the printed book. (*Ibid.*) As the vast majority of people were denied the

² See Reports of the TDC, 1881, The Thittuvillai Mission District, p.23.

right to read the scriptures, they were unaware of the principles laid down in the holy books. The fact is that majority of the people of the day were illiterate. As the Brahmins were regarded as the sole custodians of the scriptures, they gave a version of the holy books in such a manner that it suited their needs. Quite often they put forward fabricated stories which would be sufficient to establish their undue power and influence in the land.

The intervention of the colonial administrators and the Christian missionaries brought a drastic change in the socio-economic condition of the untouchable castes in Kerala. The Christian missionaries were the chief agents of colonial modernity in Kerala. They strongly fought against the social evils such as caste system and untouchability. They relentlessly worked for the emancipation of the untouchable castes of Kerala. The activities of the missionaries created a new consciousness among the lowest sections of the society. After the establishment of the LMS, the process of emancipation of the untouchable castes accelerated. The LMS missionaries like W. T. Ringeltaube, Charles Mead etc. took initiative for the amelioration of the untouchables. Due to their efforts, thousands of low castes especially the Nadars and Parayyas were converted into Christianity.

With pressure from the Christian missionaries, the rulers of Kerala introduced several royal proclamations to improve the socio-economic condition of the untouchable castes of Kerala. In 1829, the Government issued a proclamation, which exempted the converted Christians from doing bonded services on Sundays at Hindu temples. Later Sunday bonded service was abolished by law and Sunday was declared a holiday.

Introduction of English education, commercialization of agriculture, introduction of plantation industries and investment of capital on traditional economy of Kerala opened up fresh avenues and space to the untouchable castes of Kerala. The LMS and CMS opened several schools for the depressed class' education. Education provided the opportunity to the low castes for a new social awareness. The commercialization of agriculture also played an important role in the socio-economic change in Kerala. The colonialists started tea, rubber, coffee and spices plantations, where new opportunities were thrown open to the lowest sections of the society. In these plantations, the emancipated bonded laborers from the untouchable castes of Kerala and the freed slaves joined as salaried laborers. They were transformed from bonded laborers to waged laborers. A free labor market existed in Kerala and the laborers could choose this opportunity which was based on the higher salary. The introduction of plantations and the investment of capital on traditional industries created the emergence of free labor market in Kerala. In 1860s, the Government started the Public Works Department (PWD), which opened up new opportunities to the untouchable castes. The opening of the PWD in created fresh opportunities to the low caste *bonded* servants in the public services. They were largely recruited in the PWD for the construction of roads, bridges and canals etc. on a salaried base. Caste was not a barrier to the selection of the employment opportunities in PWD. They had the opportunity to choose their labor and therefore they became the salaried laborers.

Social reformers such as Vaikunda Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Poykayil Yohannan etc. played an important role in the social renaissance of Kerala.

They strongly opposed the system of caste, slavery and the gratuitous services. With the help of their social organizations, they led the struggle against socio-economic inequalities. Besides the mainstream of the socio-reform movement, leaders of the converted Christians such as Arulananda Walsalam, Mases Walsalam Sastriyar, and Devasahayam Nadar strongly pleaded for the emancipation of the untouchable castes.

The benevolent rulers of like Rani Gowri Lekshmi Bai, Rani Parvathy Bai, Uttram Tirunal Marthanda Varma and Sree Moolam Thirunal issued a series of proclamations for the abolition of bonded services among the untouchables in Kerala. In August 1864, the government issued a notification that ensured that no bonded services would be extracted from the tenants of sirkar (Government) *pattam* lands. In 1885, government issued another proclamation, which exempted the *oozhiya-viruthikkar* or bonded laborers from supplying provisions and rendering bonded services. Therefore, the regulations and proclamations issued by the benevolent rulers, the activities of the social reformers and the intervention of the colonial powers helped to the improvement the socio-economic condition of the untouchable communities of Kerala. They became treated as human beings rather than two footed animals.

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