

THE PROCESS OF REHUMANISATION INITIATED BY SRI NARAYANA GURU AND ITS IMPACT ON KINSHIP AND OTHER SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN KERALA

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Today the people of Kerala are considered to be socially and educationally more advanced than those of any other state in India. One of the main factors contributing to this progress has been the socio-cultural renaissance initiated by Sri Narayana Guru (Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, 1856-1928). In their attempts to explain this renaissance, scholars have used such sociological terms as *sanskritisation*, *westernisation* and *modernisation* (Jacob 1995: 8-12). I see Sri Narayana Guru's movement as *re-humanisation*. In the following I try to evaluate the impact that this rehumanising process has had on kinship and other social relationships in Kerala.

1. THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Most leaders of social renaissance movements in modern India have come from the upper strata of society. In other words, nearly all of them have belonged to the higher castes of the *varṇa* system. Sri Narayana Guru belonged to the Eezhavas (*īlava*), who then as now form the majority of the so-called 'backward' Hindu communities in Kerala. In Sri Narayana Guru's time the Eezhavas were considered to be untouchables, but in the hierarchical system created by the upper castes many other untouchable communities were far behind them. Sri Narayana Guru mainly worked among the members of his own community, but his revolutionary teachings and social activity resulted in the social and cultural uplift of all the downtrodden communities in Kerala. The importance of his work can be understood only when we have an idea of the social organisation in Kerala during the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.

According to the folklore of Kerala connected with the *Ōṇam* festival, in ancient times, when King Mahābali was ruling the country, all people were equal. There were no castes or any other barriers, such as those based on creed, that create inequality among human beings. Folk songs telling about this pristine equality have

been sung by people from time immemorial. Based on other evidence as well, historians believe that the caste system did not exist in Kerala in the most ancient times (cf. Menon 1979: 65). It is generally believed that it is an innovation introduced by the Aryans who came to Kerala from the north. Leaders of these Aryans were the Nambudiri (*nampūtiri*) Brahmans. By the eighth century AD, the aryani- sation of Kerala reached its peak. The Nambudiris attained supremacy in social and religious matters during the Kulaśekhara dynasty which ruled Kerala in the ninth and tenth centuries (cf. Menon 1979: 66). According to a myth propagated by the Nambudiris, it was Paraśurāma, a legendary Brahman hero, who created Kerala by reclaiming the land from the Arabian Sea. He then gave it to the Nambudiri Brahmans whom he brought from outside. By means of this myth, the Nambudiris could convince the kings and the people that they were the real owners of the land. By composing new legal codes such as the Śāṅkara Smṛti, they introduced the concepts of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability among the different communities of Kerala. These concepts were implemented by the rulers as the social codes to be followed by different castes. The practices (*ācāras*) and legal codes framed by the Nambudiris had to be observed scrupulously by all the castes and communities in Kerala (cf. Ravindran 1978: 41).

The Nambudiris were the law-makers and hence they were above the king and outside the orbit of the law. They owed allegiance only to their caste chief, the Āḷuvāñceri Tāmpṛākkaḷ, who had the exclusive authority to punish them. The law spared the Brahmans from the death penalty even for the most heinous crimes while members of the untouchable castes who committed such ordinary offences as theft, killing a cow, etc., were punished with the death penalty (cf. Menon 1979: 69). The *varṇa* system distinguishing between the social classes of Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra was successfully introduced in Kerala in a modified form after the 8th century AD (Uṇṇi 1988: 63). The members of these four social classes are called *savarṇa*, 'belonging to a *varṇa*', in contrast to people 'not belonging to any *varṇa*', *avarṇa*. The Nambudiris Brahmans then elevated the Nāyar community to the status of Śūdras through a system of liaison marriage or *sambandham* in which the Nambudiris and the kings were free to cohabit with any Nāyar woman. As a consequence of this system, the Nāyars became servants of the Brahmans and the kings and therewith powerful and influential in the society. Hindu communities other than Nāyars were considered as *avarṇa* and stratified by fixing a specific distance up to which the members of a given community could approach a member of the upper class without polluting him/her. Each community had to observe these rules of pollution distance until the beginning of the 20th century. According to the Cochin Census Report of 1901, the pollution distance to be kept from Nambudiris and other high castes by the Kammāḷas was 24 feet, by the Eezhava, Vālan, Arayan, Mūkkuvan, Marakkān, Kaṇiyan, Vilkuṛuppu, Pāṇan, Vēlan, Puḷḷuvan, and Paravan

36, by Kaṇakkan 48, by Pulayan, Veṭṭuvan and Paṛayan 48 and by Ullāṭan, Nāyāḍi and others 64 feet respectively (Uṇṇi 1988: 86).

It is interesting to note that during earlier periods of history many of these polluting communities mentioned were enjoying a very high status in the Kerala society. For example, the Pulayas are said to have been owners and rulers of the land in olden times. Quoting L. K. Ananta Krishna Iyer, Edgar Thurston reports that once upon a time the Pulayas had dominion over several parts of the country. According to this report, a person called Aikkara Yajaman, whose ancestors were Pulaya kings, was still held in considerable respect by the Pulayas of North Travancore, and acknowledged as their chieftain and lord. The existence of Aikkaranāḍ (Aikkara country) in the Kunnathnād Taluk is still a remainder of this historical fact. In Trivandrum, on the banks of Lake Veli, there is a hill called Pulayanār Kōṭṭa, where a Pulaya king is believed to have once ruled. Even the temple of Śrī Padmanābha originally belonged to the Pulayas and the Pulaya women could also worship there. Later the king took over this sacred place and built a temple there. (Thurston 1909, II: 47-48.) In the course of history the Pulayas were defeated by other castes who gained power. The land of the Pulayas was encroached upon and they began to be treated as slave labourers. According to the documents available, the Pulayas were sold as slaves up to the beginning of the 20th century although the British issued a proclamation against the slave trade in India as early as 1792. According to Thurston (1909, II: 50), such transactions were kept secret for fear of the penal code, which came into existence in 1862.

Thurston (1909, VII: 115) says that the Eezhavas (also called Tiyyas or Tīyas and Billavas) were an enterprising community and pioneers in the field of coconut cultivation, toddy-making and arrack-distilling, coir and coir mat-making, the weaving industry, Sanskrit learning and Āyurvedic treatment. It is a well known historical fact that an Eezhava physician called Iṭṭi Acyutan provided the details concerning the medical qualities of the Āyurvedic plants described in the famous book on the medicinal plants of Kerala called *Hortus Malabaricus*, published in twelve volumes in Amsterdam in 1678-1703 (Uṇṇi 1988: 227). Such physicians possessed traditional works on Āyurveda written in Sanskrit as inherited family property. This shows that they had sound knowledge of Sanskrit and Āyurveda, and this tradition may go back even to times preceding the advent of the Nambudiris in Kerala.

Kerala folk songs known as 'ballads of Malabar' mention the Eezhavas as being as skilled as the Nāyars in the art of warfare (*kaḷari*). Two important families of *kaḷari* warriors mentioned in these ballads are the Tiyyas (Eezhavas) of the Puttūram family and the Nāyars of the Taccōḷi Māṇikkōttū family (Uḷḷūr 1990: 249). Thurston has recorded that in mediaeval times they were largely employed as soldiers by the kings. Titles like Cānrōr, Paṇikkan, Taṇṭān and Āśān were conferred on some of them which entitled them to enjoy many royal privileges. The recipients

of such an honorific title as Āśān, for example, were instructors in gymnastics and military exercises to Nāyar and Eezhava soldiers in ancient times. Even now ruins of old *kaḷaris* or exercise grounds are discernible in many places (cf. Thurston 1909, II: 393-396). The *kaḷari* system was discouraged by the British and the local rulers after the 17th century owing to the introduction of modern methods of warfare. This might be one reason for the decline of this community.

It is also said that the Eezhavas were declared to be a polluting community mainly because they were toddy-tappers, even though the number of actual toddy-tappers among them was very low. Stories were also spread in which the seven ancestors of the Eezhavas were children of Śiva born from seven damsels, and united as one by Śiva's spouse Pārvatī. An ancestor boy was employed to bring toddy for esoteric Śakti worship. He once killed an insincere Brahman priest who had drunk all the toddy meant for the worship and replaced it with water. Hence the boy was cursed by Śiva to become polluted as an outcaste. Thurston (1906, VII: 100) says that this story no doubt comes from a Brahmanical source.

Some historians, on the other hand, have pointed out that the Eezhavas came from Sri Lanka and were Buddhists. This is based on the etymology of their caste names (*ilava* and *tīya*, through Prakrit from Sanskrit *siṃhala* 'Sinhalese' and *dvīpa* 'island' respectively). The reason for declaring them to be a polluting caste is also said to be their connection with the Buddhist religion. But Ravindran in his recent article on the Eezhavas in the Malayalam Encyclopaedia (*Sarvaviññānakōśam*) states that there is no historical record to prove that the Eezhavas came from Sri Lanka (Ravindran 1993: 558). There are many inscriptions from the first and second centuries AD which show that the Eezhavas were established in Kerala before the period of Cēraman Perumāl during which they are said to have come from Sri Lanka. However, the Eezhavas might have followed the Buddhist faith for some time since Buddhism was an important religion from the time of Cenkuṭṭuvan in Kerala. During the Buddhist period they had rights and powers on agricultural lands and enjoyed a high social status. Even though the Eezhavas followed the Hindu faith later, they might have embraced Hinduism only when Buddhism disappeared completely from Kerala. As soon as the Brahmanical religion became powerful, their lands were taken away by the higher castes and they were declared a polluting community. It can be seen from many records and especially from the *Eezhava Memorial* submitted to the king of Travancore in 1896, that socially and educationally the Eezhavas were in a very low position during the last decades of the 19th century and even the rulers believed that they were not eligible for any fundamental human rights enjoyed by the upper castes (Ravindran 1993: 557).

2. THE FACTORS OF DEHUMANISATION

Through the introduction of the system of pollution distance, a three-tiered society was created in medieval Kerala with the Nambudiris as the supreme authority of land and law. They became kind of superhumans who could not be questioned by anyone else. The second category included people like the kings, feudal chieftains and the Nāyars, who ruled the country according to the instructions of the Brahmans. The Nāyars became tax collectors and civil and military servants. In the third large category were the people who belonged to the untouchable groups. These people were deprived of all basic human rights and were treated like subhumans by the high caste people for centuries.

This dehumanisation was possible by instilling people with a conception of social psychology according to which the untouchables were in every respect inferior to the people of higher castes and deserved only to be treated as something less than normal human beings. Accordingly, they were denied all freedom and the fundamental dignity of being human members of a civilised society. The Nambudiris provided religious testimony for this social order from their false legal texts which the kings implemented rigorously. The following are the main factors which led to the dehumanisation of untouchable communities in Kerala.

2.1. Denial of worship in temples and even of entry to temple roads

The so-called polluting communities mentioned above were not permitted to enter the inner premises of temples for worship. Each community had to remain at the prescribed distance from the outside compound wall of temples. Except some private temples of the Nambudiris and the Nāyars, almost all the big temples were run by the local states with public tax money. If untouchable people wanted to make some offering in a temple, they had to keep the money on a banana leaf and stand apart outside until the temple servants found time to come and give some *prasādam* in return. Moreover, in most temples people belonging to lower communities were not permitted to walk on temple roads or bathe in temple ponds. A resolution to permit the *avarṇas* to also walk on the roads near temples was turned down for the lack of one vote in the Travancore legislative assembly in 1925. At that time there were 'pollution planks' or boards put up on the approach roads to the temples by the government which read that 'since from here onwards it is the temple premises, Eezhavas and others are prohibited to walk on this road' (Uṇṇi 1988: 87). It is a paradox that even though some famous temples in Kerala originally belonged to the lower communities (like the Padmanābha temple of Trivandrum mentioned earlier which belonged to the Pulayas) later, when they were taken over by the Brahmans

with the help of the kings, these untouchables were not allowed even to walk on the temple roads.

The *avarṇas* had their own temples, but customarily they were not allowed to worship the higher gods of the Hindu pantheon like Viṣṇu or Śiva. Keśavan Vaidyar writes that Eezhavas and other *avarṇas* used to worship the corrupted forms of God like Cāttan, Cāmuṇṭi, Vīrabhadran, Mātan, Maruta, Ísakki and Yakṣi. They also used to make animal sacrifices and offer alcoholic drinks (Vaidyar 1995: 82). Neither their longing to worship the gods of the higher nature in their own temples could be fulfilled nor were they permitted to have a direct *darśana* of the deity in the temples of the Brahmans and the kings. They were only expected to pay taxes and give money as donations and offerings to these temples.

2.2. Right to walk on the public roads denied

Because of the fear of their polluting the higher castes, the people of the lower castes had much difficulty in walking on the public roads, and were even forbidden to do it. For example, according to a royal proclamation of the Travancore government, people of the polluting communities were prohibited to walk on the road from the East Fort to the Kiḷli River bridge (Uṇṇi 1988: 80). The situation in the states of Cochin and Malabar was still worse. Even if the untouchables could walk on some public roads, they had to keep the pollution distance very strictly. Sreedhara Menon (1979: 67) has quoted authentic eyewitness reports of travellers like Ma Huan (15th century) and Duarte Barbosa (16th century) in this respect. Ma Huan refers to the practice of the Mūkkuvās of Cochin falling prostrate on the ground at the sight of a Brahman or a Nāyar and remaining in that position till they passed by. Barbosa speaks of the arrogant behaviour of the Nāyars towards the lower castes. He says that when the Nāyars walked along the roads, they shouted to the lower castes to get out of their way. This they did and if one did not, the Nāyar could kill him without punishment. Thurston (1909, VII: 100) also quotes General E. F. Burton, who says that such was the insolent pride of the caste that the next and the very respectable class of Hindus, the Teers (Eezhavas) were not allowed to come near the Nāyars, under penalty of being cut down by sword.

From historical records it appears that even during the first decades of the 20th century, people belonging to the castes from Eezhava to Nāyāḍi did not have the freedom to walk on public roads. The only difference in comparison to earlier times was that they were not killed, but only beaten up if they sometimes happened to walk on such roads. This was because the upper caste people had by that time become afraid of being punished for killing by the courts introduced by the British. But even then the lower caste people were forbidden to travel as they wanted and hence they were unable to do many basic things in life (Uṇṇi 1988: 79).

To inform untouchables that *savarṇas* are coming and also to inform high caste people that *avarṇas* are coming, the members of each group were expected to make a particular sound. High caste people used to utter sounds like 'hō, hō' or 'hōi, hōi' or 'pō, pō' ('go away, go away') which was known as *occāṭṭu*. On hearing these sounds people of lower castes had to remain at the prescribed pollution distance or hide somewhere so that they should not cause pollution by their nearness or visibility. Since no actual measurement was possible, they had to keep much more distance than was prescribed. Each polluting community had to use separate sounds to indicate their presence on the road. The Eezhavas had to utter '*tīṅṅale, tīṅṅale*' ('pollution, pollution') and many other *harijan* communities had to utter '*ē*' (Uṅṅi 1988: 83). A case was filed in the Calicut Magistrate court in 1907 by a person called Govindan, who belonged to the Tīya community. He complained of being abused and insulted by a Nāyār for not keeping enough distance while walking on a country road. Instead of accusing the Nāyār who had ill-treated Govindan, the Brahman magistrate in his judgement commented that Govindan should be happy that the accused had not killed him and that actually the bones of persons who like Govindan violated the customs should be broken into pieces (Uṅṅi 1988: 87).

2.3. Purchasing and selling things in market places denied

People belonging to the untouchable communities were unable to enter the open markets. They had permission to do so only in exceptional circumstances like during a drought. Hence it was impossible for the *avarṇas* to purchase or sell anything in the markets (Uṅṅi 1988: 20). At least for essential things like salt, these people had to go to the market. But to get things purchased, they had to get the help of some person belonging to the poor section of the upper castes. Quoting Padmanabha Menon, the author of *Kochi rājya caritraṃ* ('History of the Cochin state'), Bhāskaran Uṅṅi records that if people like Pulayas came in the way of Nāyars on such market roads, formerly they were simply killed. Only in the 19th century, when Kerala came under British rule, the custom of immediately killing people for such offences stopped. But other things continued the same. For example, if a Pulaya wanted to purchase something from the town market, he had to stand outside the town boundary and shout for the thing which he wanted. He had to place the price of the thing wanted at some place and stand at a certain distance. Then the merchant would come and place the thing there and take the money away. In the case of other untouchable communities the situation was not much different (Uṅṅi 1988: 20). People of the lower communities such as the agriculturists, artisans and craftsmen formed the basis of the society. The prohibition of their entrance to public markets went totally against their interests. This system was beneficial only for the higher castes, who could sell or purchase things as they liked.

2.4. Discrimination in housing, clothing, hairstyle, and ornaments

Caste-based discrimination in the construction of buildings, in the use of clothes, in hairstyle and in wearing ornaments was strictly observed even during the first decades of the 20th century.

The Nambudiris lived in houses called *nālukeṭṭu*. This traditional housing complex consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by four houses known as *vaṭakkini* 'the northern house', *tekkini*, 'the southern house', *kiḷakkini* 'the eastern house' and *paṭiññāṭi* 'the western house', and a veranda. The Nāyars also lived in *nālukeṭṭu* houses, but these houses had some clear differences from those of the Nambudiris (Uṇṇi 1988: 39). The people of the lower castes were not allowed to build or live in such *nālukeṭṭu* houses. However, Thurston refers to old houses of the Eezhavas which had some resemblance to those of the Nāyars. These houses consisted of a central building called *arappura* and on its northern side a *vaṭakkatu* functioning as the women's apartment and kitchen, a courtyard in the *arappura* and a little building called *kiḷakkatu* enclosing it on the eastern side. On the southern side in some of these houses there was also a small *tekkatu*, which was a small building for ancestral worship. The main entrance usually stood a little south of the *kiḷakkatu*, to the south of which again was a cow shed (*toḷuṭṭu*). All these buildings were found only in the houses of rich Eezhavas, the poor satisfying themselves with an *arappura*, a *vaṭakkatu* and a *toḷuṭṭu*. (Thurston 1909, II: 396.)

Thurston (1909, VII: 94) further states that in the pre-British period, a few of the well-to-do families of the Tiyyas of Malabar lived in houses called *nālapura* 'four houses'. But he also notes that for the most part the Tiyyas who were slaves of the Nāyars and the Nambudiris lived in one-room thatched huts. Before 1861 many lower castes were not allowed to construct tiled roofs (Uṇṇi 1988: 46). If one wanted to build two-storied or tiled houses, special permission had to be obtained from the chieftains by paying a fee and giving other presents (Menon 1979: 79). On account of caste restrictions, the Mūkkuvās and other lower caste people resided in huts three feet high. There was a government order that such people might not construct huts higher than this. Bhāskaran Uṇṇi (1988: 42) records that because of this restriction, it became the custom to keep the height of the huts at three feet during the 19th century. Most of the untouchables were allowed to construct houses only far off from the houses of the upper castes so that they would not pollute them. Hence most of these people lived in huts thatched with coconut leaves either in a slum area or in an abandoned area. As there was further stratification among the untouchables, discrimination in the matter of dwellings created many difficulties.

There was also caste discrimination in dressing. For example, only women of the upper castes like the Nāyars were allowed to wear a waistcloth (*muṇṭu*) which came below the knees. This *muṇṭu* (*accipuṭava* was its special name in Malayalam)

was usually woven by the Eezhavas, but women of the Eezhava and other lower castes were not allowed to wear it (Uṇṇi 1988: 30). Bhāskaran Uṇṇi (1988: 32) has quoted an incident which happened towards the end of 19th century. One Eezhava woman was walking wearing a *muṇṇu* which came down to the knees. Seeing this, some Nāyars became angry and compelled her to undress. This caused a major incident.

The Nambudiris also made a law with the sanction of the kings that the women of all lower castes, including the Nāyars, should not cover their breasts with a cloth in the presence of a Brahman or a king. Samuel Mateer in the late 19th century observed that the proper salute from a female to persons of rank was to uncover her bosom (Menon 1979: 12). Nāyar women were allowed to put some cloth on their breasts on special occasions. But women of the lower castes were not allowed to cover their breasts even with a simple towel (*tōrttu*). They could keep such a cloth only in their hands or at the waist (Uṇṇi 1988: 83).

T. K. Ravindran records that each man of the lower castes had to pay a tax for the hair that grew on his head and each woman had to pay a breast tax. He has also cited an instance which describes how an Eezhava lady in Shertalai, unable to stand the humiliation and rapacity of a higher caste tax collector, cut off one of her breasts and presented it to him (Jacob 1995: 23). Men and women among the Pulayas and other communities which are now included in the schedules castes, wore a small *muṇṇu* round their loins, which seldom reached the knees. Some of these women had to wear leafy garments (Menon 1979: 116).

In the matter of hairstyle, too, there was clear caste discrimination. For example, only women of the higher castes had the right to tie their hair into a knot leaning towards the left side of the head. Eezhava and other lower caste women had to tie the hair into a knot next to the temple and above the right ear (Uṇṇi 1988: 54).

Caste-based distinction extended to the use of ornaments. Usually women of the lower castes were not allowed to wear ornaments worn by women of the upper castes. Thurston reports that in the olden days, a Tiyya woman could wear an ornament appropriate to Nāyars on special occasions. This could be done only with the permission of the Nāyar landlord and by paying a fee (Thurston 1909, VII: 99). Women of many other lower communities were allowed to wear only beads or ornaments made of metals other than gold. Women, men and children of the Pulaya and other lower castes had to wear beads indicating their particular caste. (George 1974: 140.)

Since there are two long rainy seasons in Kerala, and at other times the sunshine is rather severe, people living there need an umbrella. An umbrella made of palm leaves and provided with a handle was in use until recently and the use of it was the sole monopoly of the Nambudiri Brahmans. Instead of such an umbrella, people of the lower castes had to use banana leaves or *pāḷa*, the bark film of an areca palm leaf. According to Samuel Mateer, all castes except the Brahmans were

prohibited from holding umbrellas on public occasions in the late 19th century (cf. Menon 1979: 112). Bhāskaran Uṇṇi (1988: 83) writes that the Eezhavas could use umbrellas at the beginning of the 20th century. But whether it was raining or hot sunshine, they were not permitted to hold the umbrella straight up but only in a slanting position, with the result that they got wet. When travelling with an umbrella they had to say '*valiye, valiye*' ('a polluting fellow is walking on the way') so that *savarṇas* could recognise them and avoid becoming polluted. Otherwise they were beaten up.

2.5. Commensality between castes and subcastes prohibited

Commensality between the various communities during feasts was strictly prohibited by conventions. According to the custom, the Nambudiri Brahmins could not eat even with the subdivisions of their own community (Uṇṇi 1988: 8). This was imitated by other upper castes like the Nāyars who also did not eat with the subdivisions of their castes. The Nāyars were divided into more than fifteen subdivisions in general (in Travancore there existed altogether forty subdivisions) and commensality between these subdivisions was not at all possible (Uṇṇi 1988: 195, 201). The lower castes also followed this system of the upper castes and many subdivisions were made among them. Commensality between the subdivisions of the polluting castes was also not possible. This became a social problem since free social life and free interaction among various communities and among the subcastes became impossible. In fact this social evil was the outcome of the concepts of pollution distance and pollution based on untouchability, and the prohibition against commensality, all introduced by the Nambudiris to retain their supremacy in the society.

2.6. Right to milk one's own cow denied

People of the low castes, from the Eezhava community downwards, were allowed only to feed the cattle, but they were not allowed to milk even their own cow. On the basis of the available records, Bhāskaran Uṇṇi gives the following description of this custom. The cow was considered to be Goddess Lakṣmī, and when it gave birth to a calf, there was a pollution for ten days, just as when the wife of a Nambudiri Brahmin gave birth to a child. It was a rule established by the kings that after these ten days, the cow should be milked only by people of the upper castes because milk and milk products were used by the Brahmins and the lords of the higher castes only. Hence it was the duty of the kings to see that their valuable milk food should not be polluted. The kings in Kerala had to take an oath at the time of their coronation that they will protect the cows and the Brahmins. If a person belonging

to the *avarṇa* group ever milked a cow, he was fined for it. Even during the first decades of the 20th century, Eezhavas and others were barred from milking the cows for fear of them polluting the milk, which was either offered to God or consumed by people of the higher castes. This had become an accepted traditional custom. However, the cow could be fed and reared by anyone, but as soon as it delivered a calf, it was to be entrusted to the nearest Nāyar chief. When the cow stopped giving milk, the Nāyars would inform the owner and he could take it back. When taking the cow to the Nāyar and taking it back, the owner could get only one meal as a remuneration. If somebody opposed this practice, he was tied to a tree and beaten (Uṇṇi 1988: 16-17).

2.7. Right to enter a court of justice denied

As stated earlier, courts of justice were established in Kerala during the 19th century by the British. But according to Anantha Krishna Iyer, even during the first decades of the 20th century Eezhavas and other lower castes were not permitted to enter a native court of justice because they might pollute the judges, who were members of the high castes. Nāyars were the paid advocates of Eezhavas in these courts of justice (Jacob 1995: 23). Bhāskaran Uṇṇi (1988: 91) has cited a government circular of 1910 which indicates that in many courts there were restrictions based on untouchability for the entry of people from the lower castes.

2.8. Right to use normal language prohibited

The right to use the normal words of the Malayalam language about oneself, one's house and belongings and relatives in the presence of members of the higher castes was denied to people of the lower castes. They were compelled by custom to condemn themselves and to speak about themselves as *adhaman* ('below the normal man') in the presence of Nambudiris and people of the other higher castes. Instead of saying *ñān* ('I'), they had to say *aṭṭiyan* ('slave'). They had to say *cāṇaka kuṇṭu* ('cow dung pit') or *kuppappāṭṭu* ('waste pit') to refer to their houses. They had to refer to their food as *karikkāṭṭi* ('charcoal and water that has been used for washing rice').

Quoting from William Logan these and other servile expressions to be used by people of the lower castes in the presence of members of the upper castes, Bhāskaran Uṇṇi (1988: 38) states that still during the first decades of the 20th century the use of such expressions was compulsory for these people. The Nambudiris always insisted that while speaking to them, lower caste people should not call their own father *acchan*, but *tanta* or *paḷam tanta* and their mother not *amma* but *taḷla* or *paḷam taḷla*. The words *acchan* and *amma* were considered to be the monopoly of

the Nambudiris and other upper castes. Of their bathing, people of the lower castes could only say *ceru nana* ('little wetting'); of their oil bath they had to speak of *melukku toṭṭu purattal* ('touching and smearing oily stuff') instead of *eṇṇa tēccu kuḷi* ('to bathe smearing oil') (Uṇṇi 1988: 131). The compulsory use of such sub-language was meant to keep the status of these people subhuman.

2.9. The right to education denied

Since the children of the polluting communities were forbidden to mingle with the children of the upper castes, their right to education was totally denied. According to Keśavan Vaidyar (1995: 34), all untouchable communities were kept as slaves for centuries, mainly by denying them the right to education. Excepting a few families of the Eezhavas who had a tradition of Āyurvedic knowledge and Sanskrit learning, the untouchable people had no right to or facility for education. Modern education and western-type schools were started in different parts of Kerala during the latter half of the 19th century. But in most schools people of the lower communities were not admitted for study. In the *Eezhava Memorial*, collected under the leadership of Dr. Palpu with the signatures of 13,176 people which was submitted to the king of Travancore on the 3rd of September 1896, it was stated that children of the Eezhavas were not allowed to enter most government schools and were simply driven away by denying admission (Uṇṇi 1988: 702). In 1915, Kumāran Āśān, a member of the Travancore legislative assembly, presented a list of 27 schools where admission was denied to children of the untouchable communities. In reply to a petition for admitting girl students of the Tiyya community to the lower secondary girl's school in Cranganore in 1915, the Secretary to the Divan of the Cochin state wrote that owing to the religious objections in this case, which after careful consideration have been found to be insurmountable, the request cannot be granted. The communities which were still being crushed by the slavery of caste stratification could never dream of getting education during this period.

2.10. Right to government jobs denied

Through the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, people of all the lower communities were considered as unworthy of any government job in Kerala which was then divided into the kingdoms of Travancore and Cochin and the territory of Malabar with some local kingdoms. The first person among the Eezhavas who was granted a BA degree in 1888 was denied any job under the Travancore government. In 1891, Dr. Pulpu, the first holder of a medical degree among the Eezhavas, was not given a job in the Travancore medical service. When the Eezhavas sent a petition asking for employment in government service for quali-

fied people among them, the government replied that the traditional state policy did not allow them to be employed in the government service (Uṇṇi 1988: 94). In the above-mentioned *Eezhava Memorial* of 1896 it was stated that there was not even a single person from the Eezhava community in His Majesty's service who was drawing a salary of at least five rupees a month (Uṇṇi 1988: 702). 'The traditional state policy' was mainly based on the concept of pollution. The kings and the Brahmans made it an excuse that members of these communities would pollute the high caste officials. The facts indicate that from among the untouchable communities, which formed about 80% of Hindu society in Kerala, there was not a single person employed in the government till 1896.

3. THE REHUMANISING ACTIVITIES OF SRI NARAYANA GURU

3.1. Consecration of temples for the *avarṇas*

Sri Narayana Guru became known as a yogi and spiritualist during the last decades of the 19th century. He was conscious of the religious testimony by which the Brahmans were backing up the concept of pollution. The first thing that he did in order to bring about a change in the situation was to install an idol of Śiva in a river valley called Aruvippuram near Trivandrum in southern Kerala during the Śivarātri of 1888. This he did mainly to break the monopoly of the Brahmans to install deities in temples. A young Eezhava yogi without Vedic authorisation installing a Śivalinga in a temple soon became a topic of heated argumentation. Brahmans came to him and questioned the appropriateness of this action on the basis of the Śāstras. 'I have installed only an Eezhava Śiva', was the quiet and firm reply of Sri Narayana Guru (Vaidyar 1995: 30). By this statement he indirectly stated that the consecration of the image of a deity in any temple and its worship there cannot be the exclusive monopoly of just one particular caste since God belongs to all and not to one particular community alone. On the wall of his temple, Sri Narayana Guru wrote the famous four-line verse:

*jāti bhēdaṃ mata dvēṣaṃ
ētum illāte sarvaruṃ
sōdaratvena vāḷunna
mātrkāsthānam āṇ' itū*

This is the ideal place,
where there is no difference of caste,
and no religious spite,
where all live in a spirit of brotherhood.

This was the first proclamation of Sri Narayana Guru's firm conviction that differences based on caste and creed and other similar blind beliefs should be done away with for the sake of establishing brotherhood among all people. To achieve this goal, he started a two-fold programme of activities. In the first place, he wanted to reform the religious field, and secondly to fight for the social and political rights through organised movements. (Vaidyar 1995: 30.) After the consecration of the first Śiva temple, he travelled among the people. As people from different parts of the country wanted such temples, he established them throughout Kerala. These temples released the untouchables from the clutches of religious slavery, which forced them to worship God by standing far away from the sanctum sanctorum in the monopoly of the *savarnas*. The temples created a psychological change in the untouchables' religious attitude. Sri Narayana Guru mainly installed deities like Śiva and Subrahmanya, but he also consecrated a temple of Śārādā Devī, the Goddess of learning, at Śivagiri near Varkala. Later he even installed the sacred syllable *Om* and a mirror and discs engraved with words like *satyam* (truth), *dharmam* (righteousness, virtue), *daya* (kindness) and *śānti* (peace) in some temples. All these temples were open to devotees of all untouchable communities. He trained people from all lower communities to become priests in these temples and also allowed people from other religions to worship in them (Vaidyar 1995: 31). Through this popular movement of opening temples for all the untouchables, Sri Narayana Guru could create an awareness in the masses that the people of the so-called lower castes are also human beings and that they have equal rights with the upper castes to perform all religious rites such as worshipping or consecrating temples of Vedic gods. This created self-confidence in people who were previously made to believe that they were inferior in matters of religion and hence do not deserve any human rights.

3.2. Organised movement through the S.N.D.P.

In 1903 Sri Narayana Guru established an organisation called the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripālana Yōgam (S.N.D.P.) to launch an organised struggle for obtaining all fundamental human rights for the untouchables. Perhaps this was the first of its kind in India. Sri Narayana Guru was the President of this association and his associate and social worker, Dr. Palpu, became the Vice-President. The Secretary of the association was Kumāran Āśān, who later became well known in Malayalam literature as a revolutionary poet. The S.N.D.P. Yōgam started a three-phased programme to achieve its goals (Vaidyar 1995: 149, 150). The first was an ideological fight against social evils such as untouchability as well as a struggle to secure school admission and government jobs for people of the lower castes. The second was the eradication of meaningless and decaying traditions and blind beliefs within the Eezhava community. The third and most important activity was very much

of constructive nature. The purpose of this constructive programme was to gain strength through organisation, gain cultural freedom through education and to achieve prosperity through industry. Sri Narayana Guru's famous saying 'gain strength through organisation' (*samghaṭana koṇṭu śaktar ākuka*) was the main inspiration behind all these programmes. In a statement published in 1908 Sri Narayana Guru made it clear that the material and spiritual aspects of life are not different from each other. For the physical, mental and spiritual progress of a society, temples and centres of worship will be helpful. But the economic progress of the society is a basic condition for everything, and the basis for economic progress is improvement in agriculture, business and technical education. (Bhāskaran 1985: 1.) Under the guidance of the Guru who was the President for twenty-five years, workers of the S.N.D.P. Yōgam like Dr. Palpu, Kumāran Āśān, and others made a sincere effort to achieve these objectives. The Yōgam established branches all over Kerala and also disseminated information and ideas through its journal, *Vivēkodayam*. Able speakers were sent out to many places to speak about topics like religion, morality, education and industry (Sanoo 1978: 97). These peacefully organised agitations started by the S.N.D.P. Yōgam had a long-standing effect.

The followers of Sri Narayana Guru were mainly members of the Eezhava community. But he also worked among other sections of the untouchables. Ayyankāḷi (1866-1941), a leader of the Pulayas who drew inspiration from the work of Sri Narayana Guru, founded an organisation called *Sādhu Jana Paripālana Sangham* in 1907 (Menon 1979: 205). Ayyankāḷi began to work for the emancipation of the Pulayas. According to Keśavan Vaidyar (1995: 151), even though most members of the S.N.D.P. Yōgam were Eezhavas, the aim of the Yōgam was from the very beginning the uplift of all the downtrodden people. The third annual general body meeting had accepted a resolution in this regard. The Yōgam worked in close cooperation with the *Sādhu Jana Paripālana Sangham*. As a result of the efforts of the S.N.D.P. Yōgam, its secretary Kumāran Āśān was nominated a member of the *Śrī Mūlam Popular Assembly* in 1905 and later a member of the Legislative Council of Travancore. He worked there for about two decades. He fought for the eradication of untouchability, for the admission of the lower castes to schools, for their right to government jobs, and for permission for them to walk on the temple roads and public roads. He also asked the government to develop staple industries like coir-yarn, copra, and weaving in which the Eezhavas had much interest. Further, he urged the government to send some young men of that community to foreign countries for training. (Ravindran 1972: 3.) Ayyankāḷi was also nominated a member of the Assembly in 1912 and for 25 years he fought there for the rights of the Pulayas and other lower communities (George 1974: 139).

3.3. Freedom through education

Sri Narayana Guru tried to reorganise a society which had been made firmly to believe in the inequality between men, in the injustice done to the lower castes as natural justice and in the concept of pollution as created by God. In order to make them better human beings, the Guru asked them to 'become free through education' (Vaidyar 1995: 33). The consecration of temples for social worship and the organisation of the Yōgam brought the untouchables together. These socio-religious reforms prepared the ground for their rehumanisation psychologically and materially. As a further step to break the monopoly of the Brahmans, he popularised Sanskrit and also English education among the lower castes. In 1914 he opened an Advaita Āśrama at Alwaye, starting a Sanskrit school there in 1915. Admission to this school was open to anybody interested in learning Sanskrit irrespective of caste or creed (Jacob 1995: 55). Sri Narayana Guru also established schools at Aruvippuram, Varkala and other places. In a message given in 1917 he stated that from now onwards there is a need for establishing educational institutions rather than consecrating temples. The schools should be the main temples. (Vaidyar 1995: 91.) Along with spiritual and material education, he also introduced the idea of work experience in the schools established by him at Aruvippuram and Śivagiri in the early decades of the 20th century. The S.N.D.P. Yōgam took up this movement and later established many schools and colleges in Kerala. It can also be seen that the movement to educate the 'polluting communities' started by Sri Narayana Guru became so popular that Kerala became the state with the highest rate of literacy in the post-independence India.

3.4. The ideal 'one caste, one religion and one God for man'

Sri Narayana Guru wrote some popular poems redefining caste and refuting all the false concepts of caste propagated for centuries by the Brahmans to keep the people in the dark. The keylines of some of these poems became slogans and popular sayings. One of the most popular slogans was the ideal 'one caste, one religion and one God for man'. The first two stanzas of his poem 'Defining the caste' (*jāti nirṇayam*, Bhāskaran 1985: 487) are as follows:

*manuṣyāṇām manuṣyatvaṃ,
jātir gōtvam gavāṃ yathā
na brāhmaṇādirasaivaṃ
hā! tattvaṃ vētti kō' pi na.*

*oru jāti oru matam
oru daivam manuṣyanū,
oru yōni or ākāraṃ
oru bhēdavum illitil.*

The caste of a human being is humanity,
Just as the caste of a cow can only be cow.
Brāhmaṇa and such others are not his caste,
But this truth is seldom known to any.

One caste, one religion,
And one God for man.
One is the species, one is the form,
And no difference exists in it.

In this poem written in 1914 Sri Narayana Guru explained that there is only one caste of man, namely humanity. He scientifically argued that all mankind comes from the same species or womb (*yonī*) and hence there is no difference between men. He rationally established that the castes created by man do not exist in reality. He made it clear that manhood or being a man is the only caste of men like being a cow is the caste or kind of the cows. Caste distinctions, like Brāhmaṇa and other *varṇas* or *jātis*, are not real castes of man. They are only created by people and imposed upon men. To prove his ideas he took recourse to the Advaita philosophy and the Upaniṣads and explained in his *Ātmōpadēśa śatakam* that since all the beings in this universe are different forms of the Supreme Brahman or God, and since the same soul exists in all human beings, there cannot be any distinctions like 'he is Brāhmaṇa' or 'he is Paṛaya' and the like. So he advocated that whatever one does for one's own well-being should be not to harm others, but it should be for the benefit of others (Bhāskaran 1985: 347-350). His main concern was man and humanity and this is the spiritual humanism exemplified by him based on the Advaita philosophy.

Since Sri Narayana Guru believed in one caste, he encouraged commensality and intermarriage between different castes and religions. His followers like Sahodaran Ayyappan and T. K. Madhavan propagated his ideas on caste through various constructive programmes. In the famous statement issued on the background of the controversial commensality programme carried out by Sahodaran Ayyappan in 1917, the Guru said that whatever be the religion, dress, language and similar things of men, there is no harm in their eating together or in their intermarriage, since they all belong to the same (human) caste (Vaidyar 1995: 45). Kumāran Āśān (1873-1924), the revolutionary poet and disciple of Sri Narayana Guru wrote the poetic work *Caṇḍāḷa bhikṣuki* (1922) questioning untouchability, and another called *Duravastha* (1922) on the theme of intercaste marriage (Āśān 1998: 468, 524).

Sri Narayana Guru underlined the fundamental unity of all religions. For him, the spiritual principles were above all religions. Hence he proclaimed that 'Whatever may be one's religion, man should become better' (Vaidyar 1995: 51). He convened a conference of all religions at Alwaye in 1924. The motto of this conference was 'not to argue and succeed, but to know and let know' (Vaidyar 1995: 46). The Guru believed in the material and spiritual uplift of man through the right understanding of different religions. In fact, his ideal of 'one caste, one religion and one

God' is a reinterpretation of the *sanātana dharma* in its liberal and universal form. Although he consecrated temples of Śiva, Sarasvatī and other Vedic gods and goddesses for the common man who wanted to perform the *saguṇa* form of worship in such temples, he later installed the syllable *Om* in some temples. He interpreted the *brahma-vidyā* and the Advaitic truth in his poems on Advaita philosophy and religious experience, including the *Brahma-vidyā-pāñcakam*, *Daiva-daśakam*, *Advaita-dīpika*, *Ātmōpadēśa-śatakam* and *Darśana-māla* (Bhāskaran 1985: 243-407). In these poems he spoke of the single Supreme Brahman or God adored by the Upaniṣads and all other religions of the world.

3.5. Sri Narayana Guru's social reforms

From 1888 to 1928, Sri Narayana Guru initiated many social reforms in Kerala, mainly through his activities among the Eezhavas. All these reforms aimed at the intellectual, social, psychological and economic transition of a dehumanised society into a new society of normal civilised human beings. The Eezhavas had become used to spending a lot of money in rituals like the *kāvupāṭṭu* and *tullal* ('devil dance') connected with the worship of primitive forms of God such as *Iśakki*, *Yakṣi*, *Cāttan*, *Cāmuṇṭi*, *Vīrabhadran*, *Pūtattān* and others. The Guru discouraged all these expensive and primitive rituals and worship and advocated a simpler and more rational religious approach. In a way, he intellectualised the whole concept of god by his interpretations of the Upaniṣadic philosophy (Vaidyar 1995: 73). This helped the community to make a transition from primitive to refined religious practices and to become better aware of the higher philosophy of the Upaniṣads.

Important reforms were carried out by Sri Narayana with regard to the marriage ceremonies and other family rituals including puberty rites, pregnancy rites and funeral ceremonies. The marriage rituals of the Eezhavas consisted of two elaborate ceremonies called *tālikeṭṭu* and *puṭavakoṭa* (spoken form *puṭavaṭa*). Edgar Thurston (1909, II: 411) refers to the *puṭavakoṭa* as *saṃbandham*. On the basis of the details given by Thurston, J. Puthenkalam, A. Aiyappan and others, George Jacob (1995: 134-136) gives the following account of the *tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam*. Etymologically *tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam* means 'the auspicious event of tāli-tying'. This rite was considered to be an indispensable religious rite for Eezhava girls. If any family failed to conduct the *tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam* before the onset of puberty, that family was socially ostracised. Elaborate arrangements like consulting the *kaṇiyān* (astrologer) by the elders, erecting a pandal and decorating it with the assistance of the *taṇṭān* (the head of the coconut tree climbers) and the *ambaṭṭan* (barber). *Ambaṭṭatti*, the wife of the *ambaṭṭan*, also played an important role. The tāli-tier was generally the son of the maternal uncle, *maccambi*. He came to the house of the girl with some elders usually riding on a caparisoned elephant, if the family was rich

enough. When they arrived at the gate, the girl's relatives welcomed them. The girl was then led to the pandal by her *kāraṇavan* or maternal uncle. At an auspicious hour, while music was played, the boy with the permission of the senior members assembled there would tie the *tāli* around the girl's neck. The ceremony lasted for several days. The *tāli*-tier would go to his house while the girl remained in her house; she could take off the *tāli* after the festival was over. The *tāli* couple was never considered husband and wife outside the *tāli* booth. If the *tāli*-tier or any other boy wanted to marry her, they had to perform another marriage ritual called *puṭavakoṭa*.

The *puṭavakoṭa* or 'the ceremony for accepting a girl as one's wife by giving her a traditional cloth called *puṭava*' was usually performed at the bride's residence. Once the boy and the girl were selected, their horoscopes were examined with the help of an astrologer. 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 *tanṭān* and *ambaṭṭan* to help the family in the marriage arrangements. According to the custom, it was not required that the bridegroom go to the house of the bride for *puṭavakoṭa*. On the day of the marriage, his sister and other relatives would take the *puṭava* to the bride's house. There at the auspicious hour she loudly asked the assembly 'Shall I give the *puṭava*?' This was repeated thrice to ascertain that there was no disagreement about the marriage. Then she assisted the bride in dressing in the new *puṭava* and led 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* (the cross cousin of the girl who was his preferential mate according to the old custom) expressing his prior claim to wed the girl. He would then be given a payment to satisfy his claim; this was only a nominal amount.

Sri Narayana Guru simplified these ceremonies since they were very complicated and were a financial burden for people who were already crushed by the upper castes through taxes. According to him, the *tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam* was a mock wedding and therefore unnecessary (Jacob 1995: 136). He convened a conference of the Eezhavas in 1904 at Paravur and asked them to discontinue altogether the *tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam* (Sanoo 1978: 102). He simplified the rituals of marriage as a single ceremony where the father or the guardian of the bride joins the hands of the bride and the bridegroom and pours water from his hand to the groom's hand. Then the bride garlands the bridegroom and the latter ties a *tāli* around her neck. The bride is taken to the bridegroom's house immediately after the marriage. Sri Narayana Guru also introduced a new type of simple marriage ceremony in the temples established by him, which made the marriage expenses very low. He asked the married women to continuously wear the *tāli* as an auspicious symbol of their marriage. The S.N.D.P. Yōgam kept regular registers of marriages and the procedures were standardised.

According to the instructions of the Guru, other costly ceremonies like *tiraṅtukūḷi* (a puberty rite) and *pulīkuṭi* (a pregnancy rite) were done away with. The elaborate ceremonies connected with the death pollution were also simplified according to his instructions.

In different parts of Kerala, the Eezhavas had different types of inheritance. They followed the *makkattāyam* system (inheritance from father to son) in some places near the southern border of Tamil Nadu and the *marumakkattāyam* system (inheritance through the female line) in most places in Kerala and also a mixed system in some southern areas (Thurston 1909, II: 410). As early as 1908 Sri Narayana Guru spoke against polygamy and polyandry. He asked the S.N.D.P. Yōgam to consider what steps could be taken to stop free indulgence in these practices in future. He advocated the view that in communities following the *marumakkattāyam* or matrilineal system, legal provision should be made to give the wedded wife and children the right to get a portion of the man's individual earnings. In his opinion, marriages would otherwise be meaningless. The Guru advocated the individual partition of property as early as 1904. (Jacob 1995: 122, 138.)

4. THE IMPACT ON KINSHIP AND OTHER SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The rehumanising revolution initiated by Sri Narayana Guru had a deep and far-reaching impact on the kinship structure and other social relationships. This impact was two-directional, affecting on the one hand the untouchable communities that were considered lower than the Eezhavas and on the other hand the communities which were considered above the Eezhavas in the caste hierarchy (Vaidyar 1995: 151). The S.N.D.P. Yōgam was registered in 1903. In 1907 the Sādhujana Pari-pālana Sangham was started by the Pulaya leader Ayyankali. The Paṛayas also tried to organise themselves under the leadership of Kantan Kumāran during this time. An important development within the upper castes was the founding of the Nampūtiri Yōga Kṣēma Sabha by some Nambudiris in 1909. Following these developments, the Nāyar Service Society was registered under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan in 1912. The agitations started by the S.N.D.P. Yōgam were always very peaceful and some of the programmes, such as giving permission to the *avarṇas* to walk through the temple roads and giving the wife and children a right to the husband's property and thereby discouraging the matrilineal system of inheritance and marriage also gained the sympathy of the upper castes. For example, during the Vaikkam satyāgraha which was started mainly by the efforts of the followers of Sri Narayana Guru like T. K. Madhavan, the Nāyar leaders also took part and Mannath Padmanabhan led a 'savarna delegation' to Trivandrum in 1924. There was also another satyāgraha in 1931 at Guruvayur. These two satyāgrahas

became a success through the combined effort of all these communities. As a result, many temple roads were opened to the *avarṇas*. The Temple entry proclamation of 1936 was an important achievement of the movement of the *avarṇas*. Sri Narayana Guru had very good personal contact with the spiritual leaders of the Nāyars like Caṭṭambi Svāmi. The teachings of Sri Narayana Guru and Caṭṭambi Svāmi inspired the Nāyars to eradicate the barriers between their subcastes, as well as such irrational practices as *tālikeṭṭukalyāṇam* and *tiraṇṭukuḷi*, which impoverished many middle class Nāyar families (Menon 1979: 202). The combined efforts resulted in the Nāyar Act of 1925 and the Eezhava Act of 1925 being passed and the *makkattāyam* system of inheritance being adopted. The reform movements among the Nambudiris led to the Nambudiri Act of 1933. These acts and the Temple entry proclamation undermined the stronghold of caste hierarchy and stopped the *sambandham* marriage (co-habiting) of the Nambudiris with Nāyar women. Thus a peaceful social revolution took place in Kerala as a result of the rehumanisation programmes initiated by Sri Narayana Guru.

By 1933 the Eezhavas, Christians and Muslims joined politically to lead the abstention movement, which helped them to get more political power. Through the efforts of T. K. Madhavan, a close associate of Sri Narayana Guru, the resolution to eradicate untouchability was passed by the Indian National Congress in its Kakinada session (Vaidyar 1995: 44). As a result of it, Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress took up the fight against untouchability in satyāgrahas arranged in Kerala, such as those at Vaikkam in 1924 and at Guruvayur in 1931. This led later to the total eradication of untouchability in India through the Indian constitution accepted under the leadership of Dr B. R. Ambedkar in 1950.

With the social reforms brought about by Sri Narayana Guru, the traditional kinship organisation was totally shaken. For example, the role of the *kāraṇavan* was very important in the traditional marriage and other rites. With the introduction of the *prājāpatya* type of marriages by the Guru, the role of the father became very important. The *kāraṇavan* (maternal uncle), *ammāyi* (maternal uncle's mother) and *maccambi* (cross cousin) no longer had a role in the new system and hence the traditional system of cousin marriage was discouraged. The *sambandham* type of marriage which encouraged polyandry gave way to monogamy and a strong nuclear family as a result of the right for personal partition of the family property after the Eezhava Act of 1925 and the Nāyar Act of 1925.

Previously, the presence of the bridegroom was not necessary at a marriage. But the new marriage process introduced by Sri Narayana Guru gave equal importance to the man and to the woman as partners in the marriage, and this brought about a revolutionary change in the kinship relations. Their sons and daughters became more important to the parents than the nephews and the nieces. In the traditional society the nephews and nieces had a stronger position because it was they who were previously supposed to perform the funeral rites. Thus such earlier

powerful kinship institutions as those of the *ammāyi*, *kāraṇavan* and *maccambi* became nullified in the changing society of Kerala.

Moreover, women of all lower caste communities and uppercaste communities like the Nāyars began to wear the *tāli* permanently like the Eezhava women. Similarly, the marriage rites of all these communities began to be conducted in temples after the introduction of this innovation by Sri Narayana Guru. From 1904 onwards there was a women's session in the S.N.D.P. Yōgam and therewith the Eezhava women were brought to the forefront. Sri Narayana Guru pleaded for more rights and for more education for women. This possibly had an impact on the women of the upper castes like the Nambudiris and Nāyars.

5. THE CONCEPT OF REHUMANISATION

The rehumanisation movement of Sri Narayana Guru has been interpreted by some scholars as sanskritisation. For example, the introduction of *kanyādānam* and *pāṇigrahaṇam* are in accordance with the Dharmaśāstras which are followed by the Brāhmaṇas. M. N. Srinivas has defined sanskritisation as a process in which lower castes adopt practices that are in accordance with Sanskrit texts and the practices of higher castes. But George Jacob (1995: 143) has shown that the process of change among the Eezhavas differs from sanskritisation in the respect that they are not attempting to gain a positional change in the caste structure to attain the status of Brahmins, or are they imitating all the marriage practices of the Brahmins. They have only adopted nobler forms of marriage according to Scriptures. Thus the Eezhavas continue the Hindu religious tradition but in doing so they have adopted the strategy of selection and integration (Jacob: 1995: 142).

Sri Narayana Guru was not a western-educated person and he never tried to westernise the Eezhavas and other untouchables. Therefore, calling his movement *westernisation* seems to be inappropriate. George Jacob has interpreted the Guru's movement as *modernisation* even though he agrees that the Guru has searched for a new humanism (Jacob 1995: 181). In my opinion, it is a process of *rehumanisation*, because the term *modernisation* is insufficient: it does not convey the idea that this process changed a previously subhuman group into a normal human group. The change has taken place on two levels. First, in Kerala, it materially and psychologically changed people who were dehumanised by the upper castes for their own selfish motives. Secondly, on the national level, Sri Narayana Guru's rehumanisation process contributed to the attainment of normal humanity by people who had become subhuman by a turn of history.

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