

CASTE SLAVERY: RESTRUCTURING AND IMPLICATIONS IN KERALA SOCIETY

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Abstract Caste slavery was emerged and developed as an institution in the medieval period, and different types of slavery found in the society of Kerala. The essential characteristic of caste slavery was social exclusion and social stratification. The caste system presents the basis of social exclusion under which groups identified as 'low' caste in the hierarchy of Hindu society have been placed at disadvantaged social, economic, and political positions through the ages. Slavery is a non-voluntary system of personal relations resting wholly upon force. The element of force or compulsion is inherited in the system of slavery. Slavery in Kerala is closely connected with the system of caste. The entire society was categorized into different castes, and each caste strictly followed its own caste rules.

The Greek word "slave" was used loosely but had a definite meaning. The word *andrapodan*, "chattel slavery," literally means a footed man formed on the analogy of *terapoda*, four-footed cattle. Similarly, *andrapodistes* and *andrapodokapetos* meant "slave snatcher" and "slave dealer," respectively. The word "slave" was closely connected to "*slav*." It was also written as *sclauē*, *sclave*, etc. These various terms are the transformations and adoptions of the Medieval Latin term *sclavus*, which corresponded to the Greek "sclabos." It refers to the name of a person belonging to a race inhabiting Eastern Europe and comprising Russians, Bulgarians, Servo-Croats, Poles, Czechs, Moravians, and wends or Slovenes. It is also considered that the name "slave" was initially given to a person of the Slavonic race who had been reduced to captivity or subjection.

People were treated as property to be bought and sold and were forced to work under the system of slavery as a recognized institution. After establishing the theory of "Might is Right," the notion of superior races, which led to wars and conquests, arose. The winners of war came to enjoy chattel slavery as one of the fruits of their triumph, and having enjoyed the advantage of over-lordship, they sought to enlarge the domain of slavery by further conquests. Therefore, "war helped to make slavery and slavery helped to make war." (Varghese, 1975, 398-99) Slavery also required economic surplus and a high population density. Due to these factors, slavery would have only proliferated after the invention of agriculture during the Neolithic revolution about 11000 years ago. Therefore agriculture helped in generating not only private property but also slavery. (Durant, 1935, 19)

Slaves could be held against their will from their capture, purchase, or birth and deprived of the right to leave, refuse to work, or demand compensation. In pre-industrial societies, slaves and their labor were economically crucial for those who benefited from them. However, in modern mechanized societies, there is less need for sheer massive human resources. Norbert Wiener wrote that mechanical

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labor has most of the economic properties of slave labor, though it does not involve the direct demoralizing effects of human cruelty.

There existed different types of slavery, such as domestic slavery, debt bondage, chattel slavery, indentured servitude, serfdom, agrestic slavery, child labor, and forced labor. Chattel slavery was the traditional form of slavery in which people were treated as the personal property of an owner. The chattel slaves were bought and sold like commodities. Debt bondage was a widespread form of slavery found on a large scale in South Asia. Here a slave is under debt bondage incurred by lenders. The system of forced labor is another kind of slavery. In this system, an individual is forced to work against his or her will under threat of violence or other punishment, with restrictions on their freedom. The term forced labor is also used to describe all types of slavery and may also include institutions not commonly classified as slavery, such as conscription and penal labor.

Caste is the taboos and division of labor in the pre-Aryan tribes of India and their efforts for self-preservation in the face of invasion. (Hutton, 1963, 207) Anthropologists stated that the fundamental division of society was in three-fold categories- the dominant, the dependent, and the degraded. In other words, they were named the *canror* or warrior elite, the *ilicinar* or toiling commoners, and unclean *Pulaiyar*. (Omvedt, 1994, 36) Similar tripartite divisions have been found in Nepal in the forms of “thread-wearing castes,” “the alcohol-drinking caste,” and the “water not to be taken from castes.” (Ibid.)

Social anthropologists defined *caste* as the system of ranks related to differential control over productive resources. (Bailey, 1957, 266) Each person in the caste system performed economic, political, and ritual roles, and except for certain anomalies, there is a high degree of coincidence between politico-economic rank and the ritual ranking of caste. (Ibid.) The anomalies are mainly apparent at the uppermost and lowermost ranks of the ritual system. However, Louis Dumont criticized Bailey’s interpretation of caste. According to Dumont, ritual purity is the code of caste hierarchy instead of differential control over productive resources. He also pointed out that the hierarchical caste system is founded on two basic ideological principles. Firstly, the opposition between ritual purity and pollution defined the hierarchical relationship between the pure Brahmins and the polluted untouchables. Secondly, the absolute separation of religious status, personified by the Brahmins, from politico-economic power, which was ideally concentrated in the hands of Kshatriya kings. (Burghart, 1983, 35-42)

In the period of the Indus Valley Civilization, which is believed to have flourished between 2500 BC and 1500 BC, a section of *dasas* or *dasyus* or slaves had been found in the society. Several remains of the worker’s dwellings have been discovered at Mohenjo-Daro, with a considerably larger surface area of 28 x 15 feet each at Harappa. It resembles the *coolie* lanes or worker’s quarters of modern factory workers. It showed that in the Indus Valley Civilization, the “glorious civilization” of ancient India, slavery was an adjunct to its position. (Adoor, 1986, 1) The *dasas* or slaves of the Indus Valley Period might have been persons captured in the battle or persons reduced to bondage for crime or debt.

In the Vedic period, a number of references to slavery were found. The Vedic seers used the term “*dvi-pad*” for a slave, meaning two-footed, an extension of the term ‘*catus-pad*’ meaning four-footed. (Sharad, 1982, 7) *Ahataka* is explained by

Dev Raj Chanana: “the word is found in the compound *bhataka-ahataka* and signifies a slave. It can be derived from the root ‘hr’ and explained as ‘one who has been brought’; one could also link it with the Sanskrit word *ahitaka* derives it from *dha* and understand it as denoting mortgaged person.” (Chanana, 1960, 136) The word *bhataka* means a laborer who receives rice in lieu of wages. *Bhataka* or *bhrtaka* originally must have denoted not free wage labor but a slave.

The early Vedic literature has referenced that cattle and women slaves constituted the only forms of movable property and were transferable. (Sharma, 1991, 84) The female slaves were considered the wealth of their owners, like cattle, horses, gold, and other gifts. One of the Rigvedic hymns mentions a ruler's gift of fifty *dasis* to the priest. It showed that the rulers gave *dasis* or female slaves as *dhana* or *Dakshina* to the chief priests. (Ibid., 21) Therefore, large numbers of female slaves or *dasis* were owned by the Brahmin priests.

Kerala was considered the meeting ground of various religions and cultures and an ethnographic museum of various races and communities. (Iyer, 1941, 3) Mixture of blood is a natural process in human mobility that takes place all over the world, and Kerala, too, had its share. Different human races, such as Negritoes, Proto Austroloid, Mediterranean, and Nordic, lived in this region. (Sadasivan, 2000, 104) Regarding the process of peopling of the state, the pre-Dravidian aborigines shall be regarded as the state's earliest inhabitants who were well acquainted with agriculture.

There were three phases of habitation found in Kerala. The first phase was from 4000 B.C. to 1800 B.C.; the aboriginal classes lived in Kerala. In the second phase, from 1800 B.C. to 700 A.D., the mixed groups of aborigines and the Dravidians lived there. In the last phase, which started in 700 A.D., the Aryans mingled with the natives. However, it differed from the mingling of the aboriginal classes with the Dravidians. (Jose, 2018, 33) Therefore, it can be safely assumed that the society of Kerala was the product of a long and complex historical process.

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. (Saradamon, 1975, 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 to 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 modern times. The system of control and ownership of the *adima/adimathavam* was equivalent to slavery. (Sanal

Mohan, 2023, 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 the most arduous physical labor in agriculture. (Varier, and Gurukkal, 1991, 261) Their labor was central to wetland paddy cultivation and the later expansion of dry-land farming.

The pre-colonial documents on slave castes neither provide detailed information on their living conditions nor on their social and family life, both crucial to the analyses of the slaves' social world. (Sanal Mohan, 2015, 39) Apart from providing information on the widespread nature of the practice of slavery, the sale of slaves, and the prevailing prices for slave men, women, and children, these documents do not yield much on other aspects of slavery. But at the same time, these documents mention the names of the slaves that were transacted, their castes, and the names and castes of the masters who owned and purchased them. (Adam, 2018, 1840; Sanal Mohan, 2015, 39)

Using the term "slavery" or slave in colonial documents is essential for at least two reasons. First, the term slavery, accepted internationally to describe the phenomenon of unfreedom historically in Europe and the New World, is used to describe a system of social control of the subordinated untouchable slaves in Kerala that emerged from the system of caste. Second, the term slavery was found to help describe the particular situation of the slave castes under the domination of upper castes, which included the transaction of the former by the latter. (Sanal Mohan, 2015, 39)

Reference to slavery was also found in the early Sangam works like Manimekhalai, Purananooru, and Pathittupattu. The terms *adimai*, and *kudimai* were also used in the Tamil works. The Sangam work *Tolkappiyam* mentions three upper castes or *melor muvar* in the Sangam period. The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, and the Vaisyas were the *Melor* class, and the rest were *kizhor* or lower castes or the slave castes. Besides the native slaves, Periplus observed that among the commodities imported from the West, a large number of slaves were included, and most of them were women. However, in the early period, the slave castes – the early inhabitants of Kerala enjoyed high status in the society. There was only the classification based on primitive social functions. There was a large measure of social freedom and equality. The Panas, Parayas, and other toiling classes occupied a respected social status. (Nair, 19867-8) Some were rulers. Pulayanarkotta, now a suburb of Trivandrum, is believed to have been the center of the Pulayas, which held sway over the surrounding parts. There was also the reference to the Pulaya princess, Kotha by name, who is said to have ruled over Kokkothamanagalam, Vellanad Pakuthi of Nedumangad Taluk. (Iyer, 1941, 120) But in the later period, they lost their social status and became slaves.

Slavery was widely practiced in all parts of Kerala with a severity that would shock any modern mind. Slavery may be a thing of the past. Agrarian slavery was constitutive of the caste structure in Kerala right from ancient times. (Sanal Mohan, 2015, 38) An essential segment of our society, especially the agricultural workers of scheduled castes such as Pulayas, Parayas, Vedas, Kuravas, and the hill tribes, were the important agrestic slaves in Kerala. Extreme poverty and squalor, indebtedness, illiteracy, and bonded labor among the scheduled caste communities in Kerala could be directly traced to their slave past. (Saradamonny, 1974, 217)

The agrestic slaves were directly connected to land-related activities. In the Census of 1881, they were enumerated as 13% of the total population of Kerala. In most states, the agrarian labor force until recently was mainly drawn from the traditional agrarian slave castes such as the Pulayas and the Parayas. The Pulayas were the most populous caste among the Dalit communities. They were found in all parts of Kerala but rare in the South's Tamil districts. In 1836, 7% of the total population of Kerala was the Pulayas. The term Pulaya is derived from the word "Pula," which means ceremonial pollution, taint, or defilement. The term itself revealed their subordination. (Mateer, 1991, 33) Pulaya expresses the idea of impurity related to funeral pollution. (Ibid., 45) In the caste hierarchy of Kerala, Pulayas ranked at the bottom of society and lived in miserable social conditions. The Pulayas were generally employed in wetland paddy cultivation and dry-land farming. They continued under agrestic slavery until its abolition in 1855 in Kerala.

The Parayas were another major slave caste in Parayas. They were the agrestic serfs known as Sambavar in the Southern part of Kerala. (Thurston, 2013, 82) Paraya is derived from "para" or "drum." They dominated in the Southern regions of the state. Parayas were mostly found in Shencotta, East of the Ghats, Thovala, Agestiswaram, Eraniel, Kunnathur, Kunnathunad, and on the cardamom hills of Kerala. (Ibid., 82-83). Large numbers of Parayas were also used as domestic servants of the Europeans. The Parayas were also employed in the agricultural sector in wetland and dry-land farming. In addition, the Parayas were also engaged in weaving baskets, mats, etc, with bamboo scrapes. They observed distance pollution among themselves even as they existed in the same social location as untouchables. (Mohan, 2015, 53)

The Kuravas and the hill tribes were the essential sections of slave castes in Kerala. They had some of the characteristics of the hill tribes, and they had always been bound to the land. The Kuravas were agricultural slaves, and they were also bought and sold along with the land which they occupied. (Thurston, 1975, 123) Villagers frequently employed them as *kavalkars* or watchmen. They were obliged to stand at 64 paces from the high-caste Hindus.

The Kanikkars, Mala Arayan, etc were important hill tribes, and they were regarded as outsiders of the caste system, in which it seemed rather difficult to assign their position to them. The hill tribes of Kerala were exceedingly wretched, uncivilized, and degraded. The men went almost naked, having only a few inches of cloth round and a small cloth on the head. The women wore iron and leaden ring in the ear. (Mateer, 1991b, 49) They worshiped evil spirits and hill demons.

The hill tribes lived in a state of economic dependence, practically amounting to serfdom or as agricultural workers in the areas near jungles. (Iyer, 1941, 118) They also resided in mud huts in the center of the rice swamps or on the embankment of its vicinity. They were used as agrestic slaves by their landlords. Men, women, and children were always working in their landlord's paddy fields, and they also guarded them at night. They did not receive proper wages for their work. Sometimes, the wages were paid to them in kind and at the lowest possible rates. However, in the colonial period, some worked in the plantations, where they obtained higher wages. (Ibid., 194)

In 1820, the first census was conducted in Kerala, which showed that 9974 predial slaves prevailed in the state. (Word and Conner, 1994, 28-29) But in the

Census of 1836, the slave population of Kerala had increased to 164864, including the Sirkar slaves. The following chart shows the caste-wise agrestic slaves in Kerala during 1851 (Nair, 1986, 41):

Pulayas	-	90598
Parayas -	38625	
Kuravas	-	31891
Pallar -	3750	

The Census of 1891 recorded the predial slaves as a field laboring class, and their caste-wise distribution was: (a) the Parayas - 71847, (b) the Pulayas - 202616, (c) the Kuravas - 60377, (d) others 13818. Besides the predial slaves, the hill tribes constituted 23282 out of the total population. The census of 1891 also listed the number of laborers in Kerala as 1046071, constituting 5.2% of the total population.

The Census reports of 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, and 1941 are given below, which show the occupations of the three main slave castes in Kerala, namely Kuravas as laborers and fortune tellers, Pulayas as field laborers and Parayas as menial laborers.

Sl. No.	Caste	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
1	Parayas	69974	70554	63038	70684	77382
2	Pulayas	206503	185314	196184	207337	237865
3	Kuravas	53584	61827	75345	87071	97681
State Population		2952157	3428975	4006062	5095973	6070018 (Ibid., 46)

In addition to the predial slaves, there were a large number of *pandaravaka* or sirkar slaves in Kerala, and they were attached to the *sirkar* lands or rented out with those lands to private individuals. They were mortgaged with the lands under *kanapattam* tenure. A levy was also extracted on the *sirkar* slaves. According to the Census of 1836, 4.25 lakh slaves were owned by the Government.

In Kerala, there were more than 15 types of slaves:

- (1) Those born of female slaves
- (2) Those purchased for a prince
- (3) Those found by chance
- (4) Slaves by descent
- (5) Those kept alive in famine time
- (6) Those given up as a pledge for money borrowed
- (7) Those binding themselves for money borrowed
- (8) Those captured in war
- (9) Those unable to pay gambling debt
- (10) Those becoming slaves on their wish
- (11) Apostates from a religious life
- (12) Slaves for a limited period
- (13) Slaves for subsistence
- (14) Those who for love with women became slaves
- (15) Those who became slaves by voluntary sale of liberty. (Eapan, 1985, 32)

The socio-economic condition of the slaves in both private and *sirkar* or government was equally deplorable. Major Walker, one of the first English officers to be appointed in Malabar, observed that “the slaves were absolute property; they are part of the live-stock in an estate. In selling and buying land it is not necessary that they should the soil; both kinds of property are equally disposable and may fall into different lands. The slaves may be sold, leased and mortgaged, like the land itself, or any cattle or things”. (Walker, 1828, 866; Saradamony, 1980, 456) The people did not have a life of their own. They never worked or earned a living for themselves. They did not make decisions or plan a future for their existence; they depended on the mercy of their masters. And they begot children so that the masters would have a continuous supply of workers. (Saradamony, 1974, 456)

Slaves were part of the most degraded sections of Indian society, and “nowhere is their degradation as complete as in Kerala.” They were regarded as unclean, and they were supposed to convey pollution to persons of other castes by contact and even by approach. They were so miserably provided with the necessities of life that the most loathsome things, such as carrion, were a feast for them, and what was unallowed by them was avidity. Their persons and property were entirely at the disposal of their masters, by whom they were bought and sold like cattle and were treated even worse. The owners had formerly the power to flog and enchain them and sometimes maim them and deprive them of their lives though these cruelties are not now sanctioned by law. The conditions do not appear to have improved as they cannot get legal redress against their cruel tyrants. (Mohan, 2015, 54)

The caste slaves were paid the lowest wages—wages that would keep them alive. It is instructive to note that in the European context, slaves used to be referred to as *instrumentum vocala* or “speaking tools.” However, the slave castes in Kerala were denied speech even as they spoke. In other words, speech as an act of communication and expressing their free will was denied to them, but this did not mean that they did not have their oral tradition bearing the markings of their consciousness. In all the colonial and pre-colonial documents, they were referred to as transacted either along with land or as slaves. It is probably true that they were mostly treated as commodities and existed as “*instumentum mutum*” or mere tools without speech. The structural violence of caste slavery made them mute. (Ibid., 54) Later, they worked in the European plantations, which helped them to elevate their socioeconomic position in society. (Thurston, 1975, VI., 114)

Despite the commendable social services they rendered, they would get contempt and neglect in return. Samuel Mateer describes the pathetic condition of the slaves as follows, “the men are in wretched filthy clothes. The low castes were not permitted to wear dress like other castes. They were identified on the basis of their dressing. The slave women could not cover their upper parts of the body. They could wear dress just above their knee and the women could not cover their upper parts of the body. They used unclean dress and it mixed with mud”. (Mateer, 1991b, 45)

The ornaments of the untouchables were made of stone or shells, which were considered “the caste symbols of the low castes.” The ornaments of the slave castes must be no more valuable than brass or stone. They were not allowed to use gold or silver ornaments. They could use only stone and shells for making ornaments. There were different types of hairstyles among the untouchables. Both

men and women did not cut their hair. Like the dress, hairstyle 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 to follow such hairstyle.

The untouchable slaves were not treated as human beings; they were bought and sold like cattle. They had to keep 96 paces from the Brahmins, and he was about half this distance from a Sudra. (Ibid., 46) Even his near approach or his shadow would cause pollution to the higher castes. They were prohibited from using footwear to protect their feet from the thorns and sharp stones on the jungle path. (Ibid., 45)

The slaves lived in hopeless poverty, and many lacked sufficient means to procure even 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 were generally filthy and disgusting, and they had sometimes been suspected of kidnapping and entrapping the women of high castes. (Mateer, 1991b, 42)

The slaves were denied the right to use polished language. When speaking about parts of their body, such as the eye or ear, to a superior, they had to prefix it with 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 *yajamanan* or king while they could not approach the Brahmins.

The slaves did not have an excellent hut to live in. Buchanan found that the slaves lived in temporary huts, 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 nestled 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 slaves were permitted to erect temporary huts as the masters wanted them to move about when work was demanded in different places. (Iyer, 1941, 80) The home of the untouchables slaves was called "*madam*," and their children were monkeys or claves. (Yesudas, 1975, 8-9)

The slaves 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 slave castes. The slaves were not allowed to enter public places like roads, schools, temples, hospitals, public offices, and even the courts and *catcheris*. There were widespread discrimination in-laws against the low caste slaves. 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 properly. (Manavalan, 1990, 95) The punishments were decided based on the person's caste. (Pillai, 1982, 318)

There was much suffering from sickness. The house's dust produced vermin and made them itchy, depriving them of rest by day and sleep by night. A respectable native was forced to cover his nostrils with his cloth for the stench and filth when he entered amongst them. 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 plow along with the buffalos, which resulted in death. (*Reports of the TDC*, 1881, 23)

The public roads and streets were closed before the slave castes. There were a number of *teendal palakas* or sign boards regarding untouchability placed near all the roadsides, forbidding the lower and outcastes from traveling through the roads. Caste played an essential role in maintaining the social relationship in Kerala. (Gladstone, 1984, 119)

Education and knowledge were denied to the slaves, who feared even the touch of the printed book. (Ibid., 119) As the vast majority of the people were denied the right to read the scriptures, they were unaware of the principles in the holy books. The fact is that most 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. They often put forward fabricated stories sufficient to establish their undue power and influence in the land. Stories in *Keralolpathi* are good examples of this. The illiterate untouchable slaves never got an opportunity to serve the public services. The Brahmins were appointed in all essential government services. The practice prevalent at that time was too important not to install a foreign Brahmin whenever a high post in the state service fell vacant. (Somarajan and Sivadasan, 1995, 40)

Slaves could work as porters, domestic servants, clerks, merchants, or schoolmasters because of the pollution. Caste affected even their purchase and sale. The slaves manufactured umbrellas and other small articles, placed them on the highway side, and retired to the appointed distance. If a Pulayan wished to make a purchase, the customer placed his money on a stone and took away the goods. It was the most profitable business for customers but not for the poor owner. Even though the approach of the untouchable slaves caused pollution to the high castes, the gram cultivated by them was not considered polluted. It was used by the Brahmins and the nobles, offered in temples, and cooked in most exclusive kitchens. (Mateer, 1991, 41)

The slaves could make offerings to noted shrines from a distance; their money, fortunately, was neither polluted nor raw rice to other provisions which it was their work to cultivate and gather, else the Brahmins would starve outright. At several temples, there were special days on which the lower castes had permission to approach nearer for worship and amusement. As the Brahmin temples were not for the use of all castes, the low castes maintained their temples and worshipped deities of an inferior kind. "Parallel to the social distinctions, the gods which were worshipped by the lower castes were lower." (Gladston, 1984, 46) The lower castes had numerous devil temples. Due to their illiteracy and ignorance, these poor people constantly feared the devils. Their religious worship was primitive and unclean- *Madan* and *Martha* were the favorite deities of the slave castes. They did not have any temples. Some of the raised squares amid groves were used as temples. They were also used for bonded services to the state and the temples.

Untouchable agrestic serfs were 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 of them when he pleased. The slave's children lived as slaves, just like 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 footprints were considered sufficient to defile the whole neighborhood. The presence of the untouchable slaves was treated with a mixture of alarm and indignation, and even towns and markets were considered defiled by their approach.

The rulers took the initiative to maintain the *jathi maryadas* or caste rules. During the 19th century, the people of Kerala strictly followed the *jathi maryadas*. Violating the *jathi maryadas* was considered a severe crime, and huge fines were imposed upon the violators. This system of slavery continued without any hindrance up to the second half of the 19th century.

Slave trade was a recognized practice in Kerala. The foreign travelers also give detailed descriptions of the slave trade in the state. There were a number of slave markets in different parts of Kerala. The slaves were bought and sold like chattels in these markets. The inscriptions, *kolezhuthu* records, and foreign accounts throw light upon the slave markets in Kerala. The copper plate inscription of 849 A.D. mentions that the ruler of Venad, Ayyan Adikal Tiruvadikal granted certain privileges to the congregation of the Tharisa Church at Quilon. (Nair, 1986, 12) The inscription also describes that a kind of levy, "*adimakasu*" or slave tax, was collected from the owners who kept the slaves. The 11th century A.D. inscriptions from Central Kerala specifically mention the transfer of slaves.

The Cadjan records, believed to be the earliest written documents in South Indian history, found in the Mudaliar manuscript, contain some slave sale deeds. Francis Buchanan mentions that there were three modes of slave transfer in Travancore. (1) *jenmam* or sale, where the full value of the slaves was given and the property entirely handed over. (2) *kanam* or mortgage, where the proprietor got a loan and a quantity of rice to show that his property in slave was not extinguished, but could be resumed when the loan was repaid. (3) *pattam* or rent, where the slave was hired out for an annual sum, the hirer paying the cost of maintenance. (Buchanan, 1807, 66-68)

The price of slaves differed from place to place. The inscription of 849 A.D. shows that the male slave was priced at *fanams* 100 and female was priced at *fanams* 70 in the 9th century A.D. The slave deeds dated Ani 39, 886 KE, and Chittirai 14 already refer to the price of *vallatti* slave had been fixed at 50 *Kaliyugarayan fanams*. The foreign travelers had different descriptions of the prices and wages of the slaves. Francis Buchanan stated that "a young with his wife will sell for from 250 to 300 *fanams*. Two or three children will add 100 *fanams* to the value of the family." (Ibid.) In 1850, Rev. George Mathan wrote that "the price of an able-bodied slave in the low country, where the wages (in kind) are comparatively high, not more than Rs.6. In Mallappalli, the central part of Kerala, it comes to Rs.7 and in places near hills at prices considerably higher, even to double that amount." (*Kerala Society Papers Series*, Vo.5, 275) According to Hamilton, the price of a slave was equal to that of a quadruped. Edgar Thurston remarks that "when a farmer wants a few Pulaya to work in the fields, he obtains their services on payment of 15 to 20 rupees to them or to their

masters.” (Thurston, 1975, V, 110-111) According to Abbe J. Dubois, “a male, young enough to work, will fetch three rupees and hundred ‘seers’ of rice, which is about the value of a bullock.” (Dubois, 1897, 23).

The cruelty of the slave trade was that if the husband and wife were sold in different directions, they could never meet again. From various observations, it is evident that there was no rule against the separation of husband and wife while selling. Buchanan observed that the wife and husband were not generally sold separately, but children could be separated from the parents and between themselves. The parents also sold their children to Muslims and foreigners. Almost every market day at Changanaseri, wrote Henry Baker Jr., “Children are brought by their parents or near relatives for sale and their prices was between 6 and 18 rupees.”¹ Neyyattinkara, Nedumangad, Chirayinkeezhu, etc were the important centers of slave trade. The slaves were imported and exported, and certain churches at Cochin were used as the god owns of the slaves except for Sundays.

In Kerala, there were a number of taxes imposed upon the slaves. The socially backward people were suffering under the weight of taxation. There was an economic reason for subjecting the lower castes to heavy taxation. “As there was no organized system to raise state revenue, an easy way of raising funds was by levying poll tax on the poorer people”. In order to meet the military expenditure, a head tax was imposed on the Shannars. The Administrative Report of 1040 M.E gives a surprising list of over 110 taxes imposed upon the slaves. The tax collectors extracted the taxes arbitrarily and inflicted fear in the minds of the poor people. In addition to the poll and breast taxes, they paid a “kuppakala” tax; one *panam* for each hut was paid by the low-caste slaves. The government collected taxes from the oil mills, bows and forges, exchangers, palanquins, fishing boats, nets, hunting and keeping civets, cats, etc.. The government also collected dues at various festivals like Onam, Dipavali, and various anniversaries were collected. The socioeconomic and political condition was favorable to the origin and development of the vile social systems of Kerala.

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¹ Rev. Henry Baker. Jr. to the Secretary, CMS, 12 Oct.1847, CMSA.No.29 of 1847. Rev. George Matthen, quoted in the Church Missionary Record, Vol. XXII, Agu.1852, p.184.

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