

**THE MAKING OF 'EZHAVA': CASTE, COMMUNITIES AND
GENDER AMONG NORTH MALABAR THIYYAS AND
THIRUVITHAMKOOR EZHAVAS**

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**A dissertation submitted to the University of Hyderabad
in partial fulfilment for the award of
Ph. D. degree in the Centre for Comparative Literature**



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MARCH 2013



CERTIFICATE

15. 03. 2013

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “The Making of ‘Ezhava’: Caste, Communities and Gender among North Malabar Thiyyas and Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas” submitted by Ms. Sreebitha. P. V. bearing Reg. No: 07HCPH04 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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I, Ms. Sreebitha P. V., hereby declare that this thesis entitled “The Making of ‘Ezhava’: Caste, Communities and Gender among North Malabar Thiyyas and Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Sowmya Dechamma C. C. is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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For Renju...

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to:

Dr. Sowmya Dechamma, for her able guidance, affection, support and most importantly for being the friendliest supervisor, for always letting me work within my own personal space and pace. Working with her was a wonderful experience as I benefited greatly from her intellectual vigour and motivation that she instilled in me. I can't come up with adequate words to appreciate the patience she has shown throughout the journey, especially, while going through my shabby and unclear drafts;

Prof. M. T. Ansari and Dr. Purendra Prasad, my doctoral committee members for their suggestions and insightful comments and for being approachable all the time;

Prof. Tutun Mukherjee, for her support, encouragement and for the effectual course work and Dr. J. Bheemaiah for the course work;

Jenny Rowena, for immense help and shaping my ideas, for being a critique, for her companionship;

S. Sanjeev, for playing a great role in the conceptualisation of this research and Dileep Raj for sparing time to discuss my work and for his valuable suggestions;

Nisha. P. R., for being a great source of energy both academically and personally during Delhi times;

Dr. M. N. Rajesh, for the critical inputs and encouragement and help in all my endeavours;

Cherai Ramadas, for being a treasure of resources, motivating me to do a good archival work and for helping me in all possible ways;

G. Priyadarsanan, Pratheesh, Abhilash, Reshma, Priyalekha, Basheer, K. V. Manjula for helping me and providing material for my research;

The librarians and Staff at Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, National Archives, New Delhi; Directorate of State Archives, Trivandrum; Calicut Archives; Ulloor Smarakam, Sree Chitra Thirunal Library, Kerala University Library and Thonnakkal Asan Smarakam, CDS Thiruvananthapuram; Appan Thampuran Smaraka Library, Sahitya Academy and Sreenaryana Library (Iringalakkuta), Thrissur; Library at Jagannatha Temple, Thalassery; Anveshi Women's Studies Research Centre, Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, and CCL library, Hyderabad;

Saniechi, Shajiettan, Kukkuhechi, Unniettan, Kuryappi, Deepechi, Seena, Resmi Satheesh, Seena Panoli for providing a comfortable place and company during my visit to libraries;

Vijiechi, Aparna Nandakumar and Priya Vijay for proof reading my thesis and Bivitha Easo for her timely help;

My colleagues and students at CUK; My colleagues at DU;

The following individuals, who have, in their own unique ways, (academically / personally), played an important role in the making of this thesis: M. T. Ansari, Girijechi, Sharmila, Bindu, Sunitha, Hany Babu, Christy, Renjith, Viju Kurian, Shalini, Ambili, Shyma, Sreenath, Sheeba, Bipin, Bharat, Lenny, Prasu, Aami, Reema, Sajna, Shinto, Konkana, Sumesh, Nikhi, Sheenechi, Santhoshettan, Madhumash, Ramadevi Ma'am, Vijayamma Chechi, Jayaprakash Uncle, Rajesh Gopinathan, Vivek, J .K., Jibu Thomas, Sanju, Sudha, Suramaman, Sobhamami, Pameela, Shinu, Shibi, Nidhish, Mathew, Nayan, Riya, Nandu, Muthu and Poovi;

CSSS Kolkata for Papiya Gosh Memorial Fund Fellowship;

CCL staff: Balraj Garu, Rajani Garu, and Srisailam for their concern, motivation, support, cooperation and friendliness;

Anu, Praveen and Ancy for the great time we had together; Jenson for all the jovial moments;

Salma, the most amazing woman I have ever met in my life and the most comfortable and affectionate companionship I ever had. Salma, in what words shall I describe thee?

My entire family for their unrequited and unconditional love and support:

And,

Renju for ALWAYS being there for me.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to unravel the history of Ezhava social reform movements in Kerala through the years 1890 to 1940 spanning over five decades that brought many backward “Hindu” communities, especially the demographically significant Thiyyas, under the rubric of Ezhavas, thereby subsuming their socio-political and cultural specificities.¹ The thesis problematises the imagined unified entity of Thiyyas and Ezhavas, and also discusses the gender discourse at play in Thiyya and Ezhava social reform movements since questions of gender and community are inseparably connected.² Thus it makes an attempt to differentiate between the Thiyya and Ezhava communities and argues that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are a political caste-community, entities which were formed by uniting different castes and sub-castes as part of the modernization process. The following concerns are central to this thesis. How did Thiyyas and Ezhavas come to be perceived as one community? What are the possible reasons for their unification? What role does the question of gender play in this unification? How does this process help us understand caste and gender in its complexity? How can we attempt to deconstruct mainstream nationalist narratives of communities through such a process?

Ezhavas are a numerically significant Hindu community in Kerala constituting about 25-28 percent of its total population. It is, in fact, an umbrella term used for a number of

¹ I use the term ‘movements’ here in order to account for the plurality of backward-caste Hindu movements, and I retain the term ‘Ezhava’ because it is the category used in mainstream historiography.

² Women’s questions in both communities are relevant because it has been marginalized in mainstream historiographies as in the case of the Thiyya question.

backward communities,³ the most prominent among them being the Thiyyas of Malabar. In mainstream histories and discourses of Kerala, the Thiyyas of Malabar are seen as the counterparts of Ezhavas in Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi. This association, generally accepted as a norm in current political and governmental discourses, has in fact a history of less than 150 years. My interest is to look at the history of Thiyyas, especially the Thiyyas of northern Malabar whose significant place in the history of Kerala has been marginalized when it was subsumed into the category called Ezhavas. Though I have included Thiyyas of South Malabar and Ezhavas of Kochi, the major focus is upon North Malabar Thiyyas and Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas.⁴ North Malabar Thiyyas and Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas played a major role in the unification of both communities and were active in the reformation process as per available records.

I was introduced to the reform literatures of early 20th century Kerala during my M. Phil which was on "Questions of Sexuality: A Critique of Lalithambika Antherjanam's select writings." A significant question that struck me then was the absence of a female literary figure like Lalithambika Antherjanam in the Ezhava community in spite of the immense reforms the Ezhava community has gone through. My own subject position as a Thiyya woman which I then considered equivalent to Ezhava prompted me to re-examine the reform discourse on the issues of both caste and gender. When I began my research I realized that there is a gap in the understanding of the communities Thiyya and Ezhava. Though we consider Thiyya and Ezhava as one, we find the term 'Ezhava' recurrent in

³ Scholars have used different term for Ezhavas like Iravas, Elavas, Izhavas, Ilavar , Ilavas, and for Thiyya, the terms Tiers, Tiyyar, Tiirs, etc., have been used.

⁴ During the British rule Malabar was divided into two parts, South Malabar and North Malabar.

the reform literature and it was never known or addressed as Thiyya social reform movement in mainstream history.

I recollected an experience where I had to fill an application form for a course in B. Ed in Kerala when I found only the caste column for Ezhava. I was confused whether I could apply for it or not since my caste certificate shows I am a Thiyya and the popular understanding says both Thiyyas and Ezhavas are same. There were also moments of confusion when I was asked whether I am an Ezhava or Thiyya. For instance, while doing my research project titled “S. N. D. P. and Ezhava Women: Negotiations and Possibilities”, for which I had to conduct interviews with Ezhava women, I had to assert constantly that I was a Thiyya and also that it is an equivalent to Ezhava. These experiences added to my enthusiasm to know more about these two communities. While probing the construction of Thiyyas and Ezhava as a single community, I have tried to understand the dynamics or the historical factors which necessitated the political construction of the entity called Ezhava.

Recently I came across a write up by a Thiyya who shows his resentment for being included in the entity of Ezhava. He writes:

It was when I was in Travancore that I came across the vibrant claims that Thiyyas are Ezhavas. It was more or less connected to the S. N. D. P. and associated political organisations which wanted to reap the benefits of having a huge population base under them. However, even though the Thiyyas also are a lower level caste, it is not a sub-caste of the Ezhavas. This is a very cunning change that

has been brought into the government records now. In many government application forms, the word Thiyya is missing in the caste column. Even though I do not have any particular affinity for the Thiyyas as such, associating me or making me a part of some other entity with which I have no connection is not liked by me. It is like being a pawn in some other cunning guy's political games and ambitions.⁵

The writer clearly states that though it might seem that he is taking a pro-Thiyya stand he does not have an emotional attachment to Thiyyas and he has a problem in being identified as belonging to another caste. My intention here is to understand the complexities of such a construction. In order to achieve this we need to look at the formation of caste communities in Kerala.

The terms which I have used in this thesis such as reform, community, modernity and so on are closely linked with each other. Caste communities were formed in Kerala as part of the social reform movements which helped them embrace colonial modernity. Here reform and modernity has more or less same meanings in the sense that reform mainly focused on the eradication of the “bad” traditional customs, and modernity introduced them into modern or new institutions. As Gopalakrishnan argues the presence of strong “community movements that sought to transform traditional *jatis* into modern communities was characteristic of Malayalee Reform” (qtd. in Devika and Mukerjee 103). Caste also gets transformed as community, being considered as a modern institution. As we see in the thesis, the way the lower castes used modernity introduced

⁵ See <http://victoriavedpages.activeboard.com/t48081882/thiyyas/>

by the colonial government facilitated their entry into many public institutions such as educational institutions, government services, public roads etc.

Classical sociology has always held that all communities follow the same path i.e., pre-modern to modern. The question of modernity and the question of communities are complementary to each other. However we would begin with the question of community. According to Dilip Menon, the idea of community represents an aspiration and not an achieved entity; it is always in the process of formation without reaching realization. Discussing the process of community formation of the Thiyya caste of North Malabar, he writes:

What was different, and significant, in political activity in Malabar was the fact that the notion of community surfaced constantly and became a major source of contention within political discourse. This was not surprising in a region where inequality was evident; an imagining of community could mediate between differences (2)

Here we see imagining community as a mechanism to mediate between differences and inequalities in a caste ridden society. This concept of community is very limited because it could only solve the differences between the caste which share similar status. The formation of Nair, Ezhava, and Thiyya community provide examples for it. Through organizations like Sahodara Sangham,⁶ Ayyappan proposed that each caste should try to bring with them the caste below instead of trying to get upward to join the caste higher to them, these communities could not altogether discard the caste differences. Same is the

⁶ The secretary of the Sangham was Ayyappan. He was later known as Sahodaran Ayyappan. The headquarters of Sangham was Palliport, Cherai. For details see Sahadevan 11.

case of Nair community formation. Though they are formed by bringing together many castes the caste hierarchy and inequality remained.

As Dilip Menon points out “while the presence of inequality and differences acted as the spur to desire for community, these very factors hindered its eventual realization” (2). He finds different fractures within the society such as caste, kinship, religion and locality as the destructing factors of the equality offered by caste movements, nationalism and communism. Dilip Menon envisages different communities of Malabar like community of subsistence, community of worship around shrines and community of caste equals. As he states, his idea of the community of equals is a limited concept since this equality was to be only between members of one caste category— the Thiyyas. We see that the community of Ezhavas was formed not only by simple imagination but by uniting different castes and subsumed even the Thiyyas of Malabar into that category. However, this attempt was only successful in considering Thiyyas as equal to Ezhavas in official discourses and mainstream historical documents. The movement was not successful in wiping out the identity of Thiyyas. In contemporary Kerala, if someone enquires about the identity of a Thiyya, he/she would only mention it as Thiyya not as Ezhava. Similarly an Ezhava will not claim the identity of Thiyya. In such a context, the thesis problematises the construction of Thiyyas and Ezhavas as same.

The word *Samudayam* (community) mostly denotes the structured and imagined solidarity of nation, different religious groups, caste groups and gender groups. The community we refer here is of different caste groups and sub-castes. In other words,

people from different castes and sub-castes identify or imagine themselves as a part of particular group i.e., community because they “share” certain common characteristics, customs, rituals, aims, motivations, unlike or opposite to “other.” They would also share almost similar status in the hierarchy of caste. Ezhavas and Thiyyas are such communities which were imagined as same during the late 19th and early decades of 20th century focusing on social prestige/status and economic welfare of their respective castes.

Many scholars define the community formation in Kerala as caste politics. P. K. Balakrishnan argues that the caste politics in Kerala were formed in the name of human rights & political participation between 1850-1910 and there weren't any “caste communities” before 1850 (5). In early 20th century Kerala, different communities based on different caste groups formed many organizations as part of various social reform movements to assert their socio-political rights and instead of the word *jati* (caste) the word *samudayam* (community) was used by each of them. A number of caste associations sprung in Kerala along with the teachings of social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Chattampi Swamikal etc. In the case of Ezhavas, one of the major organizations was Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham (henceforth S. N. D. P.) which played an important role in their mobilization. It was formed in 1903 under the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru with Kumaran Asan, the famous poet, as its General Secretary. The Thiyyas founded *Gnanodaya Yogam* (The society for the awakening of knowledge) in 1905 in North Malabar and it is said that the Yogam stressed that they should organize alongside the S. N. D. P. “under the themes of religion,

business, education and social reform” (Menon *Caste, Nationalism* 67).⁷ Other organizations such as *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam* (1907), *Yogakshemasabha* (1908), Nair Service Society (1914)⁸ were formed for Pulayas, Nambutiris and Nairs respectively.

Nigam discusses Rudolphs’ description of caste associations as ‘paracommunities’ that enables members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage’. They call the politics of these caste associations as the modernity of tradition. They argue that birth in a particular caste was necessary but not a sufficient condition of membership in the association. They write:

When caste associations turned to the state for furthering their purposes, their initial claims were aimed at raising caste status in terms of the values and structure of the caste order. But as liberal democratic ideas penetrated to wider sections of the population, the aims of caste associations began to shift from sacred to secular goals. Instead of demanding entry into temples, prestigious caste names, and ‘honorable’ occupations and histories in the Censes, the associations began to press for places in the new administrative and educational institutions and for political representation (qtd. in Nigam 4266).

Nigam points out that the sanction of status by the ritual authorities was subverted when caste associations came into being and the desire to be recognised by the colonial

⁷ Dilip Menon points out that one of the important agenda of the Yogam was to build new temples which Thiyya community could alone access. For a detailed discussion see section 3 of chapter 2.

⁸ It is said that the all India Hindu Reform movements led by the organizations like Ramakrishna Mission, the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj have influenced the Hindus of Kerala and made them aware of the evils of caste system. See Sreedhara Menon 398.

government was outside the framework of the caste system. But one would see that it was not completely outside the framework of caste system. The communities were formed bringing together the castes which share more or less similar hierarchy. For the colonial government, these communities might be outside the framework of caste system whereas the native government does locate these communities in terms of caste framework.⁹ Contrary to Rudolphs' argument we also see that before the community was organized through caste association, Ezhavas have asserted their secular rights in the beginning than the sacred ones. We see that in the beginning itself they claim their representation in new administrative and educational institutions and later move on to update their caste status through many social movements.

Nigam cites the study by Rajni Kothari and Rushikesh Manu which deals with "the formation of the Kshatriya Sabha of Gujarat, a marginal peasant and landless labourer caste called Bariyas, and Bhils – a depressed tribal community – combined together under the leadership of twice born Rajputs" (4266). They argued that the socially and politically democratic character of the Kshatriya Sabha was evident in the motivation behind its formation. According to them caste consciousness played a part not for the purpose of preserving caste traditions and customs but rather of transforming them through political power. Although it is limited to some extent this is applicable to the formation of Ezhava community which is discussed in the thesis in detail. Caste consciousness of Ezhava community was democratic to some extent that they included many castes in to this fold or entity called Ezhava. But it was limited to inclusion of

⁹ This is evident in the way Hindu government of Thiruvithamkoor responded to the demands of Ezhavas in the Malayalee Memorial and Ezhavas Memorial. For a detailed discussion, see chapter 2 of this thesis.

certain castes and the same is applicable to Thiyyas. The leader of community carefully brought out many castes together through scrutinizing many other castes. The thesis problematizes the inclusion of Thiyya community into the Ezhava community. As Myron Weiner points out this was possible because of the secularization of caste (Nigam 4266). Nigam discusses Myron Weiner's study in which one of the respondents of Weiner asserted that being a Rajput 'is not a question of blood but of spirit and action'. Whereas another has the opinion that '(t)he kshatriyas are a class, not a caste.' We see similar claims by leaders as well as the members of Ezhava community and Thiyya community. The terms *samudayam* (community), *vargam* (ethnic group) in Malayalam is used with the same spirit.

Various census reports in Kerala have acknowledged the formation of communities by the unification of different sub-caste groups for the assertion of political rights. For instance, according to Velu Pillai, the homogenization or fusion of sub-castes was one of the main focus of the programme of all caste associations and it is also argued that since numerical strength was the prominent base of political importance, communities were more keen in increasing their number (Raimon 828). Velu Pillai notes that the castes which have made rapid progress in social reform movement succeeded in bringing together the sub-castes by neglecting social taboos through inter-marriages and inter-dining. He cites the example of Nairs and Ezhavas. He writes:

While the census returns of 1901 showed the existence of so many as one hundred and sixteen sub- divisions among the Nayars, the census of 1931 mentions only

two...similarly among Ilavas and many other castes the numerous sub-divisions returned in the census of 1901 have all disappeared (829).

Whereas according to Tampi, the fusion and regrouping of castes are the result of the removal of caste disabilities by the legislation as well as administrative measure. Without explaining this he states that this process has been going on in some of the communities without any conscious effort on the part of its members, while in some others it has been brought about by concerted action on the part of the leaders of the most progressive sections. The Nayar and Ilava come under the first category, the Kammala, the Varnava and the Aaraya under the second. He also cites that the Nairs who had recorded 116 sub-castes in 1901 returned themselves only under three caste names in 1931 and the Ezhavas recorded themselves as one caste in 1931 as against 22 sub-divisions of 1891. Contrary to his own opinion that the community formation of Nairs and Ezhavas happened without any conscious effort from its members, he points out that Ezhava community formation might have been due to the remarkable influence of the socio-religious movement inaugurated by Sree Narayana Guru Swamikal (131). In such reading, community formation of Nairs has been considered as a natural formation without any conscious effort from the part of its members. However as Velu Pillai suggests, one of the reasons for such formation is demography and its resultant political bargaining. Since demography is important for political bargaining, we can agree with this claim to a certain extent. But as already noted we see that communities were formed with a careful inclusion and exclusion of castes. As Tampi argues fusion and regrouping of castes are not the result of the removal of caste disabilities by legislation or administrative measure. Communities were also formed to negotiate the differences based on the caste in the

social as well as governmental/official institutions. This is not to deny the political assertion in the name of community.

While examining the community assertions by the Syrian Christians in 20th century Travancore, J. Devika and V. J. Varghese write: “The arrival of modernity not only constituted communities but also impelled them in competition against each other in Kerala. Modern politics of state is thus inextricably linked with intense community politics. The success of community politics for rights and resources varied across communities, so also strategies of assertion” (Devika and Varghese 4). The thesis tries to understand the strategies of such assertion among Ezhavas and Thiyyas and also see how in the process Thiyya community identity is subsumed.

According to Kochu, the community formation in Kerala first happened in Muslim and Christian communities.¹⁰ He notes that reformation took place in the Hindu caste group as a precursor to community formation in order to adjust with the new economic structure offered by colonial modernity (501). He adds that rejection of the *chaturvarna* value was central to the new economic developments and thus the community reformations which subvert the *chaturvarna* based caste system gained in strength. Nair samajam’s decision to replace the caste name, *sudra*/ Malayali *sudra* with the term ‘Nair’ and S. N. D. P.’s decision to bring together Thiyyas of different caste groups are cited as examples of such

¹⁰ In the case of Christians, it is noted that even before the advent of colonialism they had organizations like the *sabha* and *idavaka* connected to their worshipping places and they became a organized social group with the colonial imperial power. Whereas in the case of Muslims, it is mentioned that it was the struggle which they had to undergo in the interest of their religion and business, from the time of the Portuguese through the length of the British rule, which laid the foundation of their community formation. See Kochu 500-501.

community formation.¹¹ One need to question how far these communities could subvert the *chathurvarna* values. Though many tried to bring Ezhavas, Thiyyas and others in to the fold of Hinduism they remained lower castes. Many among Thiyyas and Ezhavas converted in to Islam, Christianity, Budhism and came up with the independent community claim because they were subjected to the predicament of *chaturvarna* system even after community formation.

This thesis traces the community formation beginning with two major memorials Malayali Memorial (1891) and Ezhava Memorial (1896). Kochu points out that national historiography was born when caste groups transformed themselves as communities by eliminating sub-caste differences and started claiming political rights. He also criticizes the nationalist as well as Marxist historiography which institutionalizes certain hegemonic groups and marginalizes other communities (502-503). The thesis while understanding the need for such community formation, as Kochu argues, tries figure out how certain hegemonic communities finds place in mainstream historiography. Ezhavas, though not a hegemonic community, was formed by merging many sub-castes and other castes. The thesis looks at the process and problematises the marginalisation of certain sub-castes in such a process.

¹¹ It is mentioned that in a meeting held at Aruvippuram, in order to establish S. N. D. P on 7th January 1903 the agenda put forwarded was thus: "To bring together the different Thiyas known by different names in different parts, and to give rise to a feeling that Thiyar are one community, and to help the Travancore Ezhavar to meet those in Kochi or Malabar, and to give an all-Kerala form to this organization." Kochu says such community formation later transformed into demand for equality and he cited the examples of Ezhavas' claim for share of political power in 1946 and Abstention movement which demanded economic and political equality of various communities in 1930. He points out that on 23 December 1946 the Ezhavar claimed a share of political power under the rule of His Highness, the King, along with a share in representative bodies, the civil services and the army. For details see Kochu 501-502.

Udaya Kumar discusses Sree Narayana Guru's concept of community intended for Ezhavas. He writes:

Sree Narayana's own social reform movement primarily addressed the Ezhavas, appealing to them to get rid of their caste markers and to internally reform themselves into a *samudayam*. Thus, the caste identity of Ezhava comes to be redefined as and supplanted by the identity of a community. The word Ezhava ceases to function as a sign of differentiation according to convention, becomes the names of a community, signifying the common locus of a certain set of individual and collective practices (258).

Sree Naryana Guru's intention was to discard the caste identity which is traditionally assigned to them. However when it came into practice it reinforced a particular caste identity for a group of castes. Janaki Abraham points out the influence of the concept of community popularized by Sree Narayana Guru on Thiyyas. According to her, the term 'community' is used as a synonym for caste among Thiyyas in contemporary Kerala. She writes:

In conversation, people would rarely name the Thiyyas as caste. Instead *Nammute Samudayam* our community or *Thiyyar Samudayam* Thiyya community, were ways of referring to caste. The ideas of the community and the transformation from a caste to community, was in fact stressed by Sri Narayana Guru. However, while the 'caste' was not used, different castes were named constantly in conversation (90).

Here we see how the usage of community becomes popular which indirectly refers to caste identity. As we have already discussed, the community is often used as a synonym

of caste and community identity refers to caste identity. Interesting this instance points out that Thiyyas do not utter the caste name and the caste is silently present in the form of community.

As already noted, the community formation among Ezhavas as well as Thiyyas was limited to the inclusion of certain castes into it. When Thiyyas were added into the community fold of Ezhavas it had several implications. The thesis points out that the community identity is constructed often by dismantling different caste identities. By the term 'identity,' I mean how different individuals themselves and herself as part of a particular caste or community. Here we see how a community identity called Ezhava was formed dismantling several sub-caste and caste identities.

By caste community, I mean bringing together different castes and sub-castes into one caste identity. The community formation was part of modernity project. As we have discussed, from the traditional realm of caste, different castes came together to modernize themselves in the modern form of community. These communities "re-form" themselves by discarding many traditional customs, social stigmas and entered into all modern social institution with rigorous efforts. And as we know colonial modernity critiques all the traditional institutions of native and what is more important is how the native made use of this modernity. As we see in the second chapter, Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor made use of this modernity and they argued for official and political representation in the native government by using Thiyyas as reference point. Thus the thesis problematises the

community formation of Ezhavas and popular perception of Thiyyas and Ezhavas as one community.

The thesis in a way deconstructs the mainstream historiography of social reform movement in Kerala with special focus on Thiyya and Ezhava community. The above mentioned theoretical frameworks lack a holistic picture of the dynamics of community formation in Kerala. Though such theoretical frameworks mention the community formation in general and deal with the hegemonic community, it hardly explained the process of community formation. Here we focus upon the lower castes' negotiations with the colonial modernity. The thesis also criticizes the mainstream nationalist understanding of communities. By doing this we also deconstruct the notion that nation was the major community and it was prioritized over other communities. Here we see how men and women in the Ezhava community envisage the community. Thus it would reexamine the existing knowledge of caste, gender and community.

The methodology used in this thesis draws on historical, comparative and cultural studies. The primary data for the thesis includes Thiyya magazine, *Mitavadi* and Ezhava magazines¹² like *Mitavadi*, *Vivekodayam*, *Sahodaran*, *Sanghamitra*, *Sahodari*, *Sthree*, etc. Though there were many magazines for Thiyyas, I have looked only at *Mitavadi*. *Mitavadi* (weekly) started at Thalassery in the year 1906, with Moorkkott Kumaran as its editor. T. Sivasankaran was the owner of *Mitavadi*. It is said that Moorkkot Kumaran

¹² It is evident that the emergence of new literary traditions in the late 19th and early 20th century opened up possibilities for the project of modernity among the lower castes of Kerala. During this period, the Thiyya and Ezhava communities brought out a considerable number of magazines in the name of community and reform.

was attracted to the policy of Mitavadis and to bring popularity for their arguments he desired to bring out a magazine called *Mitavadi*. Moorkkoth Kumaran and T. Sivasankaran with the interest in the progress of Thiyyas began this magazine. After a period of time *Mitavadi* (Monthly) was published from Kozhikode in 1907, with Murkkoth Kumaran and C. Krishnan as its editors.¹³ In 1913 Krishnan started to publish *Mitavadi* on his own and in 1921 he made it a weekly. The call issued by Swami was taken as its motto “freedom through education, strength through organization, and fight for social justice.”

Vivekodayam was the first magazine which was published for Ezhava community's development. *Vivekodayam* began as a bi-monthly in the year 1904 from Thiruvananthapuram. In the first issue of the magazine *Vivekodayam* (1904), its founder N. Kumaran Asan called it as the powerful mouthpiece for the Ezhava community reformation. *Sahodaran* was edited by K. Ayyappan, a rationalist as well as a social reformer.¹⁴ This magazine was addressed to all outcastes. Though its primary aim was to fight against caste discrimination, various issues concerning Ezhavas were also discussed in this magazine. Noticeably *Sanghamitra* and *Sahodari* are women's magazine published for Ezhava women which would definitely give us an idea of women's engagement in the reform and also their ideas regarding reform and community issues. *Sanghamitra* started publishing in November 1920 from Kollam. Though it was edited by P. K. N. Vaidyar, an Ezhava male, it is said that it was published for Ezhava women. However we see many articles of women from different communities in this magazine.

¹³ It is said that C. Krishnan was strongly against Hinduism.

¹⁴ Ayyappan was against Hinduism and he converted to Buddhism.

Sahodari was published from January 1925, P. R Mandakini being its publisher and P. R Narayanan as its manager. In the first issue of *Sahodari*, it is stated that “...communities like Nairs, Christians and Muslims have women’s magazines. We do not forget the fact that there were *Sanghamitra*, a magazine for Ezhava women which ran for a short term. We introduce *Sahodari* because we feel that it is important and necessary to have a magazine with the aim of progress of Ezhava women” (1). Another magazine, *Sthree* was edited by Parvathi Ayyappan, an Ezhava woman and was addressed to all women. The editorial stated that the magazine would deal with matters concerning women and argue for women’s freedom/liberation.

Apart from these magazines, the thesis would look at biographies and autobiographies of Thiyya and Ezhava reformers; and archival materials like governmental records, petitions, regulations and census reports. The thesis would also rely on the historiography of Kerala, and literatures associated with Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (S. N. D. P) Yogam and Sree Gnanodaya Yogam. I have followed MLA 7th edition and in case of confusion I have used a consistent method. Most of the primary and secondary sources used in the thesis are in Malayalam. I have done the translation when I incorporated it in to the thesis.

Chapter I, “Thiyyas and Ezhavas: The Questions of Caste-Community Identity,” examines various accounts of history and ethnography and points out how such narrative constructs a homogeneous Ezhava community identity which subsumes Thiyyas. The

first sub-section “Defining the Terms ‘Thiyya’ and ‘Ezhava’: A Discussion” looks at the historical accounts on Thiyya and Ezhava community argues that historians have imagined a homogeneous community for Ezhavas and Thiyyas through the theory of migration and the etymological origin of the terms. The second sub-section titled “Sub-Castes and ‘Other’ Castes” points out that Ezhavas and Thiyyas are a community made up of different caste groups, much like the Nair community which was formed by bringing together several sub-castes and other castes.

The third sub-section titled “Separate Identity: The *Illam* and Panchayat Settlement of Thiyyas and Ezhavas” furthers the argument that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are different communities by examining the separate *illam*¹⁵ settlement and the *panchayath* system of Thiyyas of North Malabar and Ezhavas of South Thiruvithamkoor. The fourth sub-section titled “Majority Lower Castes: Social Status and Traditional Occupations” criticizes caste historians’ representation of Thiyya and Ezhavas as toddy tappers and their projection of both communities as same on the basis of occupation. The chapter points out that although both communities share similar position in caste hierarchy in their respective regions, they were engaged in different professions and only a minority was engaged in toddy tapping. The fifth sub-section “Ezhavas and North Malabar Thiyyas: Differences in Social Position and Colonial Modernity” argues that though Thiyyas’ and Ezhavas’ social status in the caste hierarchy was parallel to one another, North Malabar Thiyyas had a better social position than Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor.

¹⁵ *Illam* means household.

Chapter II titled “Thiyyas, Ezhavas and ‘Others:’ The Politics of Being One” examines the politics behind the articulation and imagination of Thiyyas as Ezhavas as one. The first sub-section, “The Formation of Caste Community Identities in Kerala,” discusses Ezhava and Thiyya community formation in the light of the other caste community formations in Kerala which made such an imagination possible. It is argued that the Malayalee Memorial (1891) necessitated the Ezhava identity assertion, and the formation of a new political identity called Ezhavas. This helps us explain the process in which Thiyyas were considered as Ezhavas or rather how Thiyya identity had been subsumed into the larger political community identity of Ezhavas. On the one hand the homogenization process among Ezhavas could be seen as a response to the Nair dominance and Nair community formation on the other hand we can see as a negotiation with colonial modernity.

The second sub-section “Terming the Thiyya as Ezhava / Ezhava as Thiyya: Dr. Palpu and Community Histories” critically examines the Ezhava Memorial discourse, the community histories and also discusses the central role Dr. Palpu played in all the above discourses in an attempt to explain how Thiyyas and Ezhavas were subsumed into a single category. The third sub-section “Formation of *Samajams/Yogams*/Organizations: Strategies and Differences” points out the ideological differences and different concepts of community among the Thiyyas and Ezhavas which was undermined in order to project an Ezhava identity which is mostly associated with the S. N. D. P., an Ezhava organization based in Thiruvithamkoor. The section also shows that there was not one but several organizations/*samajams/yogams* related to Thiyyas and Ezhavas across various

regions of Kerala and they had articulated and mobilized the notion of oneness among themselves. The contentions among Thiyyas in the initial stage of the movement to be known under the label of Ezhavas are also highlighted. The fourth sub-section “Thiyyas, Ezhavas and the Discourse around Religion” examines Thiyyas’ and Ezhavas’ participation in the discourse around religion and argues how an Ezhava Hindu identity has been projected, avoiding all other movements in both communities.

Chapter III, “Thiyya and Ezhava Social Reform: Questions, Concerns and Women’s Role in the Movements,” explores the participation and engagement of women in Thiyya and Ezhava Social reform movements and various discourses around it. It also explores the questions and concerns of Thiyya and Ezhava women that are hardly noticed by historians writing caste history. Though it is not easy to make a differentiation between Thiyya and Ezhava women as in the case of men in the communities (because most of them are renowned), the chapter tries to deal with questions of Thiyya and Ezhavas women separately. The chapter argues that the lower caste women (here specifically Thiyya and Ezhava women) were not the central subjects of reforms propagated by male reformers as in the case of other upper caste reforms of the time in India, and all questions of reform were centered around the question and progress of the community although it was inclusive of the women’s question. The question of community predominated over the question of women (even for women reformers) though community was envisaged through its women.

The first sub-section titled “Theorizing of Gender in Social Reform Movements in India” maps the theories on gender in the social reform movements by feminist scholars in India. This section points out the relevance of looking at the question of women in the Thiyya and Ezhava movements. The second sub-section, “*Stree Samajams* (Women’s Associations) and Women’s Participation in Thiyya and Ezhava Social Reform Movements,” gives an account of Thiyya and Ezhava *Stree Samajams*, which are formed as part of their social reform movements, and looks at how Thiyya women and Ezhava women engaged in the process of reform through these *Samajams*.

The third sub-section, “Women’s Education and the Question of Community,” looks at Ezhava women’s engagement in the discourse around education through an examination of Ezhava women’s magazines like *Sanghamitra* and *Sahodari*. This section points out how differently Ezhava women, men and ‘other’ (especially Nair) women engaged in the discourse of modern education. The section argues that education for Ezhava women was mainly related to make them active participants in the reform process of community rather than making them mere culture bearers and ideal homemakers. The fourth sub-section, “Caste Markers: Dress Reform, Women and Community,” critically looks at the theories on dress reform and argues Thiyya and Ezhava reformers envisaged community identity/status through their women. And since the reform period falls within the nationalist movement in India, the fifth sub-section “Women: Community vs Nation” also sees how and why Ezhava women perceived and prioritised community over nation.

Chapter IV, “Legal Changes in Thiyya and Ezhava Social Reform Movements: Community Identity, Kinship and Sexuality of Women,” examines how the question of caste, gender and sexuality are inextricably linked. The first sub-section titled “A Critique of Studies on Matriliney and the Legalisation of Inheritance in Kerala” points out that the studies on matriliney in Kerala largely neglect the traditions of matriliney within Thiyya and Ezhava communities, and also discusses the ways in which men and women from both communities have engaged in the discourse around legalization of inheritance.

The second sub-section titled “Thiyya and Ezhava Matrilineal System: Community and Women” argues that the Thiyya reformers’ normalization and acceptance of patriliney among Thiyyas has in fact overshadowed the question of women as well as the question of community identity. The third sub-section titled “Family Structure, Marriage and *Sambandham* among Thiyyas and Ezhavas” critically looks at the different family structures, marital systems and the practice of *Sambandham*¹⁶ that prevailed among Thiyyas and Ezhavas before reformation took place within both communities. The section points the role of historians and social reformers in the unifications of Thiyyas and Ezhavas through the reform discourses of these customs. The fourth sub-section titled “Regulation Regarding Marriage and Divorce” points out how women’s question was marginalised by the Thiyya social reformist discourses which in turn helped forge a community identity for Thiyyas and Ezhavas.

In sum, the thesis tries to engage with Thiyyas’ and Ezhavas’ social reform movements during 1890-1940 with the argument that both Thiyyas and Ezhavas are different

¹⁶ *Sambandham* is a complex alliance between a man and woman among the matrilineal castes.

communities. While looking at the different aspects of Thiyya and Ezhava social reformation, the thesis tries to understand the process through which the political category 'Ezhava' was formed by subsuming the identity of Thiyyas. The thesis also examines the role of gender, sexuality, family structure, and marriage practices in effecting this process.

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CHAPTER 1

Thiyyas and Ezhavas: The Question of Caste-Community Identity

This chapter examines how a homogenous Ezhava caste-community identity was constructed through accounts of history and ethnography. This would help us to understand how the political category Ezhavas was formed by subsuming the Thiyya identity. The following concerns are addressed in this chapter. How do we define the terms Thiyya and Ezhava? What were the sub-castes and other castes among Thiyyas and Ezhavas? What are the elements which points out their separate existence? Are there any differences in their social position? The chapter attempts to show how despite the existence of different sub-castes Ezhavas and Thiyyas were imagined as one. It also discusses how the castes not associated with Ezhavas or Thiyyas were assimilated into the umbrella community of Ezhavas.¹ The chapter also throws light upon colonial modernity of Thiyyas.

1.1. Defining the Terms “Thiyya” and “Ezhava”: A Discussion

This section would discuss different terms which are used to denote Thiyyas and Ezhavas and also examines the historical accounts which treat Thiyyas and Ezhavas as same. Most historians have talked about / studied the Thiyyas of Malabar and Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi as one community (Aiyappan 1944; Innes 1951; Pillai 1953; Rajendran 1974; Menon 1983; Balakrishnan 1983; Narayanan 1984; Bhaskaranunni

¹ The formation of a Non-Brahmin identity as a political entity in Tamil Nadu is similar to this process although Non-Brahmin is not a caste entity like Ezhava.

1988; Logan 1989).² It should be noted that, earlier in Kochi, instead of the term Ezhava, the term Chova, Chogas or Chogans has been mostly used. For example, in the census reports of Cochin, Ezhavas³ are mentioned as *Choganmar* and Chogans respectively. Though the thesis largely focuses upon the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor and Thiyyas of North Malabar, we would begin by addressing the question of Chovas of Kochi.

Dr. P. Palpu,⁴ one of the most prominent Ezhava reformers, considers communities of Chovas, Ezhavas and Thiyyas to be one and the same. In a welcome address delivered at a public meeting of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S. N. D. P. Yogam),⁵ Palpu states, “The object of the Yogam is to improve the condition of the Tiya or Ezhava, or Chova community of this coast, and its policy is to effect this improvement without prejudice to the interest of other communities”(Vivekodayam 1917, 35). Similarly, there were also attempts to prove that Ezhavas or Chevakas of Kochi were Thiyyas. In a note titled “Kochiyile Thiyyar” taken from the Kochi state manual that appeared in *Mitavadi*, it has been stated that surely Ezhavas or Chevakas are the Thiyyas of British Malabar (1914, 6). Scholars like P. K. Balakrishnan also makes the assumption that Thiyyas of Malabar, Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor and Chovas of Kochi are same (403-404).

Viswambaran also points out that those who are known as Thiyyas in North Malabar and

² Although Robin Jeffery, Meera Velayudhan and Filippo Osella have worked on Ezhava related issues, the Thiyya question does not figure in their study. For details, see Jeffery, Meera Velayudhan and Osella.

³ The term ‘Eluvars’ is used for Ezhavas in the 1875 report whereas the term ‘Iluvan’ is used in the 1921 report. For details see Sankariah and Govinda Menon.

⁴ Dr. Palpu was an Ezhava social reformer, who was denied admission for the study of medicine because of his caste. He had to go through the same experience when he became a doctor and was forced to practice his profession in the state of Mysore. Being a victim of caste discrimination, he decided to work for the progress of lower castes, especially the Ezhavas.

⁵ S. N. D. P. was formed in 1903 under the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru with Kumaran Asan, the famous poet, as its general secretary. Its goal was to spread the ideas of Sree Narayana Guru. Dr. Palpu was one of the founders.

South Malabar are called as “Ezhavar” and “Chovar” in Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi respectively (45). However, it is said that in areas like Chirayinkeezhu taluk, where the majority Ezhavas live, the Chovas are used as derogatory term for Ezhavas (46-47).

Like the term “Chovas”, there are different terms which have been used to denote Thiyyas and Ezhavas. The Thiyyas were considered as belonging to Shanar tribes.⁶ In the census report of Madras Presidency (1871), the Thiyyas are classified under the category Shanar which is described as formed of three classes – Tiers, Syuvan, Kanisan (Cornish 350). Whereas in the census report of Cochin (1875), it is argued that Choganmars or Eluvars are not of the Sudra tribe, but outcastes or aboriginals possessing so much of Hindu blood. It is also noted that, “to the South, this class is known as ‘Shanars’, to the north, as ‘Teans’, denominations carrying with them, but slight shades of distinction, and all may be considered as applicable to the same race” (Sankariah 38). It can be assumed that the Thiyyas and Ezhavas were known as Shanars in Southern and Northern Kerala respectively.

The terms *Villavar*, *Villavan* and *Chekon* are also used to refer to either Thiyyas or Ezhavas. It is difficult to specify which communities these terms denoted respectively since historians who have documented it have treated both communities as same. For example, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai says, “Here another powerful community was *Villavar*. Now they are commonly known as *Ezhavar* (Ezhavas) and *Thiyyar* (Thiyyas). According to Damodaran, previously the words *Villavan* and *Chekon* have been used to denote Ezhavas (*Kerala Charithram* 155). Similarly, Padmanabha Menon says:

⁶ The term ‘Tiers’ has been used for Thiyyas in the census report.

In south Malabar, on the coast and in North Malabar this class is known by the name of Tiyyers, while in the Palghat and Valluvanad Taluks and in the states of Kochin and Travancore they are called Ezhavas and Chogas. The Shannars of South Travancore are not far from them The word Chogan, Chovan, or Chekavan is said to have for its original in Sanskrit “Sevakan” one who works or serves (qtd. in T.K. Madhavan 1)

Ezhavas of Kochi and Thiruvithamkoor were also known as Chevakas. For instance, Damodaran writes, the *vargam*⁷ which is known as *Ezhavar* and *Chevakar*⁸ in Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi, and as Thiyyar and Billavar in Malabar and *Kannadadesam*⁹ respectively are the highest population in Kerala (*Ezhavacharithram* 274). Mathew’s observation is also important in such context. He writes:

The ballads do not provide any information to affirm whether the different names like *cevakar*, *ilavar*, and *tandans* denote one and the same group of people or the people of the same caste. From the description of Aromal Cevakar, the *cevakars* who were brought from Ceylon were given a special title or position called *tandaimastanam* or the status of a *tandan*. According to A. Aiyappan, Ilavas in the Valluvanad Taluk of South Malabar are called *tandans*. On the other hand, K. P. Padmanabha Menon does not see any difference at all between *cevakars* and *tandans*. He says that *cevakars*, *cevons*, *ilavars*, *tiyans*, *tandans* and *sanas* are of the same caste (27-28).

Mathew points out that ballads do not provide any information to establish these terms as same and scholars have different opinion about the terms. However, contradictory to his

⁷ Vargam refers to ethnic group.

⁸ Another term used for Ezhavas.

⁹ It could be today’s Karnataka.

argument, later, he states that ballads give references to the name *ilavas* (Ezhavas) and there are plenty of evidence to show that *ilavas* and *cevakars* belonged to the same caste. He cites an example from *vatakkann pattukal* (Northern ballads) which refers to Unniarcha who belonged to the *cevaka* family as *ilavatti* (*ilava* woman) (29).

However, here the argument is that most historical and sociological accounts treat Ezhavar / Iluvar / Eluvar / Ilavar, Thiyyar / Tiyyr / Tier / Tean / Tiyan, Shanar, Sanas, Chogans / Chovan / Chevakan / Chevakar / Cevakar / Checkon / Cevons, Billava / Villavan / Villavar as same. Nevertheless, currently we see the usage of only two prominent terms Thiyya and Ezhava.

It is interesting to note that most theories which argue for the homogenous nature of Ezhava and Thiyya communities were written during and post reform period (late 19th century onwards) and most of them depended upon the etymological origin of these terms. Different theories regarding the origin of these communities also treated them as a single community. While some argue that Thiyyas / Ezhavas are indigenous to Kerala, others hold the view that they are migrants from Ceylon (island of Srilanka), Western Asia, and Northern India. The most accepted theory says both were indigenous to Ceylon and migrated to different parts of Kerala and are known by different names (Thurston 1975; Iyer 1981; Logan 1989). K. R Narayanan points out that the writers of Kerala State Manual like Nagam Aiya, Velu Pillai, the writer of Kochi History, Padmanabha Menon, census commissioner of Thiruvithamkoor, Kunjan Pillai and Thambi; Caldwell and Thurston etc., have the opinion that Ezhavas are migrated from Ceylon (139). Most of

these assumptions have been made on the argument that caste names indicate the place of origin and vice versa. Padmanabha Menon states:

The names by which the caste is designated are supposed to indicate the place of their origin and the occupation as a body. The word Tiya is said to be a corruption of the Sanskrit word Dwipa or island, showing that the Tiyar or Dwiper had their origin in an island while the word Ezhava is supposed to indicate that island, to be Izham a corruption of Simhalan, the name by which Ceylon had been known to Hindus for many centuries (qtd. in T. K. Madhavan 1)

Mostly tracing the etymological origin of the words ‘Ezhava’ and ‘Thiyya’, historians state the words to have been derived from Ezham / Ilam which points to Simhalan / Ceylon (Island of Srilanka). Logan (2007), for instance writes:

One among their caste names (Thiyyan) seems to suggest that they had come from an island (Dweepu). Another name (Ezhavan) also suggests that this island is Ceylon. It is also known that “Theevan” is the variant form of the Sanskrit term “Dweepan.” In the records of Thalassery factory, Thiyya community is generally referred by the name, ‘Thivi.’ Considering the fact that the name of ancient Ceylon was ‘Simhala,’ it could be said that Simhalan transformed into ‘Sihalan’ ‘Ehalan’ ‘Ezhuvan’ (115).

Writing about the history of caste, Aiyar (1901) points out that there are numerous traditions in vogue regarding their early history. He argues that apart from tradition, it is possible that the original habitat of Ezhavas was the island of Ceylon as the etymology of their caste name shows (278). Likewise, the attempt which tries to prove that Ezhavas or

Chevakas of Kochi were Thiyyas is also based on the assumption that they are the migrants from Ceylon (*Mitavadi* 1914, 6).

Nonetheless, many scholars have criticized the assumption that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are from Ceylon which mainly constitute to the argument that both communities are same. Abraham (2007) in her unpublished thesis “Gender, Status and Class: A Sociological Study of the Thiyyas” points out that M. M. Anand Ram’s “Influx-Crete to Kerala”, Kambil Ananthan’s “Kerala Charithra Nirupanam” and Kottieth Krishnan’s manuscript “Ramayana in a new setting or the culture of Kerala” refute the theory that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are descendents of Ceylon.¹⁰

Ananthan argues that the community which is known as Villavas (Thuluthiyyas), Thiyyas and Ezhavas according to the places it belongs to, were in Kerala since time immemorial (98). Scholars like P. K Balakrishnan, Sreenivasa Aiyankar, K. Damodaran also criticizes such assumption that Ezhavas are migrants from Ceylon (Muhammad 964-965).

Another scholar Damu critiques the notion of the homogenous nature of Thiyyas and Ezhavas on the basis of etymology and migration theory. According to him, it is a wrong assumption that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are born in same *kulam*.¹¹ He points out that both Ezhavas and Thiyyas are from different places and from different group. Thiyya community of Malabar migrated to Kerala in 700 BC from Kyrgyzstan in the erstwhile

¹⁰ She examines the ways in which Brahminical texts (*Keralolpathi*, *Keralamahatmyam* etc.) and colonial ethnographers (Logan’s Manual and District Gazetteers) have been contested by the members of caste (here mostly Thiyya) writing alternate history. See Abraham.

¹¹ *Kulam* means ethnic group.

Soviet Union. By tracing the etymology he argues that the word Thiyya is derived from the name of the mountains, Tian, on the southern side of Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, he held the view that Ezhavas and Nairs are the descendents of Sinhalese and migrated from Srilanka to the Southern part of Kerala (40-41). Shyamalan also opines that Thiyyas are migrated from Tianshan mountain of Kyrgyzstan (*Malayalamanorama* 2011). Similarly, Cornish writes:

The *shanars* of Tinnevely and the south of the Peninsula are also called *Ilavar* ...The tradition amongst the southern Shanars is that they came originally from Ceylon; but as the population movement has always been in a different direction, namely, from north to south, this account is very improbable (162).

According to him there have been migrants to and from Ceylon of the southern habitants is certain, but it is difficult to decide the place of origin of Ezhavas.

Since the migration theory is still a subject of debate, unconvincing speculations are many. However, Ram's argument deserves much attention here. He criticizes the upper caste historians' view of the origin of both communities, "They write all these lies only to obstruct the growth of a community that was reviving, during the British rule, from forced distinction" (7). He finds this as the mechanism of upper caste to subjugate the lower castes who were reviving during the colonial period. However in this section we have seen how historians imagined a homogenous community for Ezhavas and Thiyyas, through the migrations theory and etymological origin of the terms which have been contested by certain other historians. We also find how these historical accounts are

important in the formation of a larger community identity for all castes under the umbrella name of Ezhavas.

1.2. Sub-Castes and ‘Other’ Castes

This section tries to show how historians discussed in the above sub-section overlooked the caste differences and also existing sub-castes among Thiyyas and Ezhavas. We will also examine the sub-castes among Thiyyas and Ezhavas and examine how it forms a community identity by bringing together these sub-castes and other castes into it. Nairs and Ezhavas are considered to be the two major communities which were formed by uniting many sub-castes among them. According to Narayanan the subdivisions among Nairs and Ezhavas gradually disappeared. He writes:

The Nayers who had recorded 116 sub - castes in 1901 returned themselves only under three caste names in 1931...A similar fusion appears to have been taking place among Ilavas also, the progress thereof being at an accelerated pace as compared with that of the Nayers. They had recorded themselves as one caste even in 1931 as against 22 sub- divisions of 1891. This must to a large extent, have been due to the remarkable influence of the socio-religious movement inaugurated by Sree Narayana Guru Swamikal (131).

Similarly, Velu Pillai writes:

while the census returns of 1901 showed the existence of so many as one hundred and sixteen sub-divisions among the Nayers, the census of 1931 mentions only two...similarly among Ilavas and many other castes the numerous sub-divisions returned in the census of 1901 have all disappeared (Raimon 829).

Both Tampi and Velu Pillai argue that there were many sub-castes among Nairs and Ezhavas which disappeared over a period of time.

Though there are differences in opinion, there is an abundance of information about the sub-caste group among Ezhavas compared to sub-caste group among Thiyyas. It is generally argued that Ezhavas of southern Kerala were divided into four sub-castes namely *Malayalam Ezhavar*, *Pandi Ezhavar*, *Kollathu Ezhavar*, and *Pachili Ezhavar* (Rajendran 1974; Mathur 1977; Aiya 1906, Thurston 1909; Jacob 1995). According to Thurston, there are only three divisions of southern Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas called *Pachili*, *Pandi* and *Malayalam*. Whereas, according to Mateer, the internal divisions of Ezhavas are *Pandi Ezhavar* or *Pattanam Vakakkar*, *Pachotti* or *Pachili Ezhavar* and *Pula Ezhavar* (*Native life* 84).

Murali points out that there was a group called *Kurachovan* among Ezhavas. Iyer says that among the Ezhavas of Kochi there are three sub-castes called *Thiyyachon* (*Chovan*), *Pandichon* and *Velakandachon* and in Thiruvithamkoor there are two sub-castes called *Natichon* and *Pachilichon* (280). Bhaskaranunni also points out that Ezhavas of Kochi and Thiruvithamkoor have the sub-castes *Thiyyachon* (*Chovan*), *Pandichon*, *Velaakatichon*, *Nadichon* and *Pachalichon*. N. R. Krishnan writes, though Ezhava community still have the caste names like *Kurachovan*, *Pulachovan*, *Natichovan*, it is not easy to identify these castes (35).

It is said that in South Malabar, Thiyyas were subdivided into the *Thiyya Chon*, *Vaisya Thiyya* (*Thekkan Chon*), and *Pandi Chon* (*Izhuvan*).¹² *Pandi Chon* of North Malabar and South Malabar is referred as *Izhuvan* i.e., *Ezhavas*. We also see that while there were *Pandi Chon* in North Malabar, there are *Pandi Ezhavas* in Thiruvithamkoor. We also find *Thiyachon* (*Chovan*), *Pandichon* and *Velakandachon* both in Thiruvithamkoor and North Malabar. One can read two possible reasons for this similar sub-caste grouping among Thiyyas and Ezhavas. Either it has happened through cross migration or it was the misinterpretation of the historians who considered both Thiyyas and Ezhavas as one community. One such misinterpretation for instance is Damodaran's observation that there is a division called *Marayar* or *Marayas* among the Thiyyas of Malabar and Kochi while there was no Thiyya presence at all in Kochi. Damodaran writes, "In fact, the ritual chief (*purohithar*) or barbers known as "Ezhavathikal" are the only sub-group among Ezhavas. They are also named as *Kavuthiyyar*, *Kuruppanmar*, *Panikkar*, *Asanmar*, and *Varyanmar*. It is said that they also came along with Ezhavas from Ceylon" (*Ezhava Charithram* 279).

Various census reports of Thiruvithamkoor, Kochi and Malabar/Madras Presidency¹³ give us more information about the sub-castes among Thiyyas and Ezhavas. As per the 1876 census report of Travancore, Paraven, Nulian, Thundan, Elaven, Shannan are recorded as slightly modified forms of the same order of the Hindu community (203).¹⁴ It is also

¹² See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ezhava>.

¹³ Malabar was part of Madras Presidency under the British rule.

¹⁴ It is also mentioned that the Nooliars are the most numerous in the taluk of Nayyattinkaray and the neighbourhood of Trivandrum. The Thundans are found in the central taluks of Sherengil, Quilon, Karunagapally, Kartigapally, and Mavelikara. The large body of Elavars and Paravars are residents of the northern taluks. See *Report on the Census of Travancore*.

stated that they are also known as Shogans, Valens and Elava Panikars. The Shanars of South Travancore and Tiers of North Malabar are considered similar to the Elavars of North Travancore (204).¹⁵ However, as per this report, Tiers/Thiyyas are mentioned as a separate category of North Malabar.

The census report of Travancore (1901) divided Ezhavas into three classes, the Pandi Ezhavas or the Ezhavas of the Tamil districts, the Malayalam Ezhavas or Chovas or the Tiyas of British Malabar. The table shows, the subdivision of Ezhavas as 46 among which the statistics of *Chova, Kura, Malayala, Muttlam, Pandi, Pandi Illam, Thiyyan* are given (Aiyar 278). Whereas, as per the census report of Travancore (1911) Ezhavas are divided into the three classes (1) Pandi Izhavas , (2) the Malayalam speaking Izhavas or Chovas and (3) the Tiyas of British Malabar (Aiyar 242). Interestingly, though these reports list out more sub-castes among Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor, the Thiyyas of British Malabar are also included in the census reports. Bhaskaranunni discusses about the sub-castes among the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi. In Kochi there are sub-castes named *Thiyyachon, Pandichon, and Velakatichon* and in Thiruvithamkoor, *Natichon* and *Pachalichon*. He mentions that as per the last Kochi Kaneshumari report, only three sub divisions are mentioned such as *Pandi Ezhavas, Malayalam Ezhavas* and north Malayalam Thiyyas. Here it is interesting to note that the Thiyyas of Malabar are included in some of the census reports of Kochi and Thiruvithamkoor (*Keralam* 109-110).

¹⁵ See *Report on the census of Travancore*.

It is stated that in the census report of Cochin (1891), the Ezhavas¹⁶ are classified under five subdivisions numbered as (1) Iluvan, (2) Thandan, (3) Vathi, (4) Kavutiyan, and (5) Tiyyaan (Sankara Menon 168).¹⁷ As per the census report of Cochin (1901), the community Chogan or Iluvan community has been classed under (1) Iluvan, (2) Tiyyan and (3) Kavutiyan. However, most importantly we see that while in the 1981 census Tiyyas are numbered 111 and in 1901 census it is only 2 (167). The gradual decline of the number of Thiyyas and the disappearance of the categories Vathi and Thandan points out their adaptation of the caste name Iluvan/Ezhava.

It should be noted that Ezhavas were addressed as Elavar tribe in the earlier census reports. The census report of Cochin (1875) records Kaniyans and Pananas as the divisions of Elavars tribe (Sankariah 39). And as discussed in the first section, it can be assumed that the Thiyyas and Ezhavas were known as Shanars in Southern and Northern Kerala respectively. In the census report of Madras Presidency in 1871, Thiyyas are classified under the category Shanar which is described as formed of three classes, along with Syuvan and Kanisan (Cornish 350).¹⁸ And, one of the earlier account mentions Chegots of Malabar which are said to have two castes namely Chegots and Twen Chegots (Visscher 128).

¹⁶ The term 'Iluvan' has been used for Ezhavas.

¹⁷ It is also added in the Census Report that Thandan is the name of a sub-caste and the title given to the head man of the caste. "Thandans have not been enumerated in the State as a separate sub-caste. Vathi and Kavutiyan are almost synonymous terms, so that they have been clubbed together. Kavutiyan is, however, a more general term, being sometime applied to the barber caste of Tacchans, Kanakkans and etc. and Vathi would be therefore have been a more appropriate name for the barber priest of Iluvans." For details see M. Sankara Menon (1903).

¹⁸ The term 'Tiers' has been used for Thiyyas in the Census Report.

So far we have looked at the sub-castes within the Ezhavas and Thiyyas. The writing of social reformers suggests that many other castes that were not traditionally associated with Ezhavas and Thiyyas were assimilated or brought under both categories called Ezhavas and Thiyyas. For instance, C. Kesavan, an Ezhava social reformer states:

Apart from these Channars, there were the subdivisions within them, the general public which was called “Aayandalangal,” and above them, there were also the “Puzhukas” whom these Channars had bought as slaves under the names of Kandan, Vadukkan etc. Ezhava community consists of all these. What had led to this community structure! (vol. 1: 22).

Kesavan finds it difficult to justify the formation of community and he compares it that of Roman community which was divided into Petricians, Plebians and Serfs. Moorkoth Kumaran, a Thiyya social reformer also says castes below and above Thiyyas were assimilated to them (Kunjappa, *Moorkoth Kumaran* 11).¹⁹

The community formation was a complex process among Thiyyas. Under the title “Who is superior among Ezhavas?” Bhaskaranunni quotes a *Karalakaumudi*²⁰ report as follows:

It has been almost seven or eight years the Thiyyas of Southern Malayalam and Northern Malayalam have dispute over the topic that whether weavers can be included in their community or not. Thiyyas submitted a petition to their community leaders Mr. C. M. Krishnan Muppan and Mr. C. M. Kumjikkoruvu

¹⁹ Though Moorkoth Kumaran gives the description of some castes like Kavuthiyyan (Sudrakavuthiyyan and Thiyyakavuthiyyan), Vannan, Mannan, Malayar, Munnuttan and Anjuttan, and its functions in caste hierarchy, he does not clearly mention the castes which were assimilated to Thiyyas.

²⁰ It could be either a Malayalam magazine or news paper.

demanding that Ezhavas should get the final judgment. Many Thiyya leaders have signed in the petition. After a discussion of petition it has been decided that weavers should not be allowed to have any rights over the religious ceremonies of Thiyyas and they should remain as a separate community (*Keralam* 283).²¹

Though we find that the term Ezhava has been used in between, this document suggests that although certain castes aspired to be part of Thiyya community, they had been excluded from it. All these instances suggest that many castes or sub-castes or other castes have adapted the caste-community identity Ezhava and Thiyya. The apparent absence of sub-castes among Thiyyas and Ezhavas in contemporary Kerala suggests the success of community formation among them which to some extent has ruptured the caste hierarchy within and amongst themselves. But as already noted, the caste-community formation in Kerala resulted in further caste hierarchy as well.

Scholars also have the opinion that there were no caste differences in Kerala until the Aryan invasion. A. Aiyappan writes: “Mr. E. M. S.Nambuthiripad, the communist leader, is also a Marxist historian, according to whom the Iravas, Nayars and Brahmins of Kerala were originally of one group but Aryanism and feudalism made the Iravas a proletariat caste.” (*Social Revolution* 121). Kambil Ananthan has the opinion that Nambuthiris, Nairs, Thiyyas, Kummalas and Mukkuvas all belonged to one caste (65). Similarly, K. R. Narayanan points out that, the historians, Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai, K. Damodaran, Balakrishna Pillai and E. M. S Nambuthiripad held the opinion of Ezhavas and Nairs being same community (142). On the basis of the similarities in the customs

²¹ This note was originally appeared in Mitavadi. 8.4(April 1920).

observed by Ezhavas and Nairs, K. R Narayanan also shares the same opinion (143). All these instances suggest that caste community formation in Kerala was very complex.

1.3. Separate Identity: The *Illam* and Panchayat Settlement of Thiyyas and Ezhavas

This section would discuss the separate *illam*²² and Panchayat settlement of Thiyyas and Ezhavas in order to illustrate the separate identities of Ezhavas and Thiyyas. We find *illam* settlement among the Thiyyas of North Malabar and Ezhavas of South Thiruvithamkoor. According to Kathleen Gough, the Thiyyas of former Kottayam Kingdom i.e., North Malabar had eight matrilineal clans called *illams*.²³ As noted by C. A. Innes in the Malabar district Gazetteer, North Malayalam Thiyyas are divided into eight *Illams* known as *Koyikkal*, *Nellikkal*, *Vanmarikka*, *Pazhayar*, *Mamkuti*, *Thenamkuti*, *Patayankuti*, and *Villakuti* (125). Bhaskaranunni and Rajendran also have the same opinion and Bhaskaranunni adds that each *illam* has four *Kiriyam* and there are thirty two *Kiriyams*.²⁴ Though Krishnan agrees that there are eight *illams* and thirty two *Kiriyams*, he named *illams* differently. They are *Nellikka*, *Pullanji*, *Vamseri*, *Kozhikkalan*, *Patayamkudi*, *Manamkudi*, *Thenamkudi*, *Vilakkamkudi*. Kesavan suggests that Thiyyas of Malabar have twelve *illams* and ten *kiriyams* and he gives the names of only six *illams* like *Kozhikkolan*, *Thalakkotan*, *Nellikka*, *Thenkuti*, *Varakam*, and *Pullanji* (Vol.2 : 23).

²² *Illam* means household

²³ According to Samuel Mateer these *illams* are an imitation of the clan (*gothra sambradayam*) of Brahmins. Since the members of same *illam* are considered to have blood relation, marriage is not allowed among the members of the same *illam* and the inheritance is through mothers. Bhaskaranunni says that, in those days monogamy was not in practice and marriage among the same *illams* were strictly prohibited. See Mateer 16; Bhaskaranunni 2005, 110.

²⁴ See Bhaskaranunni 2005, 123; Rajendran 27.

Whereas Sanjeevan points out that, Theyyam,²⁵ in its lyrics/performance addresses Thiyyas in eight *illam* such as *Nelikkathiyyan*, *Varakkathiyyan*, *Palathiyyan*, *Vavuthiyyan*, *Karattuthiyyan*, *Puthiyatathiyyan*, *Kotakkathiyyan*, *Olorathiyyan* (Otor) (*Theyyathile* 172).

While Thiyya *illam* seems to be numbered at least at eight, the Ezhavas of South Thiruvithamkoor are said to have had four *illams*. As already noted South Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas had three divisions called *Pachili*, *Pandi* and *Malayalam* and *Malayalam* Ezhavas are divided into four *illams* namely *Muttillam*, *Matambiillam* or *Pallichalillam*, *Mayyanatiillam* and *Chozhiillam* (Narayanan *Ezhava* 48). According to Bhaskaranunni some of the *illams* of Ezhavas are: *muti*, *chothi*, *mayyanatu*, *madambi* (*Irupatham* 123). Kesavan also mentions that Ezhavas have four *illams* namely *Moottillam*, *Madambiillam*, *Chozhiillam*, *Mayyantillam*. These *illams* are again divided into five *Channaymas*. People who belong to *Moottillam* are *Nayan Channar* and *Mayyanatillam* are *Mutha Channar*, *Ilaya Channar*, *Ayanthi Channar* and *Kannangara*. .Kesavan writes:

There are four *illams* among Ezhavas namely *Italyil Moottillam*, *Matambiillam*, *Chozhiillam*, *Mayyanattillam*. All people from Mayyanadu belongs to *Italyil Moottillam* and *Mayyanattillam*. This *illam* settlement was prevalent, earlier from kollam to Thrukkunnappuzha. But it is not sure whether it is still there. There are still these *illams* among Ezhavas in south till Kanyakumari and in Pandi, Marriages are not allowed among the members of same *illam* (vol. 1: 4-15).

²⁵ Theyyam is a popular ritual art of northern Kerala. In Malabar, Thiyya community has strong connections with Theyyam.

However, as Kesavan pointed out, we find that these *illam* settlement fades away and there exists no *illam* settlement among Ezhavas or Thiyyas in contemporary Kerala. These further points to how gradually differences within a community have been erased to further the cause of a single community identity. On the other hand it could also be seen as the effect of new institutions brought in by colonialism.

Apart from this distinct *illam* settlement, there is another system which points out to the separate existence of Thiyyas and Ezhavas. Before the establishment of civil and criminal courts, conflicts within the communities have been settled through different systems among Thiyyas and Ezhavas. According to Moorkoth Kumaran, a Thiyya social reformer, *Desasabhas*²⁶ had the power to settle the civil and criminal cases among Thiyyas. Four *taravadus*²⁷ in each *tara* was powerful and the *tarayil karanavanmar*, the eldest members of the *taravadus* had the power to excommunicate the culprits.²⁸ If the case is not settled in *tara*, it settles in *Kazhakam* where fourteen *karanavars*²⁹ from four *taras* are present. And in case the allegation is serious and the defendant is an influential person the case settles at *kottil* where *karanavars* from thirty two *taras* or sixty four *taras* takes the decision. Kambil Ananthan also gives details about this Panchayat System among Thiyyas (100- 102).

A Thiyya social reformer, Revathiamma in her autobiography gives the details of Thiyya community in Mayyazhi (now Mahe, which was under French rule) and Thalassery

²⁶ Desasabha is Panchayat System among Thiyyas.

²⁷ Tharavadu means matrilineal household.

²⁸ Neighbourhood unit is known as *tara*. Desam is the smallest revenue paying division.

²⁹ An elder/head of the household

(which was under British rule). She quotes her grandmother's narrative in which she points out that community *Karanavars* and local chieftains was powerful enough to excommunicate the people in the community. Both from Revathiamma's narration and her grandmother's account, it seems that Thiyyas were a powerful community in Malabar and were structured to some extent under community *karanavars* and local chieftains.³⁰

We see differences in the arguments regarding power or involvement of Nairs in the Panchayath of Thiyyas. Kathleen Gough writes:

Like the Nayars, they had a neighborhood unit, comprising of the Tiyyar community of one or more villages. The neighborhood had a caste assembly of the heads of households; it judged offenders against the religious laws of caste and could fine or expel them from caste with the consent of the Nayar village headman or the chief (*Tiyyar* 406).

According to Gough, Thiyyas needed the permission of Nair village head man or chief in order to expel someone from the community. Whereas Ananthan argues that there were no such institutions among North Malayalam Nairs which exerted power over other communities (101) Moorkkoth Kumaran also points out some cases in which the community's *Karanavars* asserted certain power over Nairs.³¹ He criticizes Logan's Malabar manual which documented the Nairs' system of *jathikkuttam*³² or Panchayath. According to him it is a result of Nair prejudice since a Nair official has given the

³⁰ See Revathiamma.

³¹ There was a custom called *Vannathimattu* among Thiyyas and Nairs. Vannathi had to hand over *mattu* (cloth) on the 4th day of the menstruation of a woman. It is said that the Thiyyas had power over Vannathi and Thiyya *Karanavar* can stop Vannathi from giving *mattu* to somebody and she had to obey it. It is also stated that Thiyya *Tarayil karanavar* had the right to prevent Vannathi from giving *mattu* to an upper-caste woman.

³² *Jathikkuttam* or *Jathisabha* is the separate Panchayat system of Nairs and Thiyyas.

information to Logan regarding Thiyyas requiring Nair permission to resolve certain issues (Kunjappa 15). Here, ideologically, Kumaran does not want to concede Thiyyas as lower or wanting permission from Nairs. This in a way points out that Thiyyas wanted to retain and assert their identity as separate and autonomous from Nairs. This can be thought of as the first steps toward formation of a ‘community’ by its own rights.

Now let us examine how powerful were these *jathikkuttam* or panchayath and also Thiyyas’ attitude towards other lower castes. Sreeraman in his article “Thiyyarute Jathi” writes about a document titled “*Aikamathyam Parambalam*” which was published in 1911 (29-33). This document was the report of the *Jathisabha* (gathering of members of the same caste) of Thiyyas which was held at a Thiyya’s house on 4th June 1911. It was related to an incident of the out casting of some Thiyyas of Kozhikode who had food at the house of a weaver named Kunjikkurumban. This meeting was conducted on the demand expressed in letters written by 33 Thiyyas which was addressed to K.V. Choyi³³ and was attended by 408 Thiyyas. A notice was also published seeking the opinions of the people who can’t attend the meeting and also of the *Thandans* and *Karanavars* were not invited. Among the 842 replies received, 839 had the opinion that accused Thiyyas should be punished. The president, Choyi stated that such act has been condemned on the ground that it brings shame for their caste and the Thiyyas who did it deliberately are not supposed to mingle with others and should be expelled from the group (*sanghavirodam*). Prior to this meeting, Kallinkal Rarichan Mupppan had published his opinion in support of the accused Thiyyas. This was harshly criticized and dismissed in the meeting. In the judgment (*theerppu*) it has been stated that according to the opinion of 406 among the

³³ Probably a prominent leader among Thiyyas

408 who attended the meeting and the 839 among the 842 who had send letters, the act has been condemned and since it was not deliberate they are forgiven for their mistake. This shows the attitude of Thiyyas towards the lower castes like weavers and also the power of *jathisabha*. As discussed in the second section of the chapter we see that during the same period, the debate whether weavers should be included in the Thiyya community were strong. This document suggests how strongly Thiyyas wanted to maintain the caste hierarchy when it comes to the question of lower castes and also how they used the power of *jathisabha* to execute it.

Now coming to the Ezhavas, there is an argument that there was no such *tara* or Panchayat settlement among Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor (Bhaskaranunni *Irupatham* 123). However, we may find that like Thiyyas, South Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas had a particular system to decide over community matters. The *illams* of South Thiruvithamkoor Ezhavas are divided into five *Channaymas* (Mateer 16).³⁴ People belong to Muttillam are *Nayan Channar* and People belong to *Mayyanatillam* are *Mutha channar*, *Ilaya Channar*, *Ayanthi Channar* and *Kannangara* (Kesavan vol. 1: 14-15). Kesavan, an Ezhava social reformer points out that *Muttachannar* have sub divisions like *pattathilkkar*, *changattukar*, *pottiyazhikathukar*, *ilambanthottathukar*. Among these four *sakhas* ³⁵, the elder most will be *pothukaranavar* and all community matters was conducted under his supervision (vol. 1:21). They had certain powers over the community members including the settlement of any complaints. Similary Aiya writes:

³⁴ Head of each *illam* is called *Channar*. Here *Channaymas* refers to sub-divisions and *Ayanthi Channar* and *Kannangara* refers to rank title.

³⁵ Here *sakhas* can be considered as divisions/sub divisions.

As among several other castes, the Izhavas have their social headmen who are known as Channarmars, Mutulpattukars, and Perambanmars. In each circle *pratikaranam* consisting of a certain number of *karas* and *muris*, i. e., villages and sub-division of villages, there are a few of these headmen, not less than five or six in number, whose business is to make preliminary enquiries about social disputes and convene meetings for the arbitration and settlement of such disputes. Marriage and other important ceremonies, unless performed with the knowledge or permission of these headmen, are not considered to have been done ‘in due and proper form or according to the usages of the caste’ and have therefore no validity (400-401).

In an article titled “Ezhavar” it is mentioned that “especially in Kochi, the leaders of Ezhavas have given the dignified titles like ‘Thandan’ and ‘Panikkar’ by Kings and Chieftains (Yoganadam 45). *Channan*, *Thandan* and *Panikkar* are the titles given to Ezhavas by Naduvazis (Kesavan 1 :123). J. Puthenkalam writes:

The Tandans, the hereditary village chief of the Ezhavas, were the agents of the ‘desavazhis’ in the supervision of all polluting castes. The *tandan*³⁶ was empowered to inflict on the guilty persons such punishments as fine, flogging or mutilation. He could also deny to these the services of the village barber, washerman or such other specialized castes. If the vannathi was forbidden to supply to the family of the guilty individual the ‘mattu’ it would have amounted to keeping the whole family in a perpetual state of ritual pollution and cutting them away from all social life (21).

³⁶ Tandan is the title given to the leader who look after community matters. For details see Ananthan 87.

However, as we have noted earlier there were Thandans among Thiyyas too. For instance, according to Ananthan, *Cheryakkaran*, *Thoravan* and *Thandayan* are the ones who would look after the community matters (109). These titles are given to them by *Tharayilkaranavars*. Bhaskaranunni states that leader among Ezhavas are *Chevakar*, *Kuruppanmar*, *Vaidyan*, *Jyothsyan*, *Asan*, and *Thandan* (Keralam 110). Kesavan notes that we find *Thandans* and *Panikkans* in Malabar, Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi (vol. 1: 285). However, the power they exercised over the community members and other lower caste communities is also complex. During the reign of Kochi Valiya Thamburan such powers of *Tandans* and *Panikkars*³⁷ have been withdrawn (*Mitavadi* 1914).

From these accounts it is evident that both Thiyyas and Ezhavas had separate *illam* settlement and a structured community system. These Panchayat systems solved the issues within the community, before the state's (colonial or native ruler) intervention into it. There is also a complex power relation between the community members and community *karanavars*, chieftains, *tandan*, *channnan* or *Panikkar*. Sometimes they exercise power over other lower caste communities and are often subjugated by them.

As far as the question of *illam* settlement is concerned we have seen that while the ethnographers, historians and Thiyyas reformers had the opinion that Thiyyas had eight illams. It is generally mentioned that Ezhavas had only four illams. Apart from this, we also find different panchayat system among Thiyyas and Ezhavas. While we find that Thiyyas had the system of *desasabhas*, *jatikkuttam*, *taras* and chieftains addressed as

³⁷ Like *Tandan*, *Panikkar* is also the title given to the one who has the right to give permission to community matters like marriage. See Mateer 15.

Tarayil karanavanmar, Cheryakkaran, Thoravan and *Thandayan* and *Ezhavas* system of *tara* or *Channaymas* as well as the chieftains are called as *pothukaranavar, pattathilkkar, changattukar, pottiyazhikathukar, ilambanthottathukar, channan, tandan* and *panikkar*. All these points out the separate community identity of *Thiyyas* and *Ezhavas*.

1.3. Majority Lower castes: Social Status and Traditional Occupations

This section examines social position of *Ezhavas* and *Thiyyas* in terms of caste hierarchy furthering the argument that these two communities had separate identities that were later assumed as one. As far as the population is concerned, while *Ezhavas* were numerically larger in *Thiruvithamkoor*, *Thiyyas* were numerically significant in *Malabar* (*Vivekodayam* 206, 212). Their traditional occupation has been considered same, their social status in the caste hierarchy was also considered similar. While deconstructing the notion of a particular occupation for a particular caste group, we argue that *Thiyyas* and *Ezhavas* in fact were engaged in different professions. This in turn would critique caste historians' role in representing both communities as toddy tappers and thereby assuming that *Ezhavas* and *Thiyyas* as same community. This section would also throw light upon the colonial modernity of lower caste *Thiyyas*.

The social status of *Thiyyas* and *Ezhavas* are considered as same. The status of *Thiyyas* is explained in *Malabar Gazatteer* as thus:

While in *Palakkatu Thaluk* they are known as *Ezhavas*, in other parts they are known as *Thiyyas*. They are majority among the Hindu *Vargam* of *Malabar*. It is

very difficult to find their community status. It is said that in northern Malayalam it is necessary for others to take bath if Thiyyas come nearby them. If we consider *varnasastram* both Thiyyas and Ezhavas are one. But it is also been argued by some among them that both are not same.

The above quote suggests that Ezhavas and Thiyyas can be considered as one on the basis of *varnasastram* (denoting a Shudra status). Similarly, Aiyappan points out that according to the traditionally accepted code of behavior in social relations in Kerala, a member of Ezhava³⁸ caste polluted a *Namputihri* from a distance of thirty-two feet; he had no access to the houses of, Nairs or *Namputhiris*, their temples, tanks, and wells and had no freedom to use roads or footpaths when *Nairs* and *Namputhiris* were nearby.³⁹

As already mentioned, one of the common factors which was used by the historians who argue for the homogenous nature of Thiyyas and Ezhavas were that their caste/traditional occupation is same. Thus, though only minority among Thiyyas and Ezhavas were engaged in toddy tapping, it was popularly perceived as the traditional occupation of both Thiyyas and Ezhavas. However such a notion has been contested by many Thiyya and Ezhava historians/reformer/writers as well as anthropologists. For instance, Aiyappan, an Ezhava social anthropologist writes:

Though the caste profession of the Iravas is said to be toddy-drawing, the actual number engaged in that profession, at any time, could have been only a small percentage of their total population (about 3 percent in some areas in 1921). If the whole of this area population were at any time engaged in toddy making, there

³⁸ Aiyappan uses the term 'Ilava' for Ezhavas.

³⁹ See Mathew 29; Aiyappan 39.

would be a tremendous, unsaleable surplus. The majority of the Iravas were tenant farmers, or free (as opposed to serf) labourers and a small percentage of them were small businessmen, *ayurvedic* medical practitioners, and so on. (*Social Revolution* 117).

As Aiyappan points out, though traditional occupation of Ezhavas is considered as toddy tapping, they were engaged in varieties of occupation related to agriculture, coir-making, small trade, traditional medicine etc. (*Iravas* 15). Similarly, Jayaprakash, an Ezhava historian questions the assumption of Ezhavas as toddy tappers that while only a minority engaged in toddy drawing. He points out that the census report of 1931 marked Ezhavas' traditional occupation as toddy drawing (21).

Anand Ram, a Thiyya historian points out that "Only a small percentage of Thiyyas were engaged in toddy tapping and in allied industries. However, the upper class writers of the 18th century A. D. took advantage of small percentage of toddy tappers amongst the Thiyyas and Izhavas and started recording that Thiyyas and Izhavas as"(6). Ezhava social reformers like Kumaranasan also showed his resentment towards such typecasting of Thiyyas and Ezhavas as toddy tappers. Kumaranasan states regarding the occupational details given by N. Subrahmanya Aiyar in the Thiruvithamkoor census report of 1911.⁴⁰

Among the thousands of hardworking men, it is known that about 215 are engaged in handcraft, 116 are land labourers, farmers and Jenmis are 163, 163 are engaged in wage labour, 128 in trade, 110 in toddy tapping, 20 in other occupation and 8 in government service. So the statement in the report that Ezhavas' main occupation is toddy tapping is wrong (Narayanan *Ezhava* 52).

⁴⁰ Vivekodayam.9.8.

Similarly, Damu argues that there is no point in saying that the traditional occupation of Ezhavas is toddy tapping (*Lankaparvam* 39).

One can find that Thiyyas of Malabar and Ezhavas of Cochin and Thiruvithamkoor were mainly engaged in agriculture. There were also many Sanskrit scholars, Ayurvedic physicians, astrologers and soldiers among Southern Ezhavas and Northern Thiyyas. Dr. Palpu, an Ezhava social reformer describes Ezhavas (he uses Tiyas or Elavas of Travancore) as thus:

The Tiyas or Elavas of Travancore number nearly half a million out of a total population of two and a half millions out of a total population of two and a half millions and are, in numerical importance, the second community in the State. They are described in the Census Report of Travancore as “a most numerous and industrious class” and as “an able-bodied and hard-working race.” A great many of them are land-owners; some are traders, doctors astrologers, &c., while the majority live by agriculture, distilling and sellings spirits, toddy-drawing, rope, sugar and mat making, weaving and other industries (Palpu 1).

Here toddy-drawing is considered as one among the many other professions of Ezhavas and Thiyyas. Like Palpu, Rajendran also considers Thiyyas as Ezhavas as one but his observation is also important in this context.

There was no particular occupation for the community as a whole; as in the case of barbers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths etc. However Ezhavas were considered, as having toddy tapping, as their traditional occupation ...coir spinning and weaving absorbed another section of the community, both men and women. Yet another

section occupied itself with cultivation. Some of the cultivators were rich peasant tenants. There were well to do Ezhavas, educated and enlightened. Among them were Sanskrit scholars, Ayurveda physicians and astrologers. 'kalaris' and gymnasiums were maintained by some Ezhava veterans (Rajendran 25-26).

Gough, a British anthropologist points out that little is known of the Thiyyas (Thiyyas) before the period of British rule. She mentions "as a "low" caste they tended to be ignored by contemporary writers and, being mostly non-literate, they left few records (405). However, she points out that Thiyyas were traditionally sharecropping tenants of gardens and rice fields owned by Nairs and Brahmins. Varma, also argues that though the majority of Thiyyas were/are agricultural laborers, very few of them owned land. Majority earn their living as tenants and as workers in the fields of Nair *janmis* (224). While Puthenkalam⁴¹ and Robin Jeffery also point out that Thiyyas were poor, landless and discriminated against.⁴² According to Chandri, though the majority Thiyya survived through physical labour, there were few Thiyya land owners and *pramanis* (elite) like Karayi Bappu and Karayi Kutti (127-137). It has to be noted that, traditionally there were also many Sankrit Pandits, *vaidyas* (doctors), and soldiers among Thiyyas. These accounts show that Thiyyas were traditionally peasants and they were engaged in various professions.

Here we see Ezhava's and Thiyya's traditional occupation has been considered as same although they were into various occupations for their livelihood. We also see how the

⁴¹ See Jeffery 2009, 49.

⁴² For details see Jeffery 2009, 50. Jeffery points out, in 19th century Malabar, the great land holders were Nambudiri Brahmins, Kshatriyas (although this category can be contested within the caste system in Kerala), and Nairs. Their tenants were Mappillas and Thiyyas and below them were Pulayas .

historians from the community refute the stereotyping of Ezhavas and Thiyyas as toddy tappers. However, we can assume that this stereotyping during the period of reform might have helped them imagine a homogenous identity and later on helped them come out of this stereotyping. This suggests their mobilization and progress through reformation. As discussed in the introduction, the mobilization of Nadar and Kapu communities whose traditional occupation has been considered as toddy tapping is also relevant in this context.

1.5. Ezhavas and Thiyyas: Differences in Social Position and Colonial Modernity

As discussed above, Ezhavas and Thiyyas social status in the caste hierarchy was parallel to one another. However, some historians argue that Thiyyas had a better social position than Ezhavas. According to the colonial ethnographer Edgar Thurston, Thiyyas and Ezhavas are different communities and Thiyyas are superior to Ezhavas (114). He points out that there was a custom in the country that a superior caste man pretends complete ignorance of the caste of lower caste man. His guess is that it might have happened in the case of Thiyyas too and the Thiyyas were forced to be written down as Ezhavas in the documents concerning land, in which the Zamorins, Brahmins or Nair grandee appears as landlord (*Castes and Tribes* 38).⁴³ Similar view has been expressed by Bhaskaranunni and C. Kesavan. According to Bhaskaranunni some Nambuthiris and administrative chiefs used the term 'Ezhavas' for both Ezhavas and Thiyyas in the land records (*Keralam* 114). Kesavan in his autobiography *Jeevithasamaram* mentions that it was an

⁴³ Differences in the customs of Ezhavas and Thiyyas are also pointed out by him. He cites some examples to prove the superiority of Thiyyas. For instance, while Thiyyas had to perform a custom called *mattu* which gave them certain power and privilege, Ezhavas were completely ignorant of such customs. See Thurston.

interesting historical fact that Thiyyas are described as only Ezhavas in the documents concerning land by *Zamutiri*⁴⁴ of *Kovilakam* and other *Janmis* (vol. 2 : 23).⁴⁵ Edgar Thurston, C. A. Innes and Bhaskaranunni pointed the superior position of Thiyyas with an example that though an Ezhava would eat rice cooked by a Thiyya, a Thiyya would not eat rice cooked by an Ezhava.⁴⁶ Varma also notes that conventional Thiyyas did not inter-dine with Ezhavas (225).

As noted by Thurston, Bhaskaranunni and Ravivarma, one would see that it was the Thiyyas who consider themselves as superior to Ezhavas. However, we cannot avoid the fact that there was a conscious effort from Zamorins, Namputhiris and Nairs to represent Thiyyas as Ezhavas. This points out the comparatively better status of Thiyyas.

There are also arguments that the difference between Thiyyas and Ezhavas were less compared to the difference between North Malabar and South Malabar Thiyyas. For instance while pointing out that Thiyyas considered themselves as superior to Ezhavas, Varma notes that there is not much of a difference among them compared to the difference between northern Malayalam⁴⁷ and southern Malayalam Thiyyas (225). Similarly, Innes writes, “The Tiyans consider themselves superior to the Izhuvans, and will not eat rice cooked by them; there are considerable differences between the dress and customs of the two communities, but more than hardly between those of the North and South Malabar Tiyans (125).” Marriage between North Malabar Thiyyas and South

⁴⁴ Zamutiri or Zamorin is a hereditary royal title used by Hindu rulers of the medieval kingdom of Calicut on Malabar coast. For details see, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zamorin_of_Calicut

⁴⁵ Feudal landlords in Kerala were known as Janmis.

⁴⁶ See Thurston 38; Bhaskaranunni 2005, 114; Innes 125.

⁴⁷ Here Malayalam refers to Malabar.

Malabar Thiyya Women were not in practice (Bhaskaranunni 123).⁴⁸ As pointed out by Bhaskaranunni the possible reason is the differences in the law of succession among them. These instances suggest that there were many differences among Thiyyas of North Malabar and South Malabar in terms of customs. However, it should also be noted that the inter-dining or inter-marriages was not common among Thiyyas of Malabar and Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor. We will deal with it in more detail in the fourth chapter.

The mobility of Thiyyas of North Malabar during the colonial time needs to be addressed here. We see a major shift in the social status of Thiyyas of North Malabar compared to the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor. This can lead to the argument that colonial modernity was in favour of lower castes like Thiyyas. An analysis of the condition of the Thiyyas under native rulers as well as colonialists would substantiate this argument. We would analyse pre-colonial and colonial situation of Thiyyas in order to understand how and why Thiyyas of North Malabar were in a better position compared to the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor.

It is interesting to note that like Brahmins and Nairs, caste did not serve as an obstacle for Thiyyas to get English Education (Kurup *English* 149). Thiyyas were among the first to join the educational institutions founded by Basel Missionaries and a significant minority got government jobs under colonial administration and became tehsildars, lawyers, pleaders, sub-judges and deputy collectors. It is said that the first one who got into the British Civil Service in Malabar was Churayi Kanaran, a Thiyya (Chandri 130). It is also been argued that Thiyyas alone were moving towards attaining, a higher status,

⁴⁸ Bhaskaranunni also points out that marriage among Ezhavas and Thiyyas as well as was not in practice.

educationally, socially, economically and absorbing a modern milieu of culture due to the advent of Basel missionaries who were the harbingers of change in Malabar” (Kunjappa “Heritage”) Varma writes:

Towards the end of 18th century many Thiyyas in this area were reaching a better position as traders and land owners. They have also favored East India Company in many ways. Still this better status is kept by Thiyyas especially by the Thiyyas of Northern Malayalam. Northern Malayalam Thiyyas are one among the most modern (parishkarikal) groups in India. Among them many occupied government jobs and many are advocates (Malabar Gazetteer)

Thiyyas got more opportunities under colonial rule than under native rule. They were denied admission in Zamorin’s college, Calicut [established in 1879] and Brennen College, Tellicherry [established in 1891] till as late as 1918 (Menon *Caste Nationalism* 64).⁴⁹ In an article which was written in *Vivekodayam* at the time of introducing B. A. course in Samoothiri Collge, Calicut, it has been stated that while Malabar was ruled by ‘progressive’ native ruler like Manavikraman, Thiyyas and other lower-castes did not get admission into colleges (Vivekodayam 212). The author wonders what would have happened if Malabar had not come under the British rule. Their ‘loyalty’ towards British points out their growth under British rule. A Thiyya social reformer, P. Raman in his presiding note at the tenth meeting of S. N. D. P which was held at Calicut states:⁵⁰

⁴⁹ It should be noted that almost all parts of Malabar except Wynad came under the rule of British East Indian company with the Treaty of Seringanad Patam (signed on 19 march 1792).

⁵⁰ *Vivekodayam* 10.1 & 2.n.d. 14.

We enjoy the blessings of peace and prosperity under the sympathetic British government as citizens of the great British Empire. Our loyalty and devotion to the throne must find enthusiastic expression at all our public gatherings (14).

We have been and are being treated very sympathetically and for such advancement as we have made we are indebted to British government. I affirm very enthusiastically and in all sincerity say that the Thiyyas in Malabar would never had attained their present position but for the benevolent sympathy of the British government and the sympathy and patronage of the district officers. We are grateful to them (24).⁵¹

As Dilip Menon rightly points out, the new Thiyya elite (although a small minority) had born out of the colonial and missionary presence in North Malabar (*Caste, Nationalism* 64). They derived their positions from education, employment as lawyers and civil servants, involvement with trade and commerce, and the setting up of factories (5).

We see that Ezhavas did not have the same privileges in Thiruvithamkoor. As we have seen during the colonial time, the educational status of North Malabar Thiyyas were much better than the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi (Chandri 127). Varma shares the same opinion. According to him, North Thiyyas had better status and education compared to South Ezhavas. (Varma 225). In an article “Kochiyile Thiyyar” [Thiyyas of Kochi], it is argued that as far as the education is concerned, Thiyyas of Cochin were in a lower position compared to the Thiyyas of British Malabar (Mitavadi

⁵¹ *Vivekodayam* 10.1 & 2, 25.

1914). As stated in the Malayalee Memorial, while Ezhavas were denied even the lowest government jobs, the Thiyyas whom they call as their counterparts occupy the higher jobs in the Malabar. Puthenkalam also points out that that caste was no bar for employment in British Malabar but it was not so in Thiruvithamkoor (30). It was only in 1904 that the primary education of backward classes was declared to be free and schools were opened to Ezhava and other backward communities in Thiruvithamkoor.

This however is not to suggest that North Malabar Thiyyas did not have to struggle to get access in educational institutions under British rule. The debate regarding the admission of Thiyyas into Zamorin's college proves it. An anonymous writer's letter to the editor of *Madras Mail* titled "Zamorin's College and Thiyyas" which appeared in Mitavadi refers to the letter written by Srinu in *Madras Mail* news paper. The letter enquires whether Tiyas and others have the right to enter the Zamorin's college or not. It discusses the benefits of alien rule and evils of Home Rule for Thiyyas as well as acknowledges the insult felt by the Thiyya boys while they were excluded from Zamorin's college. The demography of Thiyyas and Ezhavas are being questioned here. The writer argues that it will not be wise on the part of the Government to insist on the admission of students without distinction of caste, creed or colour in all aided schools and colleges and Zamorin's college is not the only institution whose doors are not open to all castes and creeds. The writer argues:

The Tiyas have as much educational facility at Calicut as their brethren of the higher castes. Then why quarrel with them over the regulations of the Zamorin's college? What the Tiyas should do is to establish a college of their own...Tiyas

with the support of the government should open a Tiya college, under Tiya management, with a Tiya staff, for the education of Tiyas. Boys of the higher castes need not be excluded from such a college, provided they are prepared to pay fees on a higher scale than that fixed for their polluting brethren of the lower caste (*Mitavadi* 44-45).

This account suggests the objection of an upper caste to open up educational institutions of the upper-castes to the “polluting” lower castes. It has also been argued that the educational institutions of lower castes should be open for upper castes if they are willing pay higher fee which in turn would assert their privileged status. The upper castes in Thiruvithamkoor also pretested against the admission of Ezhavas in their schools. For instance, Kesavan writes:

Ezhava children didn't get admission in government school. Diwan Sankarasubbayyar has decided to grant money to build school only for Ezhavas if they want to study. Kesavan criticizes this attempt one to avoid lower castes in government schools. but only two Ezhava primary schools have been founded, one in Kollam Paravur and one in Mayyannadu (vol. 1: 24).

However, these instance points out the politics behind the formation of schools only for lower castes. It is also obvious that the educational and economic progress of a few Thiyyas did not alter their lower position within caste hierarchy. Thiyyas remained and remain ‘backward caste’ compared to the Nairs and Namputiris. Jeffery writes:

Thiyyas and Iravas collectively were the largest social category in Kerala, amounting to 25 to 30 percent of the population, and among them a small middle class was developing. ‘Educated and cultured.’ E. M. S. Namboodiripad wrote, ‘receiving

salaried and pensions, they were nevertheless untouchables....this was naturally resented. And this resentment turned out a tremendous force in the history of Kerala (*Matriliny* 82).

As the quote suggests, Thiyyas and Ezhavas were the majority “untouchables” in Kerala. Their resentment towards their lower status even while they were educated and cultured must have led them to struggle together for a better status.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have discussed the importance of historical accounts in the formation of a larger communitarian identity for all castes under the umbrella name of Ezhavas. As the first sub-section “Defining the Terms ‘Thiyya’ and ‘Ezhava’: A Discussion” argues that the historians have imagined a homogeneous community for Ezhavas and Thiyyas through the theory of migration and the etymological origin of the terms, which have been contested mainly by Thiyya historians as well as reformers. Going through census reports, biographies and autobiographies of Thiyya and Ezhava social reformers, accounts of colonial ethnographers and some alternate histories, the second sub-section titled “Sub-Castes and ‘Other’ Castes” points out that Ezhavas and Thiyyas are a community made up of different caste groups, much like the Nair community which was formed by bringing together several sub-castes and other castes. Similarly, by looking at separate *illam*⁵² settlement and the *panchayath* system of Thiyyas of North Malabar and Ezhavas of South Thiruvithamkoor, the third sub-section titled “Separate Identity: The *Illam* and Panchayat Settlement of Thiyyas and Ezhavas” points out the separate

⁵² *Illam* means household.

community identity of Thiyyas and Ezhavas. The fourth sub-section titled “Majority Lower Castes: Social Status and Traditional Occupations” while deconstructing the notion of a particular occupation for a particular caste group argues that Thiyyas and Ezhavas were in fact the lower castes who shared a similar position in the caste hierarchy in their respective regions but were engaged in different professions. This in turn would critique the caste historians’ role in representing both communities as toddy tappers and thereby assuming Thiyyas and Ezhavas as the same community. The fifth sub-section “Ezhavas and North Malabar Thiyyas: Differences in Social Position and Colonial Modernity” argues that though Thiyyas’ and Ezhavas’ social status in the caste hierarchy was parallel to one another, North Malabar Thiyyas had a better social position particularly because it was under the rule of British. However, it can also be assumed that North Malabar Thiyyas were in a better position pre-colonial period as well.

In contemporary Kerala, we see that the Thiyyas of Malabar are also part of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S. N. D. P. Yogam) which is stronger in the southern part of Kerala. Recently, Sree Narayana Dharmavedi has been formed where majority Thiyyas are in the leadership and it has been stated that it is not an organization rather only a gathering of people with good thinking and to do something good for S. N. D. P. Yogam and S. N. Trust.⁵³ However, it can be assumed that the Thiyyas and Ezhavas who are part of S. N. D. P. consider themselves as belonging to same community. Otherwise Ezhavas’ and Thiyyas’ generally claims that they are superior to each other. As discussed in the introduction, we find many Thiyyas who show their

⁵³ <http://sndvkerala.blogspot.in/2010/01/why-sree-narayana-dharmavedi.html>.

resentment for being included in the entity called “Ezhavas.” Now two major questions arise. (1) Why are Thiyyas known as Ezhavas despite their superior position? (2) Why are Ezhavas not known as Thiyyas ? It can be assumed that the Ezhava Social Reform Movement and especially S. N. D. P. has played a major role in marginalizing the identity of Thiyyas and projecting the identity of Ezhavas. Secondly, Thiyyas are generally unaware of their community history and only those Thiyyas who are part of S. N. D. P. feel that they belong to the same community. However, we cannot avoid the fact that such community formation has brought in so many changes and progress in both communities. Such political formation was indeed necessary for the mobilization of these two communities. The next chapter would examine the historical circumstances which facilitated the formation of the political caste community identity called Ezhavas.

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CHAPTER II

Thiyyas, Ezhavas and “Others”: The Politics of Being One

This chapter attempts to examine how the political category Ezhava was formed by subsuming the identity of Thiyyas. The alternate usage of the term ‘Thiyya’ and ‘Ezhava’ as interchangeable for both these different communities seems to have begun during the period of Thiyya and Ezhava social reform movement (during late 19th and early 20th century). In the first chapter, we have seen how a homogeneous Ezhava community was constructed through accounts of history and ethnography and also how despite the existence of different sub-castes, Ezhavas and Thiyyas were imagined as one. It was also discussed that the imagined similarities among Thiyyas and Ezhavas, who constitute the majority lower castes in Kerala, in terms of their sharing similar social status and engaging in traditional occupations, might have helped them to have a sense of belonging to each other, which in turn made the imagination of a single community possible. In this chapter, we look at the political process through which the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor articulated a larger community identity by striking an alliance with the Thiyyas of Malabar and vice versa. While critiquing the construction of Ezhava/Thiyya identity as homogenous, we would also examine the politics behind this imagination.

The first chapter focused more upon the differences between Ezhavas and Thiyyas, whereas this chapter focuses more on the perceived/imagined similarities between them. The following are some of the questions I will address in this chapter: What are the other social movements in Kerala which helped shape the communitarian tendencies among

Ezhavas and Thiyyas? How did Thiyyas and Ezhavas get subsumed into a single category? How did Ezhavas/Thiyyas envisage themselves as a single community? In other words, what are the processes that resulted in the political and imaginative unification of the Thiyya and Ezhava communities? What were the alternative concepts of community as well as ideologies current in the Ezhavas' and Thiyyas' social reform movements that got undermined during the process of "unification" of these two communities?

2. 1. The Formation of Caste Community Identities in Kerala

Specific social and political contexts have necessitated the formation of different caste communities in Kerala.¹ In the second section of the first chapter, we have already discussed the sub-castes of Thiyyas and Ezhavas. In this section we would examine the process of the unification/fusion of sub-castes into a single community identity and the political scenario which necessitated such a formation in Kerala. when we look at the history of the imagination of caste communities in Kerala, we need to begin with the first document of political agitation of Thiruvithamkoor, *The Malayalee Memorial* (1891) which was submitted to the Maharaja of Thiruvithamkoor signed by 10,028 people belonging to different communities such as Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians, and Muslims.² They demanded equal share in the administration and criticized the privileges and positions enjoyed by Tamil Brahmins in the government services. Almost two decades

¹ The rigid caste system prevalent in Kerala, like elsewhere in India, continued to preserve the hegemony of "upper" castes in the colonial times. Only the "upper" castes had access to institutions such as schools, government offices, temples, public roads, and so on. "Lower" castes had to follow certain rules, behavioral pattern and dress codes when they wanted to appear in the public sphere. Such practices were institutionalized and were named as "social customs" by the "upper" castes and the Hindu casteist native rulers. However during the colonial times, as agents of "modernization," the social reformers, missionaries and colonial rulers intervened and made some modification in such "social customs."

² See <http://www.kerala.gov.in/history&culture/emergence.html>

later, we find a similar movement and the formation of two identities called Brahmin and Non-Brahmin in Tamil Nadu. A controversial document called 'Non-Brahmin Manifesto' in 1916 sharply criticized the dominance, power, and privileges of the "minority" Brahmin in all spheres of Madras Presidency (Pandian 1). Pandian points out that it was the colonial context which facilitated the formation of these two powerful categories, Non-Brahmin and Brahmin.³ Geeta and Rajadurai see Non-Brahmin as a consciously constructed political category, whose references were shifting and various (xv). They write:

Sociologically speaking 'non-brahmin' is a genus that includes all castes, high or low in the varna-jati complex, which defer to the Brahmin in sacral matters. Politically, though, a non-brahmin was identifiable, not only by the fact of his or her birth, but also by his and her interest in and commitment to a politics that valued equality, mutuality and self-respect (xv).

Geeta and Rajadurai attempt to map the various trajectories of Non-Brahmin and refute the argument that Non-Brahmins were envious of Brahmins and goaded by the British to assert their rights. However, unlike this clear division of Brahmin and Non-Brahmin identities, different political caste communities were formed in Kerala and the Malayalee Memorial provided a model as well as a platform for the emergence of such caste community identities in Kerala.

The Nair community was formed by the unification of the sub-castes and through the inclusion of 'other' castes. Now the question is who is considered as a Nair and how a

³ T. Dharmarajan's critique on M. S. S. Pandian's treatment of the term Non-Brahmin as a fixed and normalized identity is important. For details see <http://tdharmarajan.blogspot.in/2010/11/rebels-geneology-review-on-mss-pandians.html>.

Nair community has been envisaged. There are differences in opinion about the meaning of the term 'Nair.' According to Zerilli, the term 'Nair' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Nayaka' which means 'leader' (258). Whereas Ananthan argues that the term 'Nair' means Sevakan i.e., one who work for or serves (80-82).⁴ Scholars have different opinions on how many sub-castes constituted the Nair community identity. As per the census report of 1901 there were as many as 116 subdivisions among Nairs. Aiyappan points out that "speaking about the Nayars, it should be remembered that they are not a caste, but a cluster of castes. We know very little about the 131 castes included in the cluster, their ranking and inter-relations etc. in the various regions (*Marriage* ii)." Whereas as N. R. Krishnan argues, 64 sub-castes which include *Kusavan* (Potterman), *Veluthedan* (Washerman), and *Amaalanmar* (Palanquin bearers) among others constitute the Nair community (49). Aiyappan also states that there were 64 sub-castes among Nairs. He writes:

In the traditional classification of castes of Kerala, the Iravas [Ezhavas] were included among the polluting castes, and described as *avarnas* (i.e., outside the four classes Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra). According to this classification, the Nayars were considered as Sudras by the Brahmins, though among the 64 traditional sub-castes of the Nayar caste there were soldiers, potters, washer men, oil-mongers, palanquin-bearers, stone masons, farmers and large numbers of those who worked as domestic servants in Brahmin households (*Social Revolution* 115).

As discussed in the beginning of this section, the Nairs recorded as having 116 sub-castes in 1901 returned themselves only under three caste names in 1931. Rather than the

⁴ Bhaskaranunni criticizes the argument that Nairs are Sudras who belong to the *Chathurvarnya* system of Aryas. According to him, the meaning of the word *Sudra* is servitude and he assumes that Nairs wanted to upgrade their status by reclaiming their "previous community" name. For details see Bhaskaranunni.

number of sub-castes, we would focus upon the process of the formation of the political caste community identity of Nairs (Tampi 131). Here we are concerned about the question whether the term 'Nair' is a caste name or does it refer to a political caste community identity. As already pointed out, it is evident that the political caste community identity of Nairs was formed by the unification of the sub-castes and through the inclusion of "other" castes. Now let us look at the political process through which a community identity was formed.

It is argued that *Kerala Nair Samajam*, an organization of Malayalee Sudras, on its 4th convention in 1910 decided to replace their caste names with the single term 'Nair' by discarding the caste differences among them with a proclamation that caste differences among Nairs are meaningless and retaining them is not good for the community's progress (Kochu 501). Sub-caste difference has been considered a hindrance for the progress of community and the *Samajam* loads the term 'Nair' with a newly reclaimed dignity for community identity instead of the term Malayalee Sudra. It has also been argued that Nair community was inclusive of many lower castes such as the Thiyyas. For instance, Ananthan argues that Nairs are not a particular community and that they are formed by deriving out of the *avarnas* like Thiyyas. He has also mentioned about the resolution passed in the *Kerala Nair Samajam* which states, "Nair *Samajam* will accept whoever wants to join as Nair." It was also stated that it is not a rare incident and occasionally many have become Nairs (95).

We see similar efforts from Ezhavas to bring in all other communities into *Ezhavajathi* (Ezhava caste). For instance such a resolution was passed in the S. N. D. P.⁵ meeting at Perinadu in the year 1922. It was decided to accept other communities who want to join the *Ezhavajathi*. It was distinct from the identity assertion of Nair which often tend to equalize the Malayalee identity vis-à-vis Nair identity. For instance, it was reported that in a Nair *Sammelanam* (meeting), a resolution was passed to the effect that all who speak Malayalam and follow “Malayalee Customs” should be included in the Nair Caste (Balakrishnan 91-92). Since there were many castes and each caste followed different customs, the idea of a homogeneous custom of Malayalees would be a utopian concept. The formation of two societies among Nairs namely Malayalee Social Union (MSU) and the Malayalee Sabha (MS) to discuss the issue concerning Nairs points out who was envisaged as a Malayalee. So it can be assumed that the Malayalee Memorial represented mainly the interests of the Nairs though it subsumed other categories into its fold.

Most importantly, it was Malayalee Memorial which projected a new identity for the Malayalee which was restricted, ironically, to the Nair community alone. Sreekumar (2010) pointed out that the Nair-dominated Malayalee Memorial provided job opportunities for “Malayalees,” which when practiced, became job opportunities only for the Nairs. When we critically analyze the circumstances in which the Memorial has been materialized, it becomes clear that from the inception itself, it was a memorial of Nairs.

⁵ In early 20th century Kerala many organizations were formed in each community as part of various social reform movements. In the case of Ezhavas, one of the major organizations was S. N. D. P. (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham) which played an important role in their mobilization. It was formed in 1903 under the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru with Kumaran Asan, the famous poet, as its General Secretary. Other organizations such as the Nair Service Society (1914), *Yogakshemasabha*, and *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham* (1910) were formed for the Nairs, Namboodiris and Pulayases respectively.

As noted by Tharakan, in the 18th century, a number of Nair families that traditionally held important positions in the Thiruvithamkoor government were removed from their positions. Their resentment against the British,⁶ Tamil Brahmins and Syrian Christians⁷ generated a Nair consciousness among them and led to the conception of the Malayalee Memorial which strategically included lower castes like Ezhavas and ultimately gained the intended result (89-91).

Nevertheless, one can argue that in many ways it was the Malayalee Memorial (1891) which necessitated the Ezhava identity assertion as distinct from the Malayalee identity which was used by Nairs as a synonym for Nair identity. However, this movement initiated the formation of a new political caste community identity called Ezhavas. This would help us explain the process by which Thiyyas were considered as Ezhavas or rather how Thiyya identity got subsumed into the larger political community identity of Ezhavas.

The Malayalee Memorial indeed speaks about the pitiable condition of the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor. The memorial pointed out that while Ezhavas were denied even the lowest government jobs, the Thiyyas whom they call as their counterparts occupy higher jobs in the Malabar State due to the absence of any discrimination there.⁸ But the

⁶ For example, on behalf of the State administration, Colonel Munro took over several Nair temples along with their properties. This was a major setback for Nair pre-eminence in society because the Nairs were an integral part of these institutions. Secondly, such an action was a clear negation of the sense of autonomy that was still retained in Thiruvithamcore. Missionary efforts to convert the lower castes also led to the formation of Nair consciousness and Nair resentment towards British. For details see Michael Tharakan.

⁷ Syrian Christians' effective claim for government jobs on the basis of educational qualifications. Nairs perceived themselves differently from the Syrian Christians all over Thiruvithamkoor. For details see Tharakan.

⁸ <http://www.kerala.gov.in/ncr/ncr02.pdf>.

government's reply dated 21st April 1891 was not in favour of Ezhavas. It stated that since the Ezhavas were generally uneducated, it was better for them to pursue their traditionally assigned occupations such as cultivation, coir making and toddy tapping than try to get education.⁹ Since Malayalee Memorial denied justice for Ezhavas, under the leadership of Palpu, an Ezhava Memorial (1896) was submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore, signed by 13,176 Ezhava community members in order to attain the civic rights and access to jobs and facilities for the lower castes.¹⁰ As we see in the Malayalee Memorial, Thiyyas have been considered counterparts of Ezhavas. They became the major reference point for the political bargaining of Ezhavas. The next section would look at the process through which Thiyyas were included into the entity called Ezhavas. The homogenization process of Ezhavas could be seen as a response to the Nair dominance and the Nair community formation, which the Ezhavas might have perceived as a possible threat. Another way to look at this is to see it as a negotiation with colonial modernity. The act of homogenizing the community can be seen as a mechanism to mediate the differences between the prominent lower caste communities. This process has to a large extent contributed to the modernization of these communities during the colonial time.

⁹ "Dr Padmanabhan Palpu." <http://guruforum.webs.com/drpalpu.htm>.

¹⁰ Following Ezhava Memorial, other movements of *Avarnas* and minorities also raised similar agenda. The Agitation for Civic Rights (*Poura Samatvavada Prakshobhanam*, 1919) demanded posts in the land revenue departments for the *avarnas* of the Hindu community and for Muslims and Christians. The Abstention Agitation (*Nivartana Prakshobhanam*, 1932) demanded representation in the state legislature for Ezhavas and the Muslim and Christian communities. On the one hand these movements prove the government's injustice and indifference towards the lower castes and minorities, on the other, it marks the beginning of lower caste people's struggles against the discrimination they faced in the public sphere of Kerala.

2.2. Terming the Thiyya as Ezhava/ Ezhava as Thiyya: Dr. Palpu and Community Histories

During the late 19th and early 20th century, we see the reference to Ezhavas as the *Sahodarangal* or “brothers” of Thiyyas. In *Vivekodayam* (1904), the first magazine published for the progress of the Ezhava community, the writers mostly refer to Ezhavas as the *Sahodarangal* or “brothers” of Thiyyas.¹¹ Such “brotherhood” discourses on community stirred the ideas which led to the organization and homogenization of Thiyyas and Ezhavas. This is different from the brotherhood movement led by *Sahodaran*¹² Ayyappan, which propagated the idea of “No Caste, No Religion, and No God for Man.” Most importantly, Palpu’s assertion of brotherhood between Ezhava and Thiyya communities has helped to imagine a homogeneous identity for both communities. The prominent Ezhava social reformer T. K. Madhavan considers Palpu as the one who structured Ezhavas and Thiyyas into one community (*Palpu* 21). In this section we will critically examine the Ezhava Memorial Discourse, the community histories, and also discuss the central role. Palpu played in all the above discourses which led to the unification of Thiyya and Ezhava communities.

In the endorsement to the Memorial dated 21st April 1891, the Thiruvithamkoor Government writes as follows:

In regard to the Tiers [Thiyyas] who are imported into the Memorial, the petitioners cannot be unaware that in this country as a body, they are uneducated, preferring

¹¹ *Vivekodayam* began as a bi-monthly in the year 1904 from Trivandrum, with Kumaranasan as its editor. It was published as a quarterly for some time and then as monthly. The journal was stopped for a long time and then restarted in the year 1966 with Kesavan Vaidyar as its editor.

¹² Sahodaran means brother.

their own occupations of agriculture, coir-making and toddy drawing, to going in for such education as would fit them for the public service. There are only two of that class out of a population of 3,87,176 that have graduated in the University and very few indeed, if any, who are seeking a high education in the local college. Their social position, too, is such that they can hardly be eligible for public offices where a certain amount of respect is expected to be commanded in a State where Hindus are much more conservative and superstitious than their brethren in Malabar (Palpu 6–7).

In the Malayalee Memorial (1891), Ezhavas were referred to as Thiyyas (Tiya), and in their endorsement to the Memorial, the Travancore Government also referred to them as ‘Tiers’ who are imported into the Memorial, though the inclusion seems to be to only serve the larger purpose of forming a united Hindu community to resist the British, the Syrian Christians and the Tamil Brahmins. It is important to note that both the Memorial and the government’s reply do not make any differentiation between Ezhavas and Thiyyas and use the term “Tiyas of Travancore,” which could imply that both the Thiyyas of Malabar and the Ezhavas of Travancore could be considered as a single group, and the Thiyyas from Malabar who are co-opted into the Malayalee Memorial’s agenda are easily referred to as Tiyas of Travancore. The individual identities and specificities of the two communities who are from two different parts of Kerala are not acknowledged. The document also says that the Hindus in Travancore who are more conservative than their brethren in Malabar may not accept the Thiyyas (here they refer Ezhavas) in positions of power, and that they better confine themselves to their traditional occupations of “agriculture, coir-making and toddy drawing.” What is to be noted here is

the traditional occupations that the Ezhavas are asked to continue have not been associated with the Thiyya communities; rather these were the occupations of the Ezhavas. While many of the Thiyyas had a different livelihood or occupational trajectory when compared to the Ezhavas, the official discourse, as the Malayalee Memorial and the government's response suggest, made a conscious or unconscious attribution of homogeneity to the Ezhavas of Travancore and the Thiyyas of Malabar.

Since the Malayalee Memorial was hardly of any help to the Ezhavas, Palpu articulated the rights of Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor in the petitions sent to the Diwan of Thiruvithamkoor, and also in many other publications (T. K. Madhavan). With his efforts an Ezhava Memorial (1896) was submitted to the Maharaja of Thiruvithamkoor, signed by 13,176 Ezhava community members in order to attain admission into government schools and government service (Damodaran ix). Palpu all the while maintained that Thiyyas were brothers of Ezhavas and saw no reason to differentiate the two communities. For him, they were already one. Let us examine his publication titled, *The Treatment of Tiyas of Travancore* in a little detail.

Following the Ezhava Memorial, in order to strengthen the campaign of the Ezhavas, Palpu published a book titled *Treatment of Tiyas in Travancore* in 1896. This book contains petitions by Ezhavas and endorsements of Thiruvithamkoor government regarding their admission into government schools and government service. It also includes an individual petition submitted to Diwan Sankara Subbaiyyer by Palpu, Ezhava Memorial, and also the discourse around Ezhava Memorial that had appeared in the

major newspapers. It is said that during the same time this book was translated into Malayalam by C. V. Kunjuraman, P. M. Raman and T. C. Raman and was published as *Thiruvithamkotte Ezhavar* (Damodaran xii). This was later revised and republished in July, 1988 by N. K. Damodaran (1988). Before going into the details of the Malayalam translation, we will critically look into the original text, *The Treatment of Tiyas of Travancore* in a chronological fashion.

From the beginning itself Palpu gives more importance to the term ‘Thiyya’ (he writes it as Tiya) than Ezhavas (Elavas in his usage). He begins the book by stating that “The Tiyas or Elavas of Travancore number nearly half a million out of a total population of two and a half millions and are, in numerical importance, the second community in the State.” In order to point out Thiruvithamkoor government’s reluctance to admit Ezhavas freely into state schools and employ them in the service of the State, he quotes some petitions of Ezhavas and the endorsement of the government rejecting such demands. However, the point is that Palpu uses the term ‘Tiya’ when he refers to the petition of the Ezhavas of Kayamkulam regarding their admission into the English school, whereas in the endorsement, the government mentions the term Ezhavas (Elavers) instead of Thiyya (1). Although Palpu represents Ezhavas as Thiyyas, we see that the government acknowledges the category called Ezhavas and does not confuse them with the Thiyyas.

Later he quotes some instances to prove Thiruvithamkoor government’s discriminative attitude toward Ezhavas who attempted to enter to the service of the State. He addresses them as members of the Thiyya community/Thiyya graduates/Thiyya students rather than

as Ezhava.¹³ We see a letter which appeared in the *Madras Mail* on 19th February 1891 by a 'Travancore Tiya.' It is stated that it is "written by one whose identity is so thinly veiled that it may be said not to bear the impress of a pseudonymous (8)." From the biographical details given in the petition it is evident that the writer of this article was Palpu himself. He writes:

Sir, I am a native of Travancore, and a member of the 'Tiya Community' which was declared to be non-existent by a 'Hindu Liberal' in your issue of the 27th January. As stated in the Travancore Memorial, we are 387,17 in number, forming 16.12 per cent of the total population of the State, and 22.05 per cent of the Hindu population, yet there is not a single representative of the Tiya community holding any Government appointment on Rs. 5 a month or upward in the State, though intelligent and educated men are not wanting among them; whereas, several of their

¹³ The first instance: "During the administration of Sir. T. Madhava Rao as Dewan, the Travancore Government published in their *Gazette* that an examination which would entitle the successful candidate to practice before the Travancore courts would be held in Trivandrum and applicants were invited for the purpose. A member of the Tiya community put in his application and paid his fee but he was refused admission as he as a "low-caste" and his application fee remains to this day unrefunded."

The second instance is about Velu, the first graduate in Thiruvithamkoor. Dr. Palpu writes: "The first Tiya graduate in Travancore applied several times to the Travancore Government for employment but with no success." As per the endorsement the petitioner is informed that there is no opening now in the Travancore State. Palpu writes that frustrated by all his attempts to obtain employment in his own country Velu succeeded in entering the British service and got employed as settlement officer in South Canara.

The third instance is about another member in the Tiya community who wished to join the Medical Service in Travancore but met with a similar rebuff. He writes: "Application for a preliminary examination for the selection of 10 matriculates as medical pupils were invited by the Travancore Government in 1884. A Tiya student who applied for the preliminary examination came off second among the successful candidates. But as he was a Tiya, he was rejected on the plea of over-age while all the other successful candidates were entertained. He then left Travancore, joined the Medical College in Madras, passed the L. M. & S. Examination and again applied for employment in Travancore. He was never vouchsafed a reply though several men who had passed the Apothecary's Examination have been entertained in the Travancore service. He is now employed as an Assistant Surgeon in Mysore." Apparently these are the experiences of Dr. Palpu's father Thachakkuti Palpu, his brother P. Velu or P. Velayudhan and his own. For details see N. K. Damodaran, Madhavan.

castemen in Malabar have been advanced to some of the highest offices of the Uncovenanted Civil Service open to natives of India (9).

Here we see Palpu addressing himself as a member of the Thiyya community which was declared as non-existent by a 'Hindu Liberal'. We will come to this issue later. However here Palpu asserts his identity as a Thiyya of Thiruvithamkoor and largely talks about the Thiyya community in Thiruvithamkoor. Thiyyas of Malabar are referred as their castemen in Malabar.

It should also be noted that in the Memorial submitted to Diwan of Thiruvithamkoor in 1895, Palpu addressed himself as a member of Thiyya community in Thiruvithamkoor. He mentions that "The Tiyas (Thiyyas), or Elavas (Ezhavas) of Travancore, nearly half million, and form the second community in the state in the point of numerical importance" (12-13). He states that the conditions of Thiyyas (Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor) will improve only if the Government adopts a liberal and enlightened policy in their treatment of Thiyyas. For this he makes it a point that Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor should get all opportunities like their 'brethren' Thiyyas of Malabar. Palpu writes:

The condition, of their brethren of Malabar in this respect is exactly the reverse of their own in Travancore. The Tiyas of British Malabar under an alien and Christian Government are allowed abundant opportunities of improving their condition like any other section of the native community. There is no place in British Indian, open to a native, to which Tiyas cannot aspire. In fact a proportionately large number of the higher appointments in British Malabar are occupied by Tiyas. In other parts of

the Tiyas of Travancore in their own native land and under the Government of their own Maharajah, is nothing but deplorable (14).

He also argues Thiyyas (Ezhavas) of Thiruvithamkoor government should show the same amount of consideration that will be shown to them if they become converts. He writes:

It will be enough if the government confers on duly qualified members at least such of the appointment as they are likely to get if they become converts. This, I trust, is not too much to expect for a Hindu government (23).

There were two major demands. While the first one demanded all the government schools to be thrown open to them and second, immediate consideration of Thiyyas in government services.

However, having received no reply, Palpu submitted a reminder dated on 2nd 1895 (24). Here also we see only the term 'Tiya'. He addressed the memorial dated 13th May 1895 which deals with the condition of the Thiyyas in Travancore. He says that the reminder is to take step without delay to improve the condition of the Thiyyas. Again on 8th November 1895 he addressed a letter to Dewan (24–26). But in this letter we see the alternate use of the terms 'Ezhavas' (he uses the term Elava) and 'Thiyyas' (he uses the term Tiya). Palpu writes:

Adverting to my memorial dated the 13th May 1895, I beg to submit for your kind perusal a letter with enclosures from one Madhavan Narayanan of Kadaikavoor, in the Syranikeel Taluk, about the dismissal from the English School at Attangal of his younger brother merely on the score of his being an Elava.

With reference to the advancement of the Tiyas, it is painful to notice that the mere existence of opposition in some quarters, however unjust, is considered sufficient ground to deny the Elavas the means of their elevation, even though such denial be opposed to the expressed policy of Government (25).

The school in question is the only one that denies admission to Elava children. A great many others throughout the state are likewise closed to them. ...but it is difficult to understand how closing schools against Tiya children will tend to lessen existing prejudices or to spread education (25–26).

In the first quote he used the term ‘Elava’ (Ezhava) when he refer to an incident where an Ezhava boy was dismissed from Syranikeel Taluk. In the second quote he uses both terms to make a comparison between Thiyyas and Ezhavas. And in the third quote when he states a real situation he used the term ‘Elavas’ which in turn becomes ‘Tiya’ in his interpretation.

Since Dewan did not reply to these memorials and letters, Palpu went to Trivandrum in February 1896 and had an interview with Dewan. In the description of the interview we can see only the usage of the term ‘Thiyya’ (27-28). The Dewan’s reply seemed promising, as Palpu pointed out. But subsequently, several applications were made by Thiyya graduate and others for employment met with no success whatever (28). Later, on 31st July 1896, Palpu wrote a letter to Dewan in which he pointed out Dewan’s sympathetic attitude in the interview and its lack of apparent influence on the heads of the departments. However, here he asserts the rights of Ezhava community. We can see only the term ‘Elava’. But in the memorial in September 1896, submitted to the Maharajah

signed by 13000 people, which is later known as the Ezhava Memorial (in the book it is not named so) we see only the term 'Tiyas' (Thiyyas). Memorial begins thus:

We undersigned Tiya subjects of Your Highness most humbly beg to approach your gracious highness with this memorial and pray that our representation may be considered with due sympathy.... our community forms a fifth of the population of Travancore. It has always been noted for its steady loyalty to the State. In the past, during the times of war, the Tiyas have laid down their lives in the cause of their sovereigns (30).

And in Dewan's reply to this memorial which seems promising, he addresses them only as Memorialists and Elavas. In this context we should also look into the Malayalam translation and other publications which mention Ezhava Memorial.

As already noted the Malayalam translation of this book was revised and republished in July, 1988 by Damodaran. Instead of 'Thiyyas of Thiruvithamkoor', the book is titled as 'Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor' (*Thiruvithamkotte Ezhavar*). The author states that he writes this book to cover the unavailability of the book which can be considered as an invaluable document of the social history of Kerala. He claims that he has made some modification in the translation since he was dissatisfied with the earlier translation. The book begins like this:

The total population of Thiruvithamkoor constitutes 25 lakhs. In this 5 lakhs constitute Ezhavas or Thiyyas. If we look at the numerical strength they are the second largest caste here (1).

The Tiyas or Elavas of Travancore number nearly half a million out of a total population of two and a half millions out of a total population of two and a half millions and are, in numerical importance, the second community in the State (Palpu 1).

While in the original text Palpu gives importance to the term ‘Tiyas’ (see the beginning quote from the text), here we see Damodaran gives importance to the term Ezhava. Palpu address them as the ‘Thiyyas or Ezhavas’ whereas Damodaran address them as ‘Ezhavas or Thiyyas’. Interestingly in this revised publication even while quoting from the original text, he uses the term ‘Ezhava’ instead of Thiyya (while the original uses the term ‘Tiya’). For example let us see the beginning paragraph of Ezhava Memorial.

We undersigned Ezhava subjects of Your Highness most humbly beg to approach your gracious highness with this memorial and pray that our representation may be considered with due sympathy.

We find the same translation in T. K. Madhavan’s biography of Palpu titled *Doctor Palpu* (1969) which was published 19 years before this (129). In Velayudhan’s *S. N. D. P. Yogacharithram* (History of S. N. D. P. Yogam) also, which was published in the year 1978, we find the same quote (74). This can be seen as a deliberate attempt from the part of Ezhava historians to reclaim the Ezhava identity while Palpu all the while claimed a Thiyya identity for Ezhavas.

Now coming to other discourses on Ezhava Memorial, we can consider the opinion of press. We find a collection of editorials of English and Malayalam (here in English translation) daily newspapers like The Times of India, Madras Standard, The Hindu,

Indian Spectator, Indian Social Reformer, Western Star, Malayala Manorama, Malayalee.¹⁴ It was a strong reaction to Government's discriminative attitude towards Ezhavas. Most interestingly, we see alternate usage of the terms 'Thiyya' and 'Ezhava' in these editorials which supported the cause of Ezhavas. According to T. K. Madhavan all these opinions are shaped by the influence of Palpu (162).

However we see an alternative voice in the editorial of Malayala Manorama (Palpu xv). Though it supported the cause of Ezhavas, it acknowledges that there were Ezhavas but there was no caste named Thiyyas anywhere in Thiruvithamkoor. In Manorama it is stated that:

There are no Tiyyas in Travancore but only Ezhavas. The difference between these two classes, is best known to them but both are practically the same for all purposes. We mean to discuss here a little about the Ezhavas of Travancore. In doing so, if we explain now instead of using the generic term all that has to be said about them, the Tiyyas are British subjects and their apparent lowness in social position due to their avocations has disappeared by education and by their entertainment in Government Service. Their brethren, the Ezhavas, still remain in their original state only because they are the subjects of Travancore (Palpu Appendix xv).

This is not the only alternate voice which states that there is no caste named Thiyyas in Thiruvithamkoor. While talking about the need to abolish *Vargavythyasangal* (caste differences) among Ezhavas for the progress of community, C. V. Kunjuraman acknowledges that there is a group who argues that Ezhavas and Thiyyas are different

¹⁴ See Appendix in Palpu's *The Treatment of Tiyyas of Travancore*.

and there is no caste named Thiyyas in Thiruvithamkoor (*Vivekodayam* 1914, 70). We find that Palpu has consciously articulated an identity of Thiyya for the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor in his book *Treatment of Tiyas of Travancore* and also in the discourse on Ezhava memorial. We have also seen how differently the subsequent publication including the translation of the same text projected an identity of Ezhavas instead of Thiyya.

There are several other instances which prove Palpu's enthusiasm in bringing these communities together. He has tried to unify both communities through the programmes of SNDP too. In the first meeting of S. N. D. P. Yogam in 1903 (1078), it was decided that the Yogam should focus on the reformation of religious and material pursuits of Ezhavas (Velayudhan 193). But in the second meeting of the Yogam, Palpu stated that S. N. D. P. Yogam is registered for religious, spiritual and industrial development of Ezhavas or Thiyyas of Thiruvithamkoor, Kochi and British Malabar. He took the initiative to invite Thiyya reformers like advocate Kottiyathu Ramunni and Murkkoth Kumaran for third meeting of S. N. D. P. which was held at Alappuzha. In a welcome address delivered at the public meeting, . Palpu states: "The object of the yogam is to improve the condition of the Tiya or Ezhava, or Chova community of this coast, and its policy is to effect this improvement without prejudice to the interest of other communities" (*Vivekodayam* 35).

A glimpse at the circumstances in which the community history of Thiyyas was being written will also bring forth Palpu's role in the unification of both communities. A

critical examination of community history written during this period by the Thiyyas unravels the way they imagined a community identity distinct from Ezhavas. It was Palpu who has encouraged Thiyyas to write a community history. He advertised in the Madras Mail, an English Daily news paper that the best essay on the origin of Thiyyas', their current status and the means for their improvement will be awarded an amount of hundred rupees. Potheri Kunjambu, a Thiyya reformer wrote an essay on this topic titled "Thiyyar Oru Charithra Sameepanam" (Thiyyas: A Historical Approach) and sent to Palpu on February 17th 1897. In the article, Kunjambu refers Ezhavas as "those who belong to the Thiyya *vargam*" and points out that Thiyyas and Ezhavas migrated here together with Nairs, either before or after them (28). For him, the categorization existed before the migration itself. C. Krishnan, another Thiyya reformer published an article titled "*Thiyyarute Ulpathi*" (Origin of Thiyyas) in *Keralamsanchari* daily newspaper on June 27th in 1900. It was a response to Kunjambu's article "Thiyyar Oru Charithra Sameepanam". Instead of using the term 'Ezhavas,' and referring to the terms 'Chon' or 'Chovan,' C. Krishnan indicates that Thiyyas of North Malayalam, South Malayalam, Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi are same. He writes:

In some places of the South, there are some who even have to the caste name 'chon.' It is the 'chovan' in Thiruvithamkoor that seems to have become the 'chon' in the Northern regions. It will be immensely useful to understand the meaning of the term 'chon,' or 'chovan,' which is used as a synonym for Thiyyan in Northern Malayalam, Southern Malayalam, Kochi and Thiruvithamkoor (52-53).

For Kunjambu Ezhavas belong to Thiyya *vargam* and the categorization Thiyyas and Ezhavas existed before their migration. Whereas C. Krishnan is silent about Ezhavas and

referred to Chovan which he sees as a synonym used for Thiyyas in Northern Malayalam, Southern Malayalam, Kochi and Thiruvithamkoor. We need to remember that these articles were written before the spread of S. N. D. P. movement among Thiyyas. Two important events can be considered as the markers of social reform movement were to occur in later years. *Gnanodaya Yogam* (The society for the awakening of knowledge) was founded in 1905 in North Malabar, inspired by S. N. D. P. 's message of equality and economic self reliance. And it was in 1908, Sree Narayana Guru himself laid the foundation of the Jagannatha temple at Tellichery which Thiyyas could access. Here the point is that prior to reform period, Thiyyas preferred to use the term 'Thiyyas' to refer to their community and they addressed Ezhavas as one who belongs to Thiyya ethnic group (*vargam*). Although this seems to suggest that Thiyyas and Ezhavas were perceived as belonging to the same *vargam*, they were not seen as one. The catch here is the term *vargam* which sometimes also included the community of Nairs and was used to talk about the larger Hindu *vargam*/Hindu community. Therefore, terms and labels used and their translations need to be closely read and understood in contexts where they assume altogether different meanings.

From these accounts it can be assumed that unification of community was a strategy used by Palpu to negotiate with the native government of Thiruvithamkoor. As articulated by him and by the government, Thiyyas were of a better status under the British rule in Malabar compared to Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor.¹⁵ As far as education and employment is concerned, Thiyyas had more access to it under the colonial rule. Palpu might have understood that bringing Ezhavas and Thiyyas together was the best means to

¹⁵ See both the petitions and the governments reply to it. For details see N. K. Damodaran.

negotiate with the Hindu government of Thiruvithamkoor. The strategy of “brotherhood” used by Palpu was successful in bringing the attention of the British Parliament towards the injustice done by Thiruvithamkoor government to the Ezhavas.

And more importantly, as noted by Pillai, numerical strength was the prominent base of political importance and communities were more keen in increasing their number. He writes, “the fusion of sub-castes is one of the chief planks in the programme of all caste associations. Numerical strength being a prominent title to political importance, various communities leave no stone unturned to increase their number (Raimon 278).” It can also be assumed that bringing a large majority of lower caste of Malabar i.e., Thiyya in to the fold of Ezhava was a major political strategy adapted by Palpu and others.

In this section we have seen how through an articulation of brotherhood and the usage term ‘Ezhava’ over ‘Thiyya’. Palpu envisages a homogenous identity. Palpu addresses himself as a member from Thiyya community which was a non-existent category since there were only Ezhavas in Thiruvithamkoor then. And throughout the text he addresses the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor as Thiyyas and not as Ezhavas. This differentiation is more evident when we look into the Malayalam translation of the text where Damodaran address them as Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor (except in the quotes) even in the title of the book. As we see the petitions, government endorsement and subsequent publications has played an important role in defining community as one through naming and labeling. We see that Ezhava identity gets prominence over Thiyya identity in the subsequent publications by Ezhava historians and in the translation of the text by an Ezhava. This

shows how the Thiyya identity has been subsumed into the Ezhava identity. What are the factors which facilitated the imagination of homogenous nature of both communities and also how and why Thiyyas were keen to join with Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor will be discussed in the next sub-section and the fourth sub-section of this chapter.

2.3. Formation of *Samajams/Yogams/Organizations*: Strategies and Differences.

Ezhava social reform movement which began in the end of the 19th century and continued in the first half of the 20th century had different organizations and ideological trends within it. The social reform movement of Thiyyas was always envisaged as part of S. N. D. P. movement which basically stood for Hindu religion and for reformation of the Ezhavas. Similarly, dominant history always mentions the spiritual movement led by Sree Narayana Guru which propagated the idea of “One Caste, one Religion, one God for man”, and the atheist movement led by Sahodaran Ayyappan which propagated the idea of “No Caste, no Religion, no God for man” as two major ideological trends. But the reformation process was much more complex in both communities. Several organizations were formed other than S. N. D. P. and there were different ideological trends in both Ezhava and Thiyya communities. There were many atheists, rationalists and *Swathanthra samudaya vadikal* (those who stood for independent community) in the Ezhava and Thiyya communities.¹⁶ While looking at other organizations and different ideological trends within the social reform movement of Thiyyas and Ezhavas, this section examines different concepts of community envisaged by Thiyyas and Ezhavas which are relatively unexplored.

¹⁶ Some Ezhavas wanted to cut Ezhava’s relationship with Hindu community and their affinity to Hindu religion. They stood for an independent community. C. Krishnan, Sahodarnan K. Aiyappan, K. Ayyakkutty are some among them. For details see. P. K. Madhavan.

In the beginning Thiyyas were hesitant to collaborate with Ezhavas and also with S. N. D. P's programmes. Achuthan writes:

During this time Palpu suggested to Krishnan that it is a good idea to found an organisation in Madras to work for the prosperity. Palpu withdrew from this endeavor when Krishan revealed to him that there were hardly any chance of getting support from North Malabar Thiyyas since they consider themselves superior to Thiyyas of South Malabar and Ezhavas of Kochi-Thiruvithamkoor (48).

Similarly, in 1913, Kumaran Asan went to Calicut to meet Rarichan Mooppar, a Thiyya reformer and requested his favor to conduct S. N. D. P. Yogam's annual meeting. It is said that he showed hesitation in the beginning and later promised to help in all possible ways (Prabhakaran 36). All these point to the fact that in the initial stages of S. N. D. P., most Thiyya leaders were unwilling to be part of S. N. D. P. which would put Thiyyas and Ezhavas on one platform. Later on Thiyya reformers like Moorkkoth Kumaran played a crucial role in the unification of these two communities. He advised the Thiyyas to co-operate with the organization which has guru's name i.e., S. N. D. P.

A *Sabha* or organization is necessary for the progress of religion, industry, community customs, and especially education. I would suggest it should be SNDP Yogam. This Yogam is established in Kerala now. The Yogam which was founded mainly for the development of Ezhavas, within these twelve years have spread in Kochi and later on in British Malabar too. It has also tried and found result in

encouraging brotherhood among the castes called Thiyyas and Ezhavas found in these three places (*Vivekodayam* n.p).

The above statement also suggests reasons behind Thiyyas' enthusiasm to join in a community organization which has Guru's name and the importance of an organisation for the community's progress.¹⁷

It is said that attracted to the S. N. D. P's message of equality and economic self reliance, Thiyya elites have founded *Sri Gnanodaya Yogam* (1905) in North Malabar. The Yogam stressed that they should organize alongside the S. N. D. P "under the themes of religion, business, education and social reform (Menon *Caste, Nationalism* 67)." One of the important agenda of the Yogam was to build new temples which Thiyya community could alone access. Other lower castes like Cherumas and Pulayas were not allowed to worship in these temples by the managers of the temple (68). According to Dilip Menon the motives behind the building of the new temples as well as the responses to the call for community stemmed from varying causes. He writes:

In the face of the commercial power of the Mappilas and the control they exercised over land in the towns, the nascent Tiyya elite needed to create cohesion within its own ranks as well as forge alliances. They were able to draw upon the migrants to the towns by setting themselves up as alternative sources of credit and employment. The advocacy of temperance and the jettisoning of the

¹⁷ It was in the year 1914, that Nairs understood how important is religious reformation for community's progress. In the annual meeting of Nair Samajam, an organization of Malayalee Sudras it was decided to have a guru for community modeled after Sree Narayana Guru and to build temples of their own to react against injustice done towards them by Brahmins. See Mitavadi 1914.

use of alcohol in religious ritual had resonance for those Tiyyas in the interior who had begun to resent their roles as suppliers of toddy to shrine festivals. Moreover, in an indirect way, the actions of the state helped to strengthen the emergent sense of Tiyya community. A harsh excise policy made the Tiyyas' traditional occupation of toddy tapping increasingly unprofitable, driving impoverished tappers to the towns (62– 63).

The above quote shows how Thiyyas came together to form a single entity in order to guard their economic interests against Mappilas¹⁸ and in response to state's action. This also helped the community to move beyond the traditional caste occupation in times of crises. It also throws light on how a problem with colonial state/colonizer indirectly helped them modernize. This points out that an imagination of community among Thiyyas was already established before Thiyyas' collaboration with the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor. And this community was a mix of rural and urban Thiyyas excluding other lower castes and upper castes. Thiyyas association with Ezhavas can be seen as an extension of their community formation where they realized that to strengthen the community one needs to forget about the differences among the castes which share almost similar social status, tradition occupation etc. Moorkkoth Kumaran's observation is important in such context. He writes:

I have nothing to say to the people who argue that Thiyyas are more progressive/cultured/reformed (parishkari) than Ezhavas and Ezhavas are wealthier than Thiyyas; northern people are wise (vidvan) than southern people, southern people are innocent (parisudhar) than northern people. While the Nairs who have

¹⁸ Muslim community in Kerala is known as Mappila.

many differences in customs and countless inner divisions (ulpirivukal) and who do not have inter-marriage and inter-dining with each other are now trying to become one caste. I wonder whether we really think of the progress of our community while we argue we should separate only on the basis of minor differences among us (*Vivekodayam* n.p).

As pointed out in the first chapter, the inter-dining or inter-marriages were not common among Thiyyas of Malabar and Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor. There are conscious efforts from reformer's side to evade such differences. For instance, Kottieth Ramunni, a Thiyya reformer in presiding speech at the 3rd annual meeting of S. N. D. P. states there are not many sub-caste differences among Thiyyas and the only difference is the geographical difference. According to him, inter-dining and inter-marriage is possible among the Thiyya who are stretched from Kanyakumari to Gokarnam. To refer to Ezhavas he uses the term *swajanangal* (our people) of Thiruvithamkoor (N. K. Damodaran 17).¹⁹ Kottieth Ramunni congratulates S. N. D. P's efforts. Revathiamma, a Thiyya woman reformer was also a part of S. N. D. P. She was selected as a member of S. N. D. P and has attended S. N. D. P's meeting at Kollam and Kottayam. She has also talked about Sree Narayana Guru's influence in "reforming" them by banning "bad" customs like *Thalickettu Kalyanam*, *Thirandukuli* etc. (Revathiamma). Moorkkoth Kunjappa writes:

Sree Narayana Guru Swamikal decided to liberate the lower castes. To achieve this, he made use of Thiyyas who occupy highest position among the lower castes and who were powerful in terms of population, wealth, leadership, and education.

¹⁹ Kottieth Ramunni, a Thiyya reformer's presiding speech at 3rd annual meeting of S. N. D. P. which conducted at Alappuzha during 28-30 December, 1906.

... Since Thiyyas were used as a tool for Swami's ideology, people misunderstood swami as a leader of only Thiyyas (qtd. in Achuthan 7).

Here Kunjappa means to say that Sree Narayana Guru was not only the leader of *avaranas* and but also of *savarnas*. Swami's work helped *savarnas* like Nairs liberate from the subjugation of Brahmins. However the above quote suggests that Thiyyas have been selected as a tool by Sree Narayana Guru because they occupied highest position among the lower castes and they were powerful in terms of population, wealth, leadership, and education.

Thiyyas and Ezhavas of Kochi had minimal participation in S. N. D. P. The majority of the participation being from the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor. For instance at the 12th meeting of S. N. D. P Yogam which was conducted in 1915, among the 1299 members who attended the meeting, 138 were from Malabar, 74 were from Kochi and rest were from Thiruvithamkoor (*Mitavadi* 1916, 10). There was a parallel movement among the Ezhavas of Kochi and Thiyyas of Malabar along with S. N. D. P., the Ezhava organization in Thiruvithamkoor. Subsequently Thiyyas of Malabar and Ezhavas of Kochi had tried to form an organization for the unity of Thiyyas and Ezhavas of each region respectively. For example, K. N. refers to Kottieth Ramunni's open letter addressed to Patiyathu Mannan, titled "*pothujanasambandhamaya oru kathinte nere pakarppu*" and argues that it will be acceptable to all if a Thiyya *Mahajana sabha* unites Thiyyas of Malabar. K. N., the writer supported such a move and wanted it to happen soon (*Mitavadi* 1918 41). Similarly Ezhavas of Kochi also formed an organization. In the

article titled “The Cochin Ezhavas Conference: Social Reform Advocate” (*Mitavadi* 1916) it is stated that:

The Tiyas of the West Coast are slowly but surely coming to front.....But though the Tiyas of Malabar and their brethren in Travancore have been marching forward, the Ezhuvas of Cochin have hitherto remained stationary. But they are also awakening. Some prominent men among them have formed themselves into a Samajam and have issued an appeal to all the Ezhuvas of the state (37).

Ezhavas of Kochin have founded Kochi Ezhava Samajam in 1916 (Genevier 196). Sri Bodananda Swamikal took the initiative for this organization. However, along with the Ezhavas of Kochi, the Thiyyas of Malabar have also participated in the meetings. It was reported that the Kochi Ezhava Conference, held its first conference under the presidency of Mr. C. Krishna, B. A. B. L., High court advocate, Calicut (*Mitavadi* 1916, 37) While the first meeting was presided by C. Krishnan, a Thiyya reformer from Kozhikode (Calicut), the main speaker was Moorkkoth Kumaran, another Thiyya reformer from Tellichery (Thalassery) (Sanoo 160).

In the year 1918, under the auspices of Kochi Ezhava Samajam, *Akhilakerala Thiyya Mahayogam* (All Kerala Thiyya Meeting) was held at Paran Hall, Kozhikode. It was presided over by Kottieth Ramunni, a Thiyya reformer. In this meeting it was decided to bring Ezhava community under one organization for unity and strength. It suggested to use the term either ‘Ezhava’ or ‘Thiyya’ and C. Krishnan, a Thiyya reformer stated that it will be better to use the name ‘Thiyya’ for the whole community. Later, in the meeting

conducted at Palluruthi in 1927, Kochi Ezhava Samajam was renamed as Thiyya Mahajanasabha (Sanoo 162–163). However it was a failure, for it could not succeed in planning the preliminary programmes and bringing more people into it (Sanoo 162). Its failure points out the hesitation of Ezhavas to participate in an organization named under Thiyyas. We can assume that they could not mobilize Ezhavas in a movement which is named after Thiyyas. This might lead to a conclusion that though in the initial stage a reformer like Palpu addressed himself as Thiyya and invited them to take part in the movement, in the later stage they hesitated to address themselves as Thiyyas.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that though many Thiyyas worked together with Ezhava reformers for the progress of the community, many Thiyya reformers like C. Krishnan preferred to use the label Thiyyas for the community and its organization. Similarly, in the 4th annual meeting of S. N. D. P. Yogam, which was conducted at Kannur municipal hall in 1907, Rarichan Muppar, a Thiyya expresses his doubt that when S. N. D. P. was formed in Thiruvithamkoor, whether its benefactors intended to work for unification of the Thiyyas (he uses the term Thiyyas) of Thiruvithamkoor, Kochi and British Malabar. He extended his doubt regarding the capability of S. N. D. P. at the time of its inception to bring together these diverse communities (N. K. Damodaran 18). According to K. Ayyappan, S. N. D. P. Yogam is successful in generating a feel among Thiyyas who are known in different names in different places of Kerala as one community and it also introduced each other (N. K. Damodaran 150). These two instances points out the separate entity called Thiyyas and their participation in the Ezhava organization. Undoubtedly, one can argue that the S. N. D. P Yogam was a

platform where Thiyyas and Ezhavas could come together, but one needs to think whether it was ever successful in bringing a unity among them.

Hesitation and differences in the earlier stage of the movement to be under one umbrella points out not only to the demographic domination of Ezhavas over Thiyyas but also to a caste complexity that refuses to see Ezhava as similar to Thiyya. However this sub-section points out that there was not one but several organizations/*samajams/yogams* related to Thiyyas and Ezhavas across various regions of Kerala and how they articulated and mobilized oneness among themselves.

2. 4. Thiyyas, Ezhavas and the Discourse around Religion

This section deals with Thiyyas' and Ezhavas' engagement around the discourse on religion which would bring forth different concepts of community envisaged by Thiyyas and Ezhavas. We would begin with Sree Narayana Guru's concept of the entity called Ezhava. It should be noted that Sree Narayana Guru's take on the community and S. N. D. P.'s policy were different over a period of time. Sree Narayana Guru objected the definition of the word 'community' while it was being defined by Kumaran Asan at the time of its formation as it was limited to those communities known as Ezhava, Thiyya, Billava and Nadar. For Sree Narayana Guru, the name 'Ezhava' does not indicate any caste or religion (Velayudhan 236).²⁰ He envisaged a community of the human family (Omana 2005). Udaya Kumar writes about Sree Narayana Guru's argument on caste names thus:

²⁰ One would notice in the year 1920, in the 17th annual meeting of S. N. D. P. it was decided to give membership to all, regardless of caste and religion. See P. S. Velayudhan 181.

At times he suggested that the word *Ezhava* was not a caste name but a place name, alluding to the belief that the word *Ezhavan* is a corrupt form of *Sinhalan*, indicating that *Ezhavas* came from Sri Lanka. If *Ezhavas* really want to use the place name, Sree Narayana argued, ‘why not use the appellation “Malayali” since they have been living in Kerala for such a long time? Sree Narayana categorically asserted that the word *Ezhava* signified neither caste nor religion (257).

Now coming to the question of religion, we see that the prominent Ezhava leaders’ ideology and S. N. D. P’s policy mainly supported Hinduism. Palpu who was influenced by Vivekananda’s principles also believed that Indian society will revive only through Hindu religion. Sree Narayana Guru’s disciples like Kumaran Asan argued that Guru propagated Hindu religion and since religious reformation was one of S. N. D. P’s aims, Asan strongly advocated Hindu religion for Ezhavas and Thiyyas. Whereas we can see that Guru did not propagate Hindu religion or believed that he belonged to Hindu religion. Udaya Kumar writes:

In 1916, Sree Narayana even issued a statement to the effect that he did not belong to any particular caste or religion. He also clarified that his founding of temples did not entail his belonging to the Hindu religion: ‘we have founded some temple in response to the desire of certain Hindus. Similarly, if Muslims and Christians wish, we will be glad to do appropriate things for them’ (259).

Similarly, there were also disagreements among the Ezhavas regarding the means of social reform movement. While some stood for the progress of Ezhava community alone, others stood firmly against the caste system itself. For example, though Sahodaran K. Ayyappan, an Ezhava reformer was associated with Sree Narayana Guru and S. N. D. P.,

he founded an organization called *Sahodara Sangham* (1917) and advocated the theory of universal brotherhood, communal harmony and perfect humanity.²¹ Sahodaran Ayyappan writes:

I became a Thiyya because I was born in a Thiyya community. It was not based on any belief system. There is no other reason for my *thiyyathvm*. My friends are requesting me to disregard this *thiyyathvum* which is inborn in me. But I have problem with their methods (qtd. in Sanoo 157).

According to him each community should work for their progress and once all communities achieves the same status, the community system should be destroyed. He challenged the caste system through the propagation of inter-dining ceremony and inter-caste marriages. As already pointed out, the Brotherhood movement led by Sahodaran Ayyappan is always mentioned in history but it hardly brings out other Ezhavas' disagreement on such movements. The powerful orthodox Ezhava organizations like Vijnanavardhini Sabha were against this movement. Since he had worked for the progress of other lower caste communities like Pulaya community, he has been called as 'Pulayan',²² Ayyappan by the orthodox section of Ezhavas. Similarly, Potheri Kunjambu, a Thiyya advocate, was involved with the education and upliftment of the Pulayas of Malabar, coming to be called 'Pulayan' Kunjambu for his association with the untouchables (Menon *Caste and Colonial* 299). Like Ayyappan, Moorkoth Kumaran, a Thiyya reformer also wanted to form an *avarana* organization. He suggested that instead

²¹ Sahodaran Ayyappan was a critique of Gandhian politics and Indian National Congress and was influenced by M. N Roy, E.V Ramaswami Naiker, Dr. Ambedkar and Jayaprakash Narayan. According to Ayyappan social freedom will precede political freedom and India would attain the freedom only when caste distinctions are removed. For details see P. K. Madhavan and Sahadevan.

²² One who belongs to Pulaya, a lower caste community which comes below Thiyyas and Ezhavas in caste hierarchy.

of concentrating upon Thiyyas own development they should try to uplift all *avaranas* with them. He is one who wanted Pulayas to enter into the Jagannatha temple²³ but Gnanodayagoyam²⁴ opposed it. (Kunjappa 104).

Many Thiyyas and Ezhavas were converted into many religions during 20th century when the social reform movements were active in these communities. In the introduction to the book titled *Mathaparivarthanarasavadam: Mahakavi Aasan Ezhuthiya Marupati*, Moorkooth Kumaran, a Thiyya reformer, says that during 1930s, Thiyya community all over Kerala was split due to differences in opinion on community reformation. One group argued that Thiyyas should discard Hindu religion, while others opted for Buddhism. Some others were of the view that the immediate step was to discard Hindu religion and later think of what religion to be opted; while some stood for Christianity, some others stood for Islam; some for *Athmavidyaprasthanam*, some for the entry into old Hindu temples and some others for the means proposed by Sree Narayana Guru. There are also people who joined Brahma Samajam and Aryasamajam (Asan 1). According to Kumaran Asan, the majorities did not belong to any of these and they strongly believed that the means proposed by Sree Narayana Guru was the best.

The Buddhist movement was very strong among Ezhavas and Thiyyas. One could actually claim that it was stronger among Thiyyas. Many of them believed it as a means for social reform. C. V. Kunjiraman's article titled "Thiyyarkku Nallathu Budhamatham Thanneyanu" (*Mitavadi* 1925) suggests that Buddhism is best for Thiyyas. He states that the leaders, Palpu and Govindan from Thiruvithamkoor, Ayyakkutti and K. Ayyappan

²³ A Thiyya temple at Thalassery.

²⁴ *Gnanodayayogam* is an organization of Thiyyas of Thalassery.

from Kochi and C. Krishnan from Malabar have promoted Thiyyas conversion to Buddhism. K. Kunju Panikkar's article "Thiyyarkkengine Rakshakittum" (*Mitavadi* 1926) also propagated the idea that Thiyyas are not Hindus and it is better for Thiyyas to accept Buddhism. According to him, Kerala was a Buddhist county. Most importantly it is said that C. Krishnan, who had converted into Buddhism had conducted vigorous campaigns to convert Ezhavas and Thiyyas into Buddhism. He believed that Ezhavas and Thiyyas should embrace Buddhism in order to be freed from their disabilities (*Mitavadi* 1925).

However, Kumaran Asan argues that Buddhism failed to provide freedom for the followers (1947). Asan's "Matha Parivarthanasavadam: Mahakavi Asan Ezhuthiya Marupati" was an open letter addressed to the editor of *Mitavadi* in 1923 June 15 which was not published by them. It was a response to the criticisms that appeared in English and Malayalam in *Mitavadi* about Asan's views on Buddhist Religious movement in Kerala which was expressed in the S. N. D. P. Yogam meeting at Kollam. Since *Mitavadi* refused to publish it, this letter has been published after 10 years by his wife Srimati Bhanumathi Amma (Asan i-iv). However it brings out Asan's views on religious conversion and religious reformation. Asan states that he has argued for *Mathaparishkaranam* (religious reformation) not for *mathaparivarthanam* (conversion). He makes it clear that his ideology for reformation is the one propagated by Sree Narayana Guru i.e., "One Caste, One Religion and One God for Man."

Later, another group among Thiyyas and Ezhavas argued for an independent community and mainly stood against Hindu religion. *Akhila Keralam Thiyya Yuvajanasangham* was formed in 1932 with the attempts of K. C. Kuttan. They propagated the independent community claim, on the basis that Ezhavas and Thiyyas are not Hindus and claiming Hindu community status will serve as an obstacle in their progress. A book titled *Swathanthra Samudayam* (Independent community) was published in the year 1934 by E. Madhavan which propagated the ideas of independent community movement (1934). But the book was banned later by the government because it criticized the *savarna* hegemony and the authority of kingdom.

We see C. Krishnan and others who argued for Buddhist conversion participating in this movement as well. C. Krishnan, Thiyya social reformer argued that the weaker communities wrongly classified under Hindus, have no connection with Hindu religion and Hindu community. He advocated Thiyyas and other communities which were suffering in the name of Hinduism to become independent communities. Ezhava reformers like Sahodaran K. Ayyappan, C. Kesavan, K. Ayyakkutty, etc., were followers of the same ideology (Madhavan).

Potheri Kunjambu, in his major work, *Tiyyar*, written in 1904 advocates the wholesale conversion of Tiyyas to Christianity. However as Dilip Menon noted, Kunjambu never converted to Christianity (*Caste and Colonial* 300). Similarly we see many Thiyyas who advocated Islam for Thiyyas and Ezhavas and other lower castes. For instance in a book titled *Asavarnarkku Nallathu Islam* many Thiyyas express their views under the title

*“Ezhavarum Matha Parivarthanavum.”*²⁵ Sukumaran argues that communities from Thiyyas to Nayatis have a wrong notion that they are Hindus. He points out that only Islam follows Sree Narayana Guru’s principle, “One Caste, One Religion, One God for Humanity.” Therefore advises them to follow Islam religion. Thayyil also advocates Islam for Thiyyas and other backward communities on the ground that the petitions which are submitted to the government were failed in finding solution to their problems. Kunjiraman also has the same opinion and argues for conversion to Islam. Such discourses point out that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are not part of Hindu fold and the failure of government to provide justice for *avarana* communities. Therefore, they argue for a conversion to Islam which according to them is based on Sree Narayana Guru’s principle. However such instances points out that the movement (especially S. N. D. P.) among Thiyyas and Ezhavas which emphasized their reform being part of Hindu community, in fact was not successful to bring all members of Thiyya and Ezhava communities into it.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have examined how the political category Ezhava was formed by subsuming the identity of Thiyyas as well as the politics behind such an articulation and imagination. The first sub-section, “The Formation of Caste Community Identities in Kerala,” discusses Ezhava and Thiyya community formation in the light of the other caste community formations in Kerala which made such an imagination possible. It is argued that in many ways, it was the Malayalee Memorial (1891) that necessitated the Ezhava identity assertion, and the formation of a new political identity called Ezhavas.

²⁵ See *Asavarnarkku Nallathu Islam Matham*.

On the one hand the homogenization process among Ezhavas could be seen as a response to the Nair dominated Malayalee memorial which strengthened the Nair community formation. On the other hand we can see the process of unification as a negotiation with colonial modernity. The opportunities the colonial government offered for “betterment” of the natives like education, government jobs and so on were mainly grabbed by the upper caste communities. The Ezhavas’ aspiration to access these was materialized through such community formation. However, in the process, Thiyya identity has been marginalized. Thiyyas became the major reference point for the political bargaining of Ezhavas, in Malayalee Memorial as well as in Ezhavas Memorial (1896). We can understand the politics of unification of Thiyyas and Ezhavas when we place it in the context: numerical strength was/is one of the prominent base of political importance and Ezhava leaders were aware of it.

The second sub-section “Terming the Thiyya as Ezhava / Ezhava as Thiyya: Dr. Palpu and Community Histories” critically examines various discourse to explain how Thiyyas and Ezhavas were subsumed into a single category. The section also brings forth Palpu’s role in the unification of both the Ezhava and Thiyya communities. The third sub-section “Formation of Samajams/Yogams/Organizations: Strategies and Differences” explores the ideological differences and different concepts of community among the Thiyyas and Ezhavas which was undermined in order to project an Ezhava identity. In the fourth sub-section “Thiyyas, Ezhavas and the Discourse around Religion” we have examined Thiyyas’ and Ezhavas’ participation in the discourse around religion which reveals how an Ezhava Hindu identity has been projected, avoiding the formation of all other religious movements among Thiyyas and Ezhavas.. The next chapter would deal with the

question of women in these two communities and see how women in these communities engaged with questions of gender and community.

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CHAPTER III

Thiyya and Ezhava Social Reform: Questions, Concerns and Women's Role in the Movements

This chapter explores the participation and engagement of women in Thiyya and Ezhava Social reform movements and various discourses around it. It also explores the questions and concerns of Thiyya and Ezhava women that are hardly noticed by historians writing caste history. When we deal with the gender question in lower caste communities in Kerala, there are some reckonable studies on the Ezhava social reform movement. Those studies have not made any distinction between Thiyya and Ezhava women. Most importantly there are hardly any studies which discusses gender in the Thiyya reform movement. Though it is not easy to make a differentiation between Thiyya and Ezhava women as in the case of men in the communities (because most of them are renowned), the chapter tries to deal with questions of Thiyya and Ezhava women separately.

The chapter argues that the lower caste women (here specifically Thiyya and Ezhava women) were not the central subjects of reforms propagated by male reformers as in the case of other upper caste reforms of the time in India. Although all questions of reform were centered around the question and progress of the community it was not inclusive of the women's question. The question of community predominated over the question of women (even for women reformers) though community was envisaged through its women. This chapter would discuss the idea of "reform" and will try to bring out women's voices, analyse what they had to say. It will also check whether and how

concerns of the women were different than the concern of male reformers. The chapter makes a conscious attempt to locate women as reformers and active agents of modernity.

4.1. Theorizing of Gender in Social Reform Movement in India

This section maps the theories on gender in the social reform movements by feminist scholars in India and points out the relevance of looking at the question of women in the Thiyya and Ezhava movements. As far as the question of gender is concerned, certain frameworks have dominated feminist studies in India. They largely address the question of women in Hindu / upper-caste / middle class communities (Vaid and Sangari 1989; Tharu and Lalita 1991; Chatterjee 1989; Devika 2007; Arunima 2003; Kodoth 2007). While writing about women's historiography in India, Geraldine Forbes points out that most of the women now included in history are Hindu, upper caste and upper class, and from Bengal. The history of women from minority religious communities, women from regions other than Bengal, and non-elite women remains relatively unexplored.¹ Apparently Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar also share similar view and their work deserves special attention. While pointing out how the word 'gender' hardly occurs in the conventional textbooks even while it deals with the reforms largely related to women and family relationships, they note:

We find little about reforms among Muslims or among 'lower castes'. Attention is centered on upper caste women's education and on their marriage practices – which were altered largely through new laws; in particular those that banned widow burning, allowed widow marriage, restricted child marriage (1).

¹ For detailed discussion on women's historiography in India see Forbes.

As the quote suggests we see the discourse around reform mainly focused upon the upper-caste women's issues and thereby marginalizing the question of Muslim and lower-caste women.

Similarly, many scholars have tried to bring out women's role in several socio-political/nationalist movements in India (Lalitha 1989; Radha 1993; Jogdand 1995; Shah 2004).² Ray and Katzenstein write that women were active in the anti-caste movement in southern and western India, in tribal and peasant struggles, in the overseas anti-indenture campaigns, in nationalist, Gandhian and communist led movements (108). They point out the lack of historical records available on these agitations and the strongest legacy that has dominated this area of research is of nationalist and Gandhian streams. As they suggest the researchers focus is/was more upon women's participation in nationalist and Gandhian movements. We should also notice the major concerns of the upper-caste women of this period. For instance, Omvedt writes how early women's movement in India were focused upon the concerns of upper-caste and middle class women. She writes:

The first wave of feminists in India (20th century) were women related to the reformers or the nationalists, mainly upper-caste women who lobbied tirelessly for the right to property and amendments in the Hindu law of marriage. These first wave feminists were preoccupied with issues of 'status' rather than 'survival'. It was therefore, the uppercaste, middle class women who drew the benefits from the constitutional guarantees and legal measures (Omvedt 1985).

² Lalitha 1989; Radha1993; Jogdand 1995; Shah 2004

As she rightly points out the concerns of upper-caste women were mainly of status rather than survival. A study of lower-caste women's movement will bring forth the concerns of lower-caste women. It points out how important the question of survival was as well as status for them. 'Survival' was a matter for them because they were looking for a dignified life in a caste-ridden society. Unlike the property issues and so on, 'status' mattered for them to have a dignified life in a patriarchal casteist society. Thus the lower-caste women addressed the questions of caste and gender together. To put it in other words, for them, the questions of gender and that of community were inseparable.

Nevertheless, there are studies which question the exclusion of the study of the lower caste movements in India. For instance, Rao points out how throughout the course of the 19th century, gender reform seemed to address upper-caste women only, thereby rendering their experiences as normative. She notes how regional histories by historians who worked on gender in South India critique generalization of caste or gender relations across India. They de-emphasize the focus on Bengal and North India that largely persist in historiography (16). She also notes how dalit bahun feminist scholars critique both anti-caste and feminist movements for their particular form of exclusion (2). She writes:

From the compartmentalization of struggles against caste hegemony as separate from the project of social reform during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the persistence of a political sociological analysis of caste relations as unchanging "traditional" practices, scholars and activists have tended to examine struggles against caste inequality and the critique of gender relations in isolation

from each other. The new political agenda being articulated by dalit bahujan feminists demand the exploration of their shared and entangled histories (2).

There are also studies which trace the question of women and participation of women in lower caste/anti-caste movements. It should be noted that Dalit women were actively participating in the Ambedkar movement in the pre-independence period.³ Two Dalit women, Moon and Pawar in their writing “We Made History, too: Women in the Early Untouchable Liberation Movement” state that the story of women’s participation in the untouchable movement is an interesting one (49). They show that the early movement of untouchables in Maharashtra also led to increasing participation by women in conferences. They also point to the enthusiastic participation of women in the women’s conferences organised by Ambedkar alongside meetings for men. They state that by 1930s women had become so conscious that they started conducting their own meetings and conferences independently. Women’s active participation in various movements like *Mahad Satagraha* movement and Nasik *Satyagraha* and also independent conferences conducted to support various issues like separate electorate for the untouchables, conversion to a non-Hindu religion that would recognize their freedom, dignity, and equal status with men are also mentioned. Women’s political conferences to support Independent Labour Party and later the Scheduled Castes Federation programs and also women’s conferences at Nagpur (1942), Kanpur (1944), Bombay (1945) and Calcutta (1946) and the emergence of Dalit women leaders such as Shantabai Dani, Sulochana Dongre, and Radhabai Kamble is also important. They also point out how women were interested in reforming the marriage system and also how Dalit women accepted the

³ See http://www.womenutc.com/00_09_009.htm.

progressive religion of Buddha voluntarily. Zelliot's article "Dr. Ambedkar and the Empowerment of Women" focuses on the visibility of Dalit women while pointing out the importance of Ambedkarite vision of empowerment.

When we look into the question of women and women's participation or agency of any movement, as Rege points out, most feminist studies of the late colonial period have come to be pre-determined by Chatterjee's (1989) frame of 'ghar/bahar' and the nationalist resolution of the women's question. Rege's articulation of Dalit women's voice in *Satyashodhak* and Ambedkarite movements poses a challenge to Chatterjee's analysis of the "Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." Her framework problematises Chatterjee's conclusion that the nationalist had in the earliest decades of the century 'resolved' the woman's question. She points out that the period marked by Chatterjee as the period of the 'resolution of women's question' is the period in which women's participation in the Ambedkarite movement was at its peak. She points out that Chatterjee in his framework dismissed such movements by labelling it as western-inspired, orientalist because they utilised aspects of colonial policies and western ideologies as resources. Thus, undoubtedly Rege's writing of Dalit women's struggles into the historiography of modern India poses major challenges for our established understanding of nationalism and woman's question in 19th century India.

Bharadwaj's paper "Women's Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925-1948" tries to address the question of how the self-respect movement, the most important political

movement which was contemporary to the nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu, perceived the women's question and in what manner it tried to resolve it. She writes:

The institutions of patriarchy like family, marriage and chastity, which were defended by the nationalist movement, were called into question by Periyar and his followers. They programmatically attempted to challenge these institutions through means like Self Respect Marriages. In short while the nationalists preserved patriarchy the mobilising women for politics, the Self Respect Movement mobilised them to contest patriarchy (38).

She points out that though Self Respect Movement challenged patriarchy, it failed to create a new anti-patriarchal consciousness even among its own followers and it clearly exhibited patriarchal consciousness in its functioning at later phase. Both in Ambekarite movement and Self Respect Movement we see the participation of women and also a strong critique of patriarchy.

Narratives of women's participation in lower-caste movements are also limited to the Ambedkarite movement in the west and the Dravidian movement in the south. Nevertheless as noted above, the understanding of such movements are quite relevant when we address the question of gender in Thiyya and Ezhava reform movement. We see these movements were parallel in many ways. Like women in Ambedkarite women's movement, we see many Thiyya and Ezhava women participating in the social reform movement by attending many conferences along with men and conducting separate conferences of women with the agenda of community development. Similarly we see

how Self Respect Movement was anti-patriarchal unlike the nationalist movement. Though the Thiyyas and Ezhava male reformers agenda was not anti-patriarchal, we see many women taking an anti-patriarchal stand. Let us examine some of the works which have already dealt with the question of gender in the Ezhava social reform movement.

Many researchers have worked on the Ezhava reform movement (Osella and Osella 2000; Velayudhan 1998; Jeffery 1992) emphasizing Ezhava community's mobility in lieu of reform movement. Meera Velayudhan and Udaya Kumar discuss gender in the Ezhava reform movement. Meera Velayudhan's work focuses on the construction of the gendered identity by examining the discourses within the movement on matriliney, inheritance, form of marriage and the campaign for a law of succession and marriage. She contests the notion of the positive impact of Ezhava reform movement for women and argues that, "the discourse signified both an attempt to build the 'reputation' and 'status' of a community as well as the subordination of women by controlling relations between the sexes within the family" (*Reform* 70). However Meera Velayudhan's "Caste, Class and Political Organisation Women in Travancore" gives the details of women's participation in the S. N. D. P. movement, Vaikom *Satyagraha*, Civil disobedience movement and also in the working class movement in Alleppy in the later 1930s which lead to the emergence many other organizations of women. Her account gives us the details of participation of women in Thiruvithamkoor in these movements in the context of Ezhava social reform movement, her framework does not distinguish Ezhava women from other women who were part of it.

Udaya Kumar analyzes reform process of the female subjectivity in the wake of the Ezhava social reform movement, the ways in which body became an object of care, despite the contradictions inherent in Narayana Guru's and others' thoughts about women. He notes that despite this deep suspicion, there is a slight recognition of women's desire in the poetry of Asan, Guru's disciple. This points out that the period gave Ezhava women a new identity and subjectivity of a modern woman with individual desire. Udaya Kumar's stand seems interesting and this leads us to understand the inner dimensions of reform movement. Likewise, rather than simply dismissing the movement as the one which reinstated the subjugation of women, one needs to think about women's articulations in the movement which will be taken up in the subsequent sections.

4.2. The *Stree Samajams* (women's associations) and Women's participation in

Ezhava and Thiyya social reform movement

Before we go into the question of gender in Thiyya and Ezhava social reform movement, we will look into the participation of Thiyya and Ezhava women in these movements. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the Thiyya and Ezhava women in these movements. Though some accounts do not give direct reference to caste, it is possible to locate them in the light of many other details. The following account of the Ezhava and Thiyya *Stree Samajams* are relevant because it is not documented elsewhere. The first section would discuss the Ezhava *Stree Samajam* though it can assumed Thiyya women have also participated in it. We see a large number of women's participation in *Stree Samajams* during social reform period. Though there are exceptions, the majority *Stree Samajams* are formed along with S. N. D. P. during 1900-1930. I would consider these *Stree*

Samajams as an important platform where women could engage in the process of reform actively.

Scholars like Gulati argue that, in Kerala, the leadership, be it in social reform movements or in organized industrial actions, remained predominantly male. Women's participation had been more as followers and less as leaders and they played a marginal role in decision making, with leadership almost exclusively in male hands. Whereas Meera Velayudhan points how women are considered as actors in the historical process rather than as passive recipients of social change (*Caste* 61). Her study locates the dynamics of women's political participation within the context of Ezhava social reform and working class struggles in Thiruvithamkoor in the 1940s. She argues that the social reform movement of Ezhavas in particular and the ideas it generated had far-reaching impact in defining women's identity and role in the social and political processes of change taking place in Travancore in the early part of 20th century (*Caste* 61). However, Ezhava women's idea of reform or differences in opinion regarding reform has not come through her analysis.

As we have seen in the first two chapters, though the reform movement of Thiyya and Ezhavas was a complex process, main stream history narratives always tend to refer to only S. N. D. P. movement. However, insufficiency of records on women's participation in Thiyya / Ezhava reform movement in general will lead us to look at the historiography of S. N. D. P. movement again. Surprisingly, even in S. N. D. P. historiography we hardly find any information of women's participation in the movement (Velayudhan 1978;

Priyadarsanan 1978). Meera Velayudhan gives us an account S. N. D. P.'s *Vanitha Samajam* and other Ezhava women's organization of 1930s. In this section, I attempt to give a small account of Ezhava women's *Samajam* (which are associated with S. N. D. P.) and Thiyya women's *Samajam*. This will help us to understand women's participation in the movement and also their take on the reform movement. J. Devika writes:

...that women's magazines began to appear in Keralam since the late 19th century has been noticed. But the brisk spread of women's associations has hardly been noticed. The appearance of such special slots for women seems to indicate that the public sphere was already a structured space that promoted 'gendering' – in its very structuring, and in the circulation of new ideals of gendered subjectivity within it. ...thus women's magazines and associations addressed a population that was supposed to already possess a specific set of 'capacities' deemed 'womanly' ("Imagining" 2).

Rather than dismissing *Stree Samajams* as a gendered structure in the public sphere, we need to think how women made use of this gendered public sphere than the gendered private sphere. Both lower-caste and upper-caste women have used it as a platform to articulate their idea of reform. It is said that the first community there to hold a conference of women is the Ezhavas (*Mitavadi* 1915, 41). This first women's conference was held during the first annual conference of S. N. D. P. in 1904. As per the report, Dr. Palpu's mother presided the conference and his wife 'who was present in the meeting inspired all women by her speech' (Meera Velayudhan *Caste* 64). She has suggested that 'members of the Yogam should be cautious that there shouldn't be any uneducated girl or boy in our community' (Gauriamma *Vivekodayam* 1916, 19). In this meeting, Mrs.

Maraya Mannanthara Parvathiamma, C. N. Lakshmi, and P. K. Kunjulakshmi, were selected as secretaries and it was decided to conduct *Stree Samajam* in every year along with S. N. D. P. Yogam (Meera Velayudhan *Caste* 83).

S. N. D. P. *Stree Samajam* has been considered as S. N. D. P.'s sister organization. It is said that at the time of the 14th anniversary of S. N. D. P. Yogam, it was the 5th anniversary of its sister organization *Stree Samajam*. V. K. Kunjulakshmi, secretary of the 5th annual conference of S. N. D. P. *Stree Samajam*, in her annual report, gives a small account of the history of S. N. D. P. *Sthree Samajam* (Kunjulakshmi *Vivekodayam* 1916). As already mentioned though *Stree Samajam* of S. N. D. P. Yogam was established in the year 1903 at Aruvippuram, it did not function for a while after celebrating its anniversary. It was reactivated at Varakala in 1912 and the second meeting of *Stree Samajam* was also held at Varkala in 1915. The third meeting of *Stree Samajam* was held at Jubilee Hall, Thiruvananthapuram. The president of the meeting was Mrs. Maraya Thoppil Meenakshiamma and vice president was Paravoor K. N. Lakshmiamma. In this meeting, women have read essays on different subjects like community reformation, women's education, childrearing, etc. Most importantly, it is stated that certain decisions has been passed for the progress of community (Kunjulakshmi *Vivekodayam* 1916). This implies how women were involved in the process of community reformation.

As already noted, we see women in the Ambedkarite movement during 1930 who have conducted their own meetings and conferences independently. We see Ezhava women

were also keen to hold their own meetings and conferences. In the year 1915, the fourth meeting held at Ramavarma Club in Kollam, other than journalists, not a single man was allowed to attend the meeting. It was a deliberate choice of women to have an exclusive women's meeting. This meeting was presided by Mayyanattu Ikkavamma and women from different places have also participated in this meeting. Other than the community members, Nair women like Mrs. C. Raman Thampi, Mrs. K. Parameswaran Pillai, Mrs. Krishna Pillai, and C. Chinnamma were also presented in the meeting (*Mitavadi* 1916, 48). It was also suggested to select two secretaries for the implementation of *Stree Samajam* in each *desam* or *kara* ⁴who would also be the responsible organizers of annual meetings at each *kara* and *desam* (Kunjulakshmi *Vivekodayam* 1916, 85).

The 5th meeting of *Stree Samajam* was presided by K. Gauramma. A report of this *Stree Samajam* is found in the editorial note of *Vivekodayam* (1916, 45).⁵ It is mentioned that “respected” ladies from Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram, Chirayikkezhu, Neyyattinkara, Chengannur were presented in the meeting. Women read essays on morality (*Sadacharam*), childrearing, small scale industries, education, women's role in community reformation etc. Most importantly, it has been suggested in the meeting that *Stree Samajam* should celebrate its annual conference independently (Kunjulakshmi *Vivekodayam* 1916, 85). This shows the growth of *Stree Samajam* from a sister organization to an independent one.

⁴ Small units or villages.

⁵ K.Gauri Amma is the first woman who passed B.A. exam in Thiruvithamkoor.

We see a gradual evolution from the first meeting to the fifth meeting of *Stree Samajam*. In the first phase *Stree Samajam* was used to conduct with S. N. D. P. Yogam. In the second phase men were not allowed to attend the *Stree Samajam* and in the third phase it has been decided to conduct annual meeting independently. It should also be noted that these meetings had different agendas. Women from other communities especially Nair communities also participated in these meetings. Women used it as a platform to discuss their ideas and opinions on reform. They articulated their rights and sometimes even took decisions which were not in favour of men. For example, in the fourth meeting it was decided that a request should be sent to the government regarding the implementation of the bill which argue for strict monogamy for men like the Bills of Ezhavas' inheritance system which made monogamy compulsory for women (Kunjulakshmi *Vivekodayam* 1916, 84). This shows women's reaction towards the implementation of a patriarchal bill. They wanted to implement the same bill for men which was used to subjugate them.

Many *Stree Samajams* were conducted at different places in Kerala which was connected to S. N. D. P. In the year 1921, a special meeting of *Stree Samajam* was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram. B. N. Meenakishiamma presided the meeting. It is reported that women gave good speeches and also many decisions were taken in the meeting. A music competition was also conducted in this meeting (*Sanghamitra* 1921, 185). Another *Stree Samajam* was founded in Thrissivaperur (Thrissur) which was presided by K. A. Janaki Amma. In this meeting Sree Divyasree Bodhananda Swami was elected as the administrator of *Samajam* and K. K. Madhavi Amma was elected as Secretary. It is reported that around 50 people attended the meetings. Janaki Amma read an essay on

“cleanliness” and K. K. Madhavi Amma on “House Management”(Mitavadi 37). It is said that a women’s *Sahodara Sangham* was organized and the first meeting was held at Vatakkakom Nediya School in the presence of an ascetic woman Chandrika and elected Pappikutty Yogini and K. Lakshmi Amma as President and Secretary (Sahadevan 7–8).

As we see in all these meetings women read essays or give speeches regarding various topics. This shows that women were active participants of these meetings. These meetings had particular agendas and many issues were discussed in these meetings. We can assume this gendered space was more useful to spread the ideas of reform among women. We also see the importance of speeches during this time. This was a powerful medium to communicate the ideas of reform among the community members. To promote this S. N. D. P. had conducted speech competitions as well. It is reported that Muthukulam Srimati V. Parvathiamma, an Ezhava woman won the speech competition on the topic “the role of newspapers in the service of community” (*Sanghamitra* 1921, 11-12) which was conducted along with 19th anniversary of S. N. D. P. Yogam.

As noted before women from other communities especially upper caste also participated in these meetings. In the editorial note titled “Nambutiri Sthreekalute Unarvu” (Awakening among Nambutiri Women), it is reported that the Ezhava *Stree Samajam* which was conducted at Kallur and the *Stree Samajam* which was conducted with Thiyya *Mahajanasabha* at Peringottukara was presided by Srimati Narikkattiri Devaki Antherjanam and Srimati Araypallathu Antherjanam (*Sthree* 1933, 28). This meeting was conducted at a time when the purdah system of Nambutiri community was strong and

Nambutiri women were not allowed even to see men from their community. It is reported that, in such context it is a surprise that they have attended a meeting of an untouchable (customarily) community where not only women but men were also present. The boldness of these Nambutiri women and the achievement of Nambutiri reform movement has been acknowledged in the article (*Stree* 1933, 28). However here the point is that, women from other community also presided the meetings of *Ezhava Stree Samajams*. Regardless of community differences women have shared common platform which might have brought about constructive alliances.

As Meera Velayudhan points out, later in 1930s, the S. N. D. P. *Vanitha Samajam* (Womens' association) has formed in Alleppy with Dr. C. I. Rukmini Amma, Kadambari, Bhargavi Amma, Kalikutty Assatty as its main activists (*Caste* 64). As notes that this organization attracted more women and many attended the public meeting and also took part in temple entry meetings and demonstrations and in inter-caste dining programmes. She adds that some of these women retreated from the movement due to social pressure. And though Kalikkutty Assatty and Dr. Rukmini Amma continued their activities, the *Samajam* ended up with their activities.

In the new phase of the S. N. D. P., we see that *Stree Samajams* are known as *Vanitha Sangham*. It was registered in the year 1975 and in the year 1997, when Vellappalli Natesan took over its leadership, women were being heralded as the strength of S. N. D.

P.⁶ Since then, these *Vanitha Sanghams* have emerged as a major platform for a large number of Ezhava women to appear in the public sphere, either through processions, public meetings, felicitations of achievers etc. Currently S. N. D. P. has 4542 *Vanitha Sangham* Units in which Thiyya women also participate.⁷

Now let us look at the *Stree Samajams* of Thiyyas in early 20th century. It is said that *Stree Samajam* at Thalassery was one among the few *Stree Samajams* of this period.⁸ According to Kunjappa, Karai Damayanthi,⁹ a leader among Thiyya women established the *Stree Samajam* in Thalasseri. It is said that the *Samajam* tried to focus on the education of women for the progress of community. Karai Damayanthi founded a library to deliver books for women at home. She also arranged for training of women in stitching, child rearing etc. When this *Stree Samajam* was found in Thalassery, *Mitavadi*, in the column of “News” acknowledged their happiness (1914, 36). It is also reported that the last meeting was held at Chittakunnath Achanoth house on April 25 and 124 women were present in this meeting. Kottiyathu Ramunni’s wife Moorkkoth Madhavi Ammal, Moorkoth Kakkuzhi Kunjimatha Ammal, and Karayi Damayanti Ammal held the positions President, Vice President and Secretary respectively. Letters of People like Karayi Kurumbi Ammal who could not attend the meeting was also read in the meeting. It was decided to conduct the next meeting in a government school and Manayathu

⁶ S. N. D. P. ’s election supplement 2002.

⁷ Data collected from S. N. D. P. Yogam Head Office, Kollam

⁸ For details see Kunjappa 1977, iii.

⁹ Revathiamma’s grandfather Karai Bappu was a businessman. His daughter Karai Damayanthi amma is Revathiamma’s mother. Moorkkoth Kumaran also states that it was Karayi Damayanthi Amma who founded a *Sthree Samajam* at thalassery for the women’s community and for their education, for details see Kunjappa 1975, 4.

Kalayni Ammal was asked to prepare an essay to be presented in the meeting (*Mitavadi* 1914, 36). In a later issue of *Mitavadi* it is reported that Thalasseri *Stree Samajam Yogam* was held at Thiruvangattu girl's school on 23rd of May. Its new Vice President was Dr. C. B. Ramaravu's wife Janaki Ammal. About 150 women attended this meeting. Manayattu Kalyani Ezhuthamma gave a speech on "Women's Education" and following this secretary Damayanti Ammal also gave a speech on the same topic (*Mitavadi* 1914, 40).

However we cannot find many records on Thiyya women's *Stree Samajams*. From the available materials noted above, we see that a large number of Thiyya women participated in these meetings and also this *Stree Samajams* have no connection with S. N. D. P. Though it is an incomplete history of *Stree Samajam* of Ezhava and Thiyya women, we see how these women engaged in reform through their participation in these meeting and also their articulation through their speeches and essays. However women's education seems to be one of the heated topics of discussion of this period. Next section will look into the discourse around Ezhava women's education gleaned from these speeches and articles.

4. 3. Women's Education and the Question of Community

This section looks at Ezhava women's engagement in the discourse around education through an examination of Ezhava women's magazines like *Sanghamitra* and *Sahodari*. This is not to neglect the question of Thiyya women. One reason for the exclusion of the question of Thiyya women was that it was evident there weren't any women's magazines exclusively for Thiyya women in northern Kerala like the Ezhava women's magazines,

Sanghmitra or *Sahodari* in southern Kerala. Secondly, we hardly find any record which discusses Thiyya women's involvement in the discourse around education. Therefore, this section looks at the question of Ezhava women's education. During the reform period many questions were raised regarding the education of Ezhava women. Whether women should be given basic education or higher education? Whether the curricula should be different for men and women? Whether women should get Eastern or Western education? Before going into these questions we will look at the educational status of Thiyya women during the same period.

As we have seen in the first chapter, there was a major shift in the social and educational status of North Malabar Thiyyas than the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor during the colonial time. It was also noted that, like Brahmins and Nairs, caste did not serve as an obstacle for Thiyyas to be English Educated (Kurup "English Vidyabyasavum") and Thiyyas were among the first to join educational institutions¹⁰ founded by Basel Missionaries.¹¹ Thiyya women were also among the first to get education. In an article titled "North Malayalam Thiyyas", a northern (*oru vatakkann*) states that, the first woman who passed matriculation is from Thiyya community. He says that the majority of girls and teachers in schools are Thiyya women. According to him education among Thiyya women was not something new. He adds that about 35 years ago i.e., by the end of 19th century itself, there were Thiyya women teachers in Thiruvangattu Government School like Kakkuzhi Kunjichirutha and Manayathu Chirutha (Oru Vatakkann). It is also said that among the

¹⁰ In 1785 Basel German Mission founded a school in Thalassery. The Basel Evangelical mission, established in Switzerland in 1815, has founded many primary and secondary schools in Malabar.

¹¹ We see Thiyyas among the first head masters of Tallichery (Thalassery) Mission School. For more details see, Moorkkoth Kunjappa 1975, 29.

three women from Malabar who passed medicine exams, two were Thiyya women. The first one was Ayyathan Janaki and the third one Moorkkoth Madhavi. V. V. Janaki, a Mukkuva woman holds the second position. A report in the *Mitavadi* shows that Kausalya Ammal was the first Thiyya woman who passed B. A. L. T. Exam (1915, 40). This shows the educational status of Thiyya women in British Malabar. During colonial times, the educational status of North Malabar Thiyyas were much better than the Ezhavas of Kochi as well (Chandri 127). It is argued in the article “Kochiyile Thiyyar”, that as far as education is concerned Thiyyas of Cochin were in a lower position compared to the Thiyyas of British Malabar (*Mitavadi* 1914, 6). C. V. Kunjuraman in his speech at Kathikappally Ezhava Samajam states that as far as the women’s education is concerned, the Thiyyas occupied the highest position in British Malabar compared to other communities (*Vivekodayam* 1914, 70). He says it is awful that we (here Ezhavas), their brothers are not dissatisfied to be in a lowest position. He suggests that a solution for this pathetic condition should be one of the vital aim of Ezhava community (*Vivekodayam* 1904). It should be also be noted that Ezhava girls got admission in the Government School of Kochi much before they got in Government schools of Thiruvithamkoor (Priyadarsanan *Kumaranasante* 3).

Moreover, the educational status of Ezhavas in Thiruvithamkoor was stagnant under native rule. Long period of struggles and negotiation with the government facilitated their entry into government schools. Dr. Palpu writes about of Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor:

About thirteen percent of them are educated. Compared with Brahmins and Nairs, they are backward in point of education and this is mainly due to the reluctance of

the Travancore Government to admit them freely into State Schools and employ them in the service of the State (Palpu 1)

We have already seen how through Ezhava memorial and other petitions, Dr. Palpu articulated Ezhavas' rights to get education. Kumaran Asan's speech at Srimulam Popular Assembly also shows that Ezhavas were denied admission in government schools where upper caste studied.¹² Kumaran Asan articulated the desirability of admitting the Ezhavas, Kaniyans, Syrian Christians and men of other communities into the Sanskrit *Patasala* and the Ayurvedic *Patasala* at Trivandrum and also Ezhava girls into all the girls' schools of the state that were closed to them. Thiruvithamkoor government was reluctant to give admission to them. Government seemed to worry on the assumption that higher caste children will leave school if they do so. Raveendran writes:

On the question of the admission of Ezhava girls into the Government Schools Mr. K. Kunju Panikar had said in 1910, that 'when his predecessor in the Assembly prayed that all the girls' schools should be thrown open to Ezhava girls, the government totally refused to do so and in their reply declared that to be their policy in the matter.' Government in their reply appeared to imply that it was impossible to have an Ezhava girl learning in the same school with a Nair or Brahmin girl. If the government were stern and bent on changing the system, they could have altered the public opinion that opposed admission of lower-caste girls to such schools. The speaker cited an instance that in 1076 M. E. two Ezhava girls

¹² Legislative Council (1888) and Sree Mulam Popular Assembly (1904) was established in Thiruvithamkoor, during the reign of Sreemulam Thirunal Maharaja. Sree Mulam Popular Assembly was the platform where people could express their problems to the Maharaja. See Raveendran.

were admitted into the Puthiakavu Girls' school in the Mavelikkara Taluk. 'There upon the high-caste girl left the school. But the Government persisted in retaining the two Ezhava girls in the school even at the apparent risk of the strength of the school going down. When the high-caste girls found that government were determined, they all returned to the school in a few days...

Kunju Panikkar has also pointed out such incidents where Nair girls have left school when Ezhava girls got admission. But he makes it a point that government was adamant in this issue so that the Nair girls who left school joined back. However, Kumaran Asan questioned the government attitude on Ezhava girls' education (Priyadarshan *Kumaranasante* 1). Raveendran states that though a large percentage of Ezhava boys were attending schools, sufficient interest was not being taken by the department to spread education among the girls of the community. Out of 352 girls' schools only 180 were open to the community. He says that Asan has requested the government to impress on the department the need for persistent action in the matter.¹³ Priyadarshan also mentions that Asan has requested that the girls' schools of the state, now closed to the Ezhava girls, should be open to them as early as possible and that lists of the girls' schools which were closed or open to the Ezhava girls should be published in the Gazette from time to time for the information of the Ezhavas (14-15).

Now let us look at how Ezhava women engaged in the discourse on education. K. Gauramma in her presiding speech at S. N. D. P *Stree Samajam* which was conducted on the 14th anniversary meeting of S. N. D. P at Trivandrum gives details of the census report (1911) on Ezhava's education. The title of the table is written as "The progress in

¹³ Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, 26 February 1919.

education of the Ezhavas of Thuvithamkood, Kochi and British Malabar”, but the details given in the table appear in the name of Thiyyas (*Vivekodayam* 1916, 19). According to her as far as the growth in education is concerned, Ezhavas of Thuvithamkood stands first, while Malabar and Kochi stand second and third respectively. While discussing the educational progress in the community, Gauriamma reminds the speech of Dr. Palpu’s wife in the first women’s conference which was held during the first annual conference of S. N. D. P in 1904. She has suggested that “members of the Yogam should be cautious that there shouldn’t be any uneducated girl or boy in our community” (*Vivekodayam* 1916, 19). Gauriamma doubts whether it has been made practical yet! She suggests that primary education should be made compulsory in the community. She says, once they get primary education, they themselves will aspire for higher education. She adds that most importantly we should send our girls to school (25). She refers to the delegation visits to the Secretary of State for India in London to discuss Indian women’s education and the speech of Miss. M. Ashworth on Indian education, at the East India Association, London. Gauriamma gives some suggestions for the community development. They are:

- Make primary education compulsory
- Pay attention to teaching, science of medicine and patient treatment
- Publish magazines and news papers for the use of women
- Find capital to promote women’s education. This fund can be used for the following purposes:
 1. Give financial support for education of girls who needs it.
 2. Distribute prize to encourage the one who is excellent in education.

3. Give financial support to the girl's schools which are in a bad shape due to lack of fund.

Here we can see that Gauramma address the question women's education in her own community. She is well informed about the progress of education in the community and also the national level efforts to improve women's education. However she is most concerned about girls' education in her own community and suggests many ways to promote girls education. According to her once girls get primary education they themselves will aspire for higher education. She has also acknowledged the need to have magazines and newspapers for women. Gauramma's enthusiasm and responsibility towards the sisters of her community is also evident in her thanks-giving words, spoken at the public meeting when she was awarded gold medal for being the first woman to pass B. A. examination.

I think I am perfectly justified in saying that in awarding me this token of esteem you are laying on me a heavy responsibility; you are, as it were, awakening me to a higher sense of my duties towards my sisters of the community. I do not know how far I am competent enough to bear the weight of that responsibility; yet, I can assure you that I'll attempt all I can to foster their interests. It is my earnest desire that our community should produce many more women graduates, and I feel rather confident that the encouragement and attention the S. N. D. P Yogam has begun to show in this connection will not fail to produce glorious result that will eventually bring our community forward to take it's place in the front rank of communities and enable us also to play our part in shaping the future destiny of India (*Vivekodayam* 1916, 31).

Gauriamma argues that women should get western education and should be sent to school. But she adds that other than house management women should be trained in teaching and nursing (*Vivekodayam* 1916, 19). Similarly, B. N. Meenakshiamma sees women as culture bearers and suggests it is better to opt feminine jobs (agriculture, tailoring and spinning). According to B. N. Meenakshiamma there are very few people in the Ezhava community who realize the need/value of women's education. She says that many great men have said that progress of all communities depends upon its women. According to her the education available is not enough to equip girls to follow *stree dharmam*. She was of the opinion that if we do not include spiritual education, all other efforts will be useless. It will help women to interpret Hindu religion properly and to train and educate children who are the wealth of a community (*Sanghamitra* 1921).

There were women like Ponnamma who emphasized feminine values but criticized the notion of biological weakness of women and encouraged them to participate in the public activities (*Sahodari* 1929). Similarly, Mayyanattu Ikkavamma in her presiding speech at 4th S. N. D. P. *stree samajam* acknowledges the efforts made by S. N. D. P. for the entry of Ezhava girls into government schools. However she expresses her dissatisfaction in the progress of women's education and criticizes uneducated parents who do not send their girl children to school even for primary education. She points out to the debates of whether women should get higher education or primary (basic) education. She discusses the opinions of two groups: One group argues that women should get higher education since it is necessary for women to have equal knowledge as men. The other group argues that women do not have time for higher education so other than primary education they

should also be trained in house management, child care, health care etc. Meenakshiamma supports the second group as far as feminine duties are concerned. For her Indian women should consider modernization (*parishkaram*) as education, take caring of husband, child caring, cooking, music, *kaithozhil* (handicraft) etc (*Sanghamitra* 1921, 8). For her the major aim of women's education is to be trained in all matters which are useful for women (*Sanghamitra* 1921, 9). She adds that it is better for women to wear white dress, be religious and consider Sita as a role model.

There were also women who were much more radical and were against gendered education. For instance Kalayani Mundakkal, in her article "Bharatheeya Sthree Vidyabyasam" (Education of Indian Women) discusses the curriculum appropriate for women. She says that Congress and conferences have given much importance to women's education than men education. However she points how orthodox sections of the society and reformers have fought over the aim of women's life and the contribution of women education to make it practical. She pointed out that there should not be gender discrimination. According to her both women and men have same goals in life and the ultimate goal of education is to provide the same regardless of gender (*Sahodari* 1929 103–108). Mundakkal N. Meenakshiamma's "Aadhunikasthreekalotu" (To Modern Women) addresses the modern Ezhava women and takes a radical stand. She argues for the need for women to organize. She provides an alternatives to Ezhava and criticizes Ezhava women who are happy being housewives and urges them to earn a job which will provide them both money and honour.

Another group of women articulated their idea of reform and the role of education to pursue it. By doing so they tried to reinforce as equal space for women in public sphere. For instance, V. Parukkuttyamma in her article “Sahodarikalotu,” (“To the Sisters”) points out that community can bring about changes in their customs only if the majority are educated (*Sanghamitra* 1922). According to her, education for women is necessary for them to participate in the reform movement independently for community’s progress. Here we see Ezhava women as an active agent of modernization rather than being mere culture bearers.

Now let us look at different stances on modern education by Ezhava men and others. Ramakrishna Pillai, an upper caste as the surname suggests, in his article “Aadhunika Sthreevidyabyasavum Bharyapadaviyum” (Modern Women’s Education and Wifehood) suggests that women are much happier being wives (*Sanghamitra* 1921). He glorifies wifehood and says that higher education is not good for women because it takes a good amount of time in their life. Chembakakkutty’s “Gruhabharanam” (House Management), Sreenivasa Sastri’s “Gruhanayika.” (Housewife or Female Head of the House) and “Innathe Mahila Mandalam” (Today’s Woman Space) etc., give tips to women for being a good housewife. Sastri was of the opinion that rather than sending women to school they should be taught at home by a female teacher from the community itself.¹⁴ He was apprehensive that if the teachers are from Christian community they may urge them to convert to Christianity. Though the caste of these men were not mentioned it can be assumed that they are Ezhavas. However we need to note that as Sreenivasa Sastri’s

¹⁴ V. Sreenivasa Sastri says women should get educated at home only. There was a need to arrange women teachers to undertake home tuitions. As we see it should not be Christian teachers. Because they may urge them to convert into Christianity. So we need to arrange our own teachers for them.

account suggests, rather than a gendering process, Ezhava male was also worried about conversion. Often community reformation is seen as a product of threats of leaving community.

Here we see how differently Ezhava women, men and “other” (here Nair) engaged in the discourse on modern education. There are women like B. N. Meenakshiamma who see women as culture bearers and suggest that it is better to opt feminine jobs (agriculture, tailoring and spinning). Whereas women like Gauriamma, Ponnamma and Mayyanattu Ikkavamma emphasize that women have to be trained in feminine duties but criticize the construction of biological weakness of women and urged them to go to school as well participate in public programmes. K. Kalayani Mundakkal and Mundakkal N. Meenakshiamma are strong critics of patriarchy and argued against gendered education. Mundakkal N. Meenakshiamma criticizes Ezhava women who are happy being housewives and urges them to earn a job which gives them both money and honor. Whereas V. Parukkuttyamma has the view that education for women is necessary to participate in the reform movement independently for community’s progress.

More importantly, here we see that though some of them were concerned about their gendered position in public sphere, most of them argue for the entry of women in public sphere whether it is education, job or reform movement. Such voices are hardly recognized in history and upper-caste intellectuals always tend to conclude that the discourse on modern education was to produce ideal monogamous culture bearers. Here

we see that education for Ezhava women meant much more than making them culture bearers and best home-makers. For them it was mainly related to the question of community. It is interesting to note that the suggestions towards education of backward-caste women do not suggest any training in domesticity / home science which in the mainstream nationalist framework was furthered as necessary to nurture the education of the 'inner' sphere of the home. What this implies is a modernity that was framed differently for the lower / backward castes where the division between public and private was not so neat. Ezhava women were in fact not confined into the private/inner sphere. Ezhava reform has definitely succeeded in making Ezhava women's entry into "modernity" – education, participation in the public sphere, etc – possible. It has also to be noted the women who were actively involved in the process of reform were also aware of the debates surrounding the issue and were able to articulate them before taking a more or less informed opinion about the matter concerned.

4. 4. Caste Markers: Dress Reform, Women and Community

The clothing of Malayalees up to the beginning of the 20th century was not primarily related to the sense of nakedness of the body. As the style of wearing clothes with conspicuous differences of each caste and sub-caste was prescribed by customs, clothing functioned as a sign-system to designate the caste of the body. According to the grades in the system, one would wear a cloth on his/her waist strictly limiting the lower end above the knee-joint or up the knee-joint or above the ankle or stretching down the ankle. Nobody could transgress this custom as it was equal to the violation of one's own caste identity which would cost one one's life (Rajeevan 46–47).

Here we see how the style of wearing clothes marked the identity of caste in the beginning of 20th century. Udaya Kumar points out, in 19th century Kerala, clothing, ornaments, hairstyle, naming, and food constituted an elaborate sign-system which serves to mark the caste differences (*Self* 248).

Devika also points out how dress and ornaments served to mark social differences and hierarchical distinction and how jati-groups had to strictly maintain these signs (*Engendering* 255). She adds how lower castes' disregard for such conventions were read as challenge to upper caste power. She cites the example of the well known 'breast cloth struggle'(which is known as *Channar lahala*, *Melmundu Kalapam etc.*,) of the 19th century in the south Thiruvithamkoor which involved not only the issue of feminine modesty but also the struggle around *jati* (caste). The Channar women who had converted to Christianity in the 1850s began wearing *melmundu* (a cloth used to cover torso) which was used at that time by upper caste-Hindus on special occasions. Wearing of upper cloth would signify the symbolic equality of Channars with upper caste Nairs (Devika *Engendering* 255). This resulted in the Channar lahala of 1859. A Royal proclamation was declared that there was no objection to Channar women wearing *melmundu* but they should not exactly imitate the dress of upper-caste women: at least some small difference should be retained (Kumar *Self* 248–249). This shows how caste hierarchy is maintained even in the reformed dress code. This section will look into the discourse on dress reform and also the Ezhava women's and men's articulation of the same.

Scholars like Udaya Kumar, Devika and Rajeevan who have worked on dress reform have quoted C. Kesavan's account of a story of his mother-in-law wearing a *ravuakka* (blouse) for the first time. This particular incident dates back to the late 19th century:

My sister-in-law used to live in Trivandrum. Women used to wear blouses there, and she also began wearing them. My misfortune, when she came home, she brought me a couple of blouses. Two glittering blouses. How the blouse suited her! I also liked the blouses, and wore one at once. It looked good, but I felt ticklish wearing it. I took it off, folded it carefully, and brimming with enthusiasm, showed it to my mother. She gave me a stern look and said, 'Where are you going to gallivant in this? Fold it and keep it in the box.' She did not look cheerful in the least. I was scared of my mother. She could kill me. At night I wore the blouse and showed it to my husband. He said it looked good, and told me that I could wear it...He left in the morning. In my innocence, I came out wearing the blouse. Twisting and turning. I looked at myself; how lovely it looked...I stood there immersed in a daydream. I didn't notice my mother coming. Suddenly I heard her break a piece from a coconut branch. 'Take it off, you slut!' she said, 'you want to walk around in shirts like Muslim women? And, my God, she started beating me...Scared of her blows, I took off my blouse that day. But I was determined as well. If my mother did not like it, my husband liked it. During the day, I did not wear the blouse, but the night was mine. When I knew that my mother had slept, I used to take out the blouse and wear it. My husband used to come only very late, like a gandharva...

In Udaya Kumar's analysis, the 'blouse' ceases to be a caste marker, and becomes an object of personalized enjoyment. He sees the woman who wears blouse as a desiring subject. According to Devika, wearing *rauvukka* is an act of rebellion against the established authority (Amma) who saw the *rauvukka* as a sign of the 'dancing-girl' (*attakkari*) [Udayakumar uses the word 'slut' for *attakkari*] or detected in it a change in the wearer's position in the *janmabhedam* order (becoming a Muslim). According to Devika, the wearer of the blouse, however, wears it in defiance, seeing in it a way to make herself attractive to her husband. Whereas Rajeevan while pointing out how the woman wears blouse only in front of her husband in the bedroom, argues that this shows the emergence of the new sense of nudity and the sexualisation of women's breasts. Here female breasts become an object of sexuality. He sees this as a major transformation in the concept of women's body, sexuality and subjectifications in modern Kerala (Rajeevan 56).

Devika has examined the meaning of bare-breastedness in detail. She points out how historians of 20th century considered nakedness of female torso as the articulation of sexual submissiveness of Sudra women to upper caste dominance (here Nambutiri Brahmins) in Kerala. This interpretation leads to the assumption that in the past, women commonly used a *mulakkacha* (garment covering the breast) and a light upper cloth irrespective of caste, a convention Brahmin dominance seems to have ended (Devika *Engendering* 263). She draws examples from Robin Jefferey where a Nair girl was represented as the sexually exploited victim. However with another example she points out how both women and men from the lower castes (she uses the term 'lower

janamabheda’) were expected to display their submission by removing their upper-cloth, extraordinary attention was given to female bare-breastedness, linking it, not just an articulation of hierarchy of status, but also to the Nair woman’s obligation to provide sexual pleasure to the upper caste man. Devika argues:

Traditionally male bare-breastedness was at least as important as female bare-breastedness, and such signs of submission were to be produced by *both* men and women of groups placed lower in the *janmabheda* order before both men and women placed higher up (*En-Gendering* 265).

Drawing from Fawcett and others, she points out that reading of uncovered breasts as signifying immodesty seems to be a recent origin. Uncovering breast was not seen as a shameful activity by Nair women or Thiyya women rather covering of breasts was seen as immodest. It is also pointed out how covering of the breasts has become a seducing technique and how by covering of breasts, body becomes a desirable object. However as Devika points out, the covered female bosom did not always signify the sexually available female in traditional order rather it could signify a particular position in *janamabheda* order (*En-Gendering* 268). As we saw in the above discourses, the struggle of lower castes to gain access to the clothing of upper castes has been sidelined and only the bodies of upper caste women figure not the body of lower-caste women. Though Kesavan’s mother-in law is a lower caste woman, caste question did not come as the focus in the above mentioned scholars’ analysis.

Now let us look at how Ezhava men look at the issue of dress code of Ezhava women. Kesavan writes:

Mundu, *ravukka* and *thorthu* was the normal dress of small girls (*cherutharunikalute sadharana vesham*). But this dress code was not allowed for Ezhava women once. They were not supposed to cover their knees with mundu. The cloth which goes beyond the knees is called *achipputava*. *Achipputava* was used by only *achis* (nair women). Other women were not supposed to use *melmundu*. Breast should be kept open (vol. 1: 105-106).

In Kesavan analysis, we see the different dress code of Ezhava and Nair women. While Ezhava women were not allowed to cover their knees with mundu and Nair women had the right to cover their knees. And he mentions that except Nair women other women were not allowed to use *melmundu* too. He cites a dispute under the leadership of Arattu puzha Velayudha Panikkar against the agitated Nairs who removed an Ezhava woman's mundu which covered the knee. Rajendran writes:

Until 1865 neither males nor females of the Ilava community were permitted to wear any garment above the waist. Ilava women were not allowed to wear clothes extending below the knees. The high caste men regarded it an insult to them if the Ilava women covered their breasts (Raveendran viii).¹⁵ The proper salutation from a female of the low rank to persons of higher rank was to uncover the bosom. Higher caste men took it for granted that women of their community as well as those of the lower castes were created for their enjoyment. The social system did not give the Ilavas a sense of self-dignity. The Ilavas had very little chance to participate in improving their social conditions (23).

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that each man of the lower caste had to pay a tax for the hair he grew on his head and each woman for her breasts.

According to Rajendran the high caste men regarded it as an insult to them if the Ezhava women covered their breasts. He states that the proper salutation from a female of the low rank to persons of higher rank was to uncover the bosom. Kesavan states that it was compulsory that Nair women should remove *rauvukka* in the presence of *Thampurattimar*. Whereas Kayyalakyal Saradamma, an Ezhava woman, in her article “Ezhava Sthreekalute Avastha” (“The Condition of Ezhava Women”) describes Ezhava women’s condition and articulates her ideas on reform (*Sanghamitra* 1922).¹⁶ She compares matrilineal families to hell. She explains the Ezhava women’s condition in the matrilineal system. She says that women live according to the strict law made by *karanavars*.¹⁷ She writes:

Daughter in-law (*Anandirathikal*) of some *karanavars* are not supposed to cover breast with mundu. It is considered arrogance (*ahankaram*) if they do so. Even if they use melmundu (*mulakkacha*), they should remove it and keep it on their shoulders when they see *karanavars* from long distance. How pathetic and shameful a situation is this! Still it is practiced in some places, and women stand half naked in front of uncles. Long back it was common in many places. This bad habit (*durgunam*) is shown by our men in front of those who are known as upper caste.

This is not to deny the narrative that Ezhava women were supposed to uncover their breast in front of upper caste. But her narrative brings out the problem within the community where women are ill-treated by the *karanavars* of the community.

¹⁶ This was read in Eramallur S. N. D. P *Stree Samajam*.

¹⁷ Elder most member of the family.

However both female and male reformers from the community consider uncovering of breasts as shameful activity. Vallimavungal Ikkavamma, the first midwife among Ezhava women¹⁸ was in the forefront to reform clothing (*veshvidhanam*) and to standardize it (Kesavan vol 1: 79). Vaniyambatti writes about C. M. Rarichan Mooppan's article titled "Thiyya Society Reformation" which was published in West Coast Spectator (*Mitavadi* 1914, 35). Vaniyambatti suggests that it is better to write such articles in *Mitavadi* which has more readership than English newspapers. More than the popularity of these magazines, the content of the Mooppan's article is interesting. This article was addressed to the southern Malayalam Thiyya leaders. It is stated that since the majority of women in southern Malayalam (Malabar) do not completely cover their breasts, necessary steps should be taken to remove such practices. Mooppan says the same condition is prevalent in northern Malayalam too and those who do not get the opportunity to travel beyond Malabar will not see it as a shameful activity. According to him those who get such opportunity will definitely feel it because this intolerable activity exists nowhere except in Malabar (*Mitavadi* 1934, 35). It is also said that Churyanikanaran took the leadership to decide dress code for Thiyyas in Thalassery. It is also argued that in British Malabar though women in places like Calicut can be seen half-naked, all women cover their breasts even in poor families in Thalassery (Oruvatakkann). As discussed in the earlier chapters, Thalassery was one of the major centre of colonial administration. This suggests that colonial modernity was also responsible for such changes in the community.

¹⁸ Ikkavamma was an essayist and poet too. She ran a magazine called *Satheeratnam* after her retirement.

We see that women reformers who discuss women's issues within the community compared it with their men's condition in a caste ridden society. Uncovering of breast is considered as shameful activity for community than women. Sexual subjectification or the desired objectivity of women was not of much importance. Rather, focus was upon the desirability of community. A community's move towards modernity and self-respectability is the ground for such articulation. Rather than keeping women as centre of the discourse one has placed the community at the centre. To put it in other words, women's question was not the centre of these reforms, rather community was imagined through women. This is not to avoid the fact that even for upper-caste men, it was a shame for the community when women were bare breasted, uneducated and there were widows and sati being practiced. These made colonizers look down upon Hindus in general and therefore it was also a question of the community. But it was different for lower castes since they had to confront both upper-castes and colonizers. It was a matter of gaining respectability in front of colonizers but for that they needed to challenge the upper castes. As already noted, the Sharnar struggle had the support of Christian Missionaries. And similarly such changes took place first in Thalassery town of Malabar where reform movement as well as colonial presence was strong.

How the questions of caste/community and respectability were central to the social reforms of lower castes become more evident when we look at the discourse surrounding name. As already mentioned, naming also served as an important marker of caste. Saradamma, Kayyalakyal in her article "Ezhavasthreekalute Avastha" notes that Ezhavas were not supposed to use good names and there were only Chakki, Kotha or Unakkali.

According to her Kalyani, Kamalakshi, Chellamma and Thankamma were common among upper castes.¹⁹ She is arguing for the right to have good names for the lower castes. Such voices of women are hardly noticed in the history.

It is important to mention *Amma Vazhakku* (Amma dispute) between Ezhavas and Nairs during this period (1905-1915). Let us see the narratives of Ezhava men and women regarding this issue. Kesavan in his autobiography *Jeevithasamaram* mentions that *Amma vazhakku* occurred much later after Ezhavas got permission for entry in the schools. Ezhava girls started adding the suffix 'Amma' with their names. But the Nairs took a stand that only Nair women have the right to add the suffix 'Amma' with their names. But Ezhavas argued that *Ezhathikal* (Ezhava women) can also have it. He writes that Nair head mistresses and head masters decided not to give admission to the Ezhava girls who uses the suffix 'Amma' with their name (100).

P. R. Mandakiniyamma Asramam, an Ezhava woman, in her article "Amma" discusses about issue of adding suffix 'Amma' with Ezhava women's name. She gives an example of Gauriamma. M. A. who was denied the use of the suffix 'Amma' with her name in many *savarna* newspapers. So as to retain her self-respect she directly complained to the government and found a solution to this problem. Mandakiniamma questions that "If an uneducated and uncultured Nair woman can add Amma with her name why can't an educated and cultured Ezhava woman and Christian woman use that?" For her this is a

¹⁹ This was read in Eramallur S NDP Sthrisamajam. Saradamma, Kayyalakyal . "Ezhavasthreekalute Avastha"sanghamitra.1097. midhunam.2.11

matter of self-respect. She suggests to conduct *Stree Samajams* everywhere and to pressure the government to pass a law which gives the permission to use suffix 'Amma' with the name of Ezhava women. She also suggests that community newspapers should also take up this issue. She makes a point that this assertion can be wrongly interpreted as Ezhava women eager to use the upper caste marker i.e., the name of 'Amma', especially in the historical context where upper caste reject their caste name. But she argues that this issue is raised because any custom or *anushatanam* which curtail individual freedom is not entertained (*Sanghamitra* 1921).

Udaya Kumar writes:

The addition of amma to the names of Ezhava women, Panikkar to Ezhava men, the dropping of diminutives such as kunju or kutty by lower castes--none of these changes, be it an acquisition or the relinquishing of a caste marker, had a smooth and entirely unchallenged passage.

As Udaya Kumar points out, it was not only the issue of adding 'Amma' to the name of Ezhava women, men's attempt to add Panikkar and to avoid the diminutives of Kunju and Kutty of men were also challenged by upper castes. Thus both men and women in the community had to confront such issues.

4.5. Women: Community vs Nation

Mainstream chronicles of feminist movement in India and historians have focused largely on how women were part of the nationalist struggle throughout the struggle for independence. While this has added to our notions of history, it has simultaneously been exclusive of how for a majority of women the question of nation was secondary to the

immediate question of lived-experience which was framed around the question of caste. This section would address such concerns through an examination of how Ezhava women addressed different issues surrounding community/nation. The attempt is also to deconstruct mainstream nationalist narratives of communities.

We will begin by looking at two upper caste women's assertions on the questions of reform, community and nation. Bhageerathiamma's "Samudayasahodarathvam" (community brotherhood) is addressed to women in the Hindu community. Bhageerathiamma's caste is not mentioned anywhere. Here, M. S. S. Pandian's observation is important. He states how upper castes are silent on the issue of caste since it (implying caste as a pre-modern issue) encode them as being a pre-modern realm. According to Bhageerathiamma, nature has created only two communities – man and woman. As far as the question of reform is concerned, she says:

Every individual's practice of religion and caste may be different. I am not suggesting to make any immediate changes in that. Even then every community should live in brotherhood and equality with each other. This is a nice way in which the community strength may be augmented.

She concludes the article with a statement that she doesn't think Hindu community can be relieved from disasters like colonial rule unless and until women as a community live in "brotherhood." By retaining the differences she wants Hindu women to be united for a Hindu nation. She is totally silent about community issues and is more concerned about building a Hindu nation.

E. Kalaynikkuttiamma's article "Keralahindumahilakal" which was actually addressed in the first All Kerala Women's Meeting suggests how to revive Kerala Hindu community being ahindu woman. She has pointed out the pathetic condition of women in Nambutiri community. While pointing out how powerful women in Nair community were in the past, she states that their association with Brahmins has degraded Nair women's status as mere housewives. She promotes women to stand against untouchability and bad customs (*anacharams*), and argues for temple entry for all Hindus including Thiyyas and Cherumas who she mentions take bath and use clean dress. Her upper caste position is clear from her description of lower castes like Thiyyas and Cherumas. While discussing the women's issues in Nambutiri and Nair community, she is more concerned how Kerala Hindu community can be revived (*Sahodari* 1929).

Now we will look at the concerns of Ezhava women reformers on the question of community and nation. V. Parukkuttyamma's article "Sahodarikalotu," (To the Sisters) which appeared in *Sanghamitra*, laments the fact that Ezhava women's status is pathetic compared to women from other communities. She articulates the need for women's education for community's development and expresses her discontent with the kind of education which is available to them. She asks women not to be dependent on men and stresses on the need to work together for community's development. She points out the necessity of a newspaper (*Pathram*) to discuss community issues among Ezhava women. She states that men in their community were able to "solve" many community issues i.e., the eradication of "bad" customs and implementation of "good" customs through a proper communication among themselves with the help of their newspaper. With a remark on

Abharanatyagam (Say no to ornaments) of women she acknowledges the importance of *Sanghamitra* as women's voice and it as the proof of Ezhava women's voice in the reform movement. She realizes the power of literary medium like magazines in the project of modernity and encourages women to involve in community activities. According to her *abharanatyagam* hardly got any attention because it was shadowed by the temple entry movement of men. She adds that it would have been noticed and successful if they had a magazine or newspaper of their own (*Sanghamitra* 1921). Here we see that the way in which she interprets the act of saying no to ornaments is also different from men. For example, Madhavan Pillai's "Aadhunika Vanithakal," ("Modern Women") which addresses Hindu women, criticizes women's interest to wear ornaments and costly dresses. He asks women to avoid the use of foreign made goods and to be a part of Swadeshi Movement. For him saying no to ornaments is a part of nationalist movement whereas for Parukkuttyamma it is to make the "reform" successful i.e., for community's progress. It implies that women were aware of community issues and their idea of reform was different from both Ezhava men/upper-caste men (*Sanghamitra* 1921). Similarly, Ponnamma in her article "Streekalodu" (To Women) also argues that men and women should work together for community organization and community's progress (*Sahodari* 1929, 127). According to her the programmes set for community's progress only by men while subjugating women will never be completely successful.

Kayyalakyal Saradamma, an Ezhava woman, in her article "Ezhavasthreekalute Avastha" (The Condition of Ezhava Women) describes Ezhava women's condition and articulates her ideas on reform (*Sanghamitra* 1922). She emphasizes on various aspects of women's

reform and argues for ornament reform, dress reform, food reform, marriage reform, etc. She advises women to attend all the meetings of Ezhava men. This on the one hand shows women had their own opinion on all aspects of reform and on the other she argues for equality with men. However she also urges women to participate in country matters along with community matters. She asks women to follow *Kshetratyaganayam*, and also not to imitate white men and women. She also urges the women to stop their husbands from the profession of toddy tapping and to begin weaving industry. Here we see that the question of community and nation are linked.

B. N. Meenakshi Amma in her article “Oru Prasangam” which is the report of her speech in the *Stree Samajam* (women’s meeting) of S. N. D. P. documents how she envisages the communities of women/Ezhavas/Keralites/nation. She writes: “Now we should specially think about matters in Kerala, Thiruvithamkoor and especially our community. We will not become mere selfish women by doing so” (*Sanghmitra* 1922). Here by our community, she means Ezhava community in the Thiruvithamkoor region. According to her, one should reform one’s own home and community and when everyone does this, it leads to the reform of the world. She interprets the meaning of the word *Swathanthryam* (freedom) and says that it is the most valuable inborn treasure. We see here that freedom of the community is the primary concern for her. She also talks about the larger community i.e., Keralites and the role of Ezhavas in that community of Keralites. She points out that Ezhava community does not even have human rights. So they should strive to attain freedom. According to her, women’s education is for community’s progress. It will help women to interpret Hindu religion properly and to train and educate children who are the wealth of community. She distinguished themselves with

Muhammadeeyar (Muslims) and Nambutiris who follow dowry system. She gives preference to community's reform in order to build a Hindu nation. She thinks that community's issues should be solved in order to achieve a larger cause i.e., nation²⁰ and she encourages brotherhood among Hindu communities.

Upper-caste women like Bhageerathiamma and Kalyanikkuttiamma while addressing the question of nation, marginalize the question of community. Whereas Ezhava women like Kayylakkal Saradamma encourage women to engage with the issues concerning community and nation simultaneously. Whereas B. N. Meenakshi Amma urges women to address the questions of women/Ezhavas/Keralites/and nation in that order. We also find women like Parukkuttiamma and Ponnamma whose focus is on women's role in community's progress. The question of women, community and state is prioritized over the question of nation. To conclude, we see how different Ezhava women's imagination of nation was though for some, the question of nation was linked with the question of community, Ezhava women were generally concerned about issues of their own community than the question of a nation. In other words, for them, community issues should be solved in order to achieve a "larger cause" i.e., nation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the voices of Thiyya and Ezhava women in various discourses around Thiyya and Ezhava social reform movements as well as nationalism. The first sub-section titled "Theorizing Gender in Social Reform Movements in India"

²⁰ Meenakshiamma, B.N. "Oru Prasangam". Sanghmitra.

discussed theories on gender in the social reform movements by feminist scholars in India. We find parallels between Ambedkarite movement in the west and the Dravidian movement in the south for Thiyya and Ezhava reform movements. The second sub-section, “*Stree Samajams* (Women’s Associations) and Women’s Participation in Thiyya and Ezhava Social Reform Movements,” documented the Thiyya and Ezhava *Stree Samajams*, which are formed as part of their social reform movements, and also examined how Thiyya women and Ezhava women engaged in the process of reform through these *Samajams*.

The third sub-section, “Women’s Education and the Question of Community,” pointed out how differently Ezhava women, men and ‘other’ (especially Nair) women engaged in the discourse of modern education. The argument is that that education for Ezhava women meant much more than making them culture bearers and ideal homemakers. For them, it was mainly related to the question of community. It was noted that the women who were actively involved in the process of reform were also aware of the debates surrounding the issue and were able to articulate them before taking a more or less informed opinion about the matter concerned. The fourth sub-section, “Caste Markers: Dress Reform, Women and Community,” looked at the theorization on dress reform and discussed the articulation of the Ezhavas and Thiyyas in this matter. It was also argued that Thiyya and Ezhava reformers envisaged community identity/status through their women. And the fifth sub-section “Women: Community vs Nation” argues that Ezhava women perceived and prioritised community over nation.

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CHAPTER IV

Legal Changes in Thiyya and Ezhava Social Reform Movements: Community Identity, Kinship and Sexuality of Women

This chapter brings out the role of caste, gender and sexuality in the making of the identity of the community. The chapter would also address how marginalisation of the women's question among Thiyyas has been a major factor that helped subsume Thiyyas under the category of Ezhavas. Beginning with the survey of different scholars' opinion regarding the inheritance system of Thiyyas and Ezhavas and critiquing the matrilineal studies in Kerala, the chapter would address the following questions. How both women and men from Thiyya and Ezhava communities engaged in the discourse around legalization of inheritance? How does Thiyyas' transformation to patriliney overshadowed the question of women as well as the question of community identity? What were the discourse around family structure, marriage and *Sambandham* among Thiyyas and Ezhavas and its role in the unification of both communities? How does the discourses on regulation of marriages and divorce help to forge a community identity for Thiyyas and Ezhavas?

The scholars Padmanabha Menon, K. K Pillai, Jeffery and Ilamkulam argues that *Marumakkathayam* system or Matrilineal System of inheritance originated in Kerala during 11th century whereas the scholars like P. V. Balakrishnan argues that matriliney was native to the soil of Malabar. Most of these studies are based upon the assumption

that matriliney “originated” in Nair community. Based upon such assumption it has also been argued that other communities in Kerala followed matrilineal inheritance system only by imitating them.¹ Since the origin of Matriliney in Kerala is still a subject of debate we cannot reach upon any conclusion regarding where and among which community it originated. However, often communities has been identified by the inheritance system which they follow. In the Travancore State Manual, Velu Pillai states:

As regards inheritance, the different communities can be classified according as the system followed by them is patriarchal, matriarchal or a mixture of both. At the last census conducted in 1931, out of a total Hindu population of 3,134,888 persons 882,163 were *Makkathayis*, 925,902 *Marumakkathayis* and 1,328,821 followers of mixed or doubtful system (421).

In order to prove that half of the population in Kerala is matrilineal, Jeffery quotes Thiruvithamkoor census report of 1891, which counted 530,000 families, of which 56 percent were classified as matrilineal and 44 percent patrilineal (“Legacies” 649). However here the point is, in Travancore State Manual which was published much later in 1940, we find a new category which followed a mixed or doubtful system. Probably this may be the group who belong to the matrilineal system in the beginning and changed in to the patrilineal system gradually. Puthenkalam has listed the matrilineal communities of Kerala² and has also pointed out that almost all castes in North Kerala followed

¹ According to Jeffery, where Thiyyas or Ezhavas were more prosperous, they tended to affect the matrilineal customs of the dominant Nayers. Aiyappan also argues that Ezhavas followed matriliney by imitating Nairs. (A.Aiyappan, *Eravas and Cultural Change*(Madras: Government Press,1944). See Jeffery 81; Aiyappan

² Thiyyas of North Kerala, Ezhavas of Kanganur Taluk, Channars of Mayyanad, Tandans Thirumumpus (Payyannur Nambutiris), the Malayala Kshatriyas- Koil Tampurans, Thirumulpads, Samanthas- adioti,

matriliny (*Puthenkalam* vi).³ The drastic difference regarding the inheritance in southern and northern Kerala has also reflected in the enactment and amendment of inheritance law in both regions. But the discourses around the enactment of inheritance law among Thiyyas and Ezhavas have not reflected the complexities of the inheritance system which they follow. Before going into it we will look at different scholar's opinion on the complex inheritance system among Thiyyas and Ezhavas.

According to Logan, while Thiyyas of North Malabar followed matrilineal system, Thiyyas of South Malabar followed patrilineal system (*Malabar Manual* 115). Thurston also shares the same opinion. According to him South Malabar Thiyyas' inheritance is through males and North Malabar Thiyyas' inheritance is through females.⁴ Without making any distinction between Thiyyas and Ezhavas, Ragendran argues:

Marumakkathayam or Matrilineal system of inheritance was in force among the Ezhavas of North Malabar, Kasargodu, Southern parts of Cochin and Travancore. At the same time South Malabar, Northern part of Cochin state and certain part of Travancore *Makkathayam* was practiced. Among the Ezhavas of South Quilon, both systems were practiced (27).

Nedungadi, Unniyathiri, Pandala, Eradi, Vellodi, Mulpad etc., Ambalavasis, Adikal, Chakkyar, Kurukkal, Nambidi, some castes of Nambiyars like Chakkayar, Theeyattu and Pushpaka Nambiyar, Pattarunni, Plappalli, Pisharati, Poduval (Mala Poduval and Chanda Poduval) Pushpakar (Deivampadi), Vaniyar, Marar, Theiyampati Karup etc., all nayars except Mannadiyas, Saiva Vellalas, Arayas, Krishana Vakakkars (Malayalam-speaking), Valar, Mannans, Kusavans, Vaniyans of North Kerala, Chaliyans, the Vannan of North Malabar, The Mappilas of North Malabar and Edava (south of Quilon), A few Christians of Nayattunkara taluk, Hill tribes such as, Uralas, Ulladar, Neyadis, Muthuvas, Vatakkann Parayas, Kana Pulayas and Tanda Pulayas etc. see *Puthenkalam* 19.

³ The 1901 Census report of Kerala states that 578 castes in the state follow matrilineal system of inheritance (*Puthenkalam* 18).

⁴ See, *Malabar Gazetteer*. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, Vol. VII (Delhi: Cosmo, 1975).

Velu Pillai in the Travancore State Manual notes, Ezhavas⁵ as the followers of mixed or doubtful system (422). Joseph also have the same opinion. He states:

The Ezhavas of south Travancore, though followers of *marumakkathayam* system generally, have adopted a dual system of inheritance in case of self-acquired properties. They are said to be followers of the 'Misravazhi' or 'Makkal or Marumakkalvazhi' system of inheritance (qtd. in Puthenkalam 19).

In Kochi State Manual, it is stated that Ezhavas of Kochi, Kanayannur Thaluk are matrilineal and rest of the places they are patrilineal. Puthenkalam also argues :

Though almost all the Ezhavas of Travancore and Cochin follow patriliney or 'misravazhi' (mixed inheritance system), the Channars of Mayyanad (South of Quilon) and the Ezhavas of Kaniyannur taluk (in Ernakulam Dt.), a small minority, follow matriliney (vi).

Scholars like Logan have the opinion that Ezhavas followed patrilineal system. However we can reach into a conclusion that while the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor followed matriliney (*Marumakkathayam*), patriliney (*Makkathayam*) and mixed system (*Misradayam*) in certain areas, the Thiyyas of South Malabar followed patrilineal system and Thiyyas of North Malabar followed only matrilineal system.⁶

4. 1. A Critique of Matrilineal Studies and the Legalization of Inheritance in Kerala.

This section critically looks at the matrilineal studies in Kerala which largely neglect the Thiyya and Ezhava matriliney and also discusses the ways in which both men and women

⁵ He has used the term Ilavas.

⁶ According to Edgar Thurston, South Malabar Thiyyas' inheritance is through males and North Malabar Thiyyas' inheritance is through females. See Thurston.

from both communities have engaged in the discourse around legalization of inheritance. Most of the existing studies of matrilineal system in Kerala largely deal with Nair matriliney. It has been empirically studied by a number of social anthropologists and sociologists like Gough (1951), Unni (1958), Puthenkalam (1977), Jeffery (2004) etc. Historians like Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai (1953), Padmanabha Menon (1983) and research scholars like P. V. Balakrishnan (1981) , Renjini (2000) , Kodoth (2001), Arunima (2003) etc. have exclusively dealt with Nair matriliney and most of them deal with the matrilineal system in Malabar.

Meera Velayudhan (2008), Aiyappan (1944), Jeffery (2004) have studied the matrilineal system among Ezhavas without making any difference between Thiyyas and Ezhavas. However Robin Jeffery points out that there are local difference among Thiyyas and Ezhava regarding marriage practices. While pointing out that there are no remarkable studies on the status of Thiyya women, Manjula attempts to trace the real status of Thiyya women in matrilineal system and their change thorough colonialism and patriliney during late 19th and early 20th century in North Malabar. She points out the paradox of women's status in matrilineal system. She says, on the one hand matrilineal Thiyya women were honored through customs and celebrations but on the other hand they did not have any right to property. According to her colonialism and English education has made significant change in the life of Thiyya women of North Malabar and she has also studied the status of matrilineal Thiyya women before and after British administration. Though her work exclusively deals with Thiyya matriliney, her contention that matrilineal Thiyya women did not have any right to property needs to be contested.

Janaki Abraham's ethnographic study of matrilineal Thiyyas deserves special attention. It is an attempt to provide a critical framework for the study of gender and caste, as well as matrilineal kinship in India. Her study focuses on the practice of kinship and processes of transformation in kinship. She argues that caste boundaries are socially and historically constituted and also explores the way in which caste and kinship are mutually constituted. The present study will look at process of Thiyyas' and Ezhavas' transformation to patrilineal system and addressed the question of caste as well as community.

Now, we will look at the legalization of inheritance in Kerala. Each region in Keralam i.e., Thiruvithamkoor, Kochi and Malabar had different legislation on matrilineal kinship of Hindus.⁷ While in Thiruvithamkoor, Nairs and Ezhavas had separate regulations regarding the marriage and inheritance (Nair regulation of 1912 and Ezhava regulation of 1925)⁸, in Malabar, the Madras Marumakkthayam Act was passed in 1933 which was applicable to all matrilineal communities. As G. Arunima notes while the Madras Marumakkathayam Act was passed in the legislative council allowing for the division and partition of the matrilineal *tharavadu* (matrilineal household), the final act abolishing matrilineal kinship itself was passed by the Kerala Legislature in 1976 (2). As she points out though the marriage bill had been introduced for all matrilineal Hindus, i.e., the Samanthars, the Nairs and the Thiyyas, the debate of the period centred on the interests of the two upper castes, Samanthars and Nairs (142). Chatterjee writes:

⁷ Laws of Muslims in Malabar Mappila Succession Act (1918 –self acquired property of matrilineal Muslims now to be governed by Muslim law). Malabar Mappila Marumakkathaya act (1939 - which give right to demand per capita division for matrilineal Muslims).

⁸ It is said that Ezhava Law committee was compelled to exclude the patrilineal Ezhavas from the proposed legislation due to their opposition. See Meera Velayudhan.

Changes took place in the colonial period mostly outside the area of political agitation, in a domain where the nation thought of itself as already free. It was after independence, when the nation had acquired political sovereignty, that it became legitimate to embody the ideas of reform in legislative enactment about marriage rules, property rights, suffrage, equal pay, equality of opportunity, etc.

One needs to think as we see in the Kerala context, how far the independent nation gives justice to the lower castes' demand for the legalization of their inheritance system and property rights. However we cannot ignore the fact that Ezhavas tried to negotiate with the indigenous and colonial government for the legal sanction concerning inheritance and property rights. The next section would critically look at Thiyyas' engagement in the discourse around matriliney and see how the question of gender and community has been marginalized in the process.

4. 2. Thiyya and Ezhava Matrilineal System: Community and Women

This section critically analyses Thiyya reformers acceptance of Madras Marumakkthayam act of 1933 which was applicable to Thiyyas with other matrilineal communities. When we look at the discourse around changes in inheritance system, we see a bulk of literature produced on the topic among Ezhavas which demand such legislation and the absence of such records among Thiyyas. We would look at Thiyyas participation in such discourse following an examination of Ezhavas participation in it. One may find that among the matrilineal communities,⁹ it was Nairs who took the

⁹ Jeffery notes, as per the Travancore census in 1891, among 530,000 families 56 percent were classed matrilineal and 44 percent patrilineal. According to Puthenkalam, there are about twenty castes and seven tribes/adivasis who follow matrilineal system all over Keralam. See Jeffrey 649; Mahadevan 531-542.

initiative for the legislation of marriage and inheritance in each region (Jeffery 651).¹⁰ As in other matters, in the beginning, the government hasn't taken any step towards Ezhavas demand for legislation of Ezhavas' marriage and property rights.¹¹ Let us see a note taken from *Vivekodayam*.

This time there were seven Ezhava representatives in the Prajasabha. All these seven members were appointed by the government among them C. Krishnan Vaidyan's speech was about the need to change Ezhava's inheritance system either making another law in the model of Nair regulation or making some changes in Nair regulation itself and the need to implement it among Ezhavas. Many other Ezhava representatives have talked about it before and they have even submitted a special memorial. We know that Ezhavas are facing many community issues in the absence of a law regarding inheritance and marriage. Therefore, we believe that, with kindness government will immediately try to implement the above mentioned law.¹²

The above note suggests government's negligence of the memorials submitted by Ezhavas demanding legislation of inheritance system. Later, based upon the memorials submitted to government by the leading Ezhava gentlemen and Ezhava *samajams*, which demands law of succession and marriage for the community, in the year 1916, the

¹⁰Kumaran Asan in his diary writes: "drafted a circular letter to be sent to the leading Ezhavas of Travancore regarding the desirability of moving the Govt. for a regulation like the Nair Regulation for Ezhavas. See Prabhakaran 30.

¹¹ *Vivekodayam* 10. 9,10. 268.

¹² See *Vivekodayam* 11.

Thiruvithamkoor government appointed a committee to enquire about the customs followed by Ezhava community with regard to marriage and inheritance.¹³

In *Vivekodayam* editorials, in the year 1917, points out the delay of the activities of Ezhava law committee. It has been suggested that it is more convenient to follow the Nair regulation regarding the rule of succession but the rules regarding the marriage and divorces should be taken carefully (*Vivekodayam* 1917, 151-152). The popular disagreement in this opinion is pointed out in the later issue of *Vivekodayam*. The editorial note of *Vivekodayam* (1917) is about the earlier attempts made through *Vivekodayam* which demand that in order to form a law for the Ezhavas of Thiruvithamkoor, the committee which has been appointed by the government should be given the permission to collect information through witness trial. It is said that, a decision was taken regarding this and it has been sent to the government later in the committee meeting which was held on 1st of *Kumbam*.¹⁴ Other than this Ezhava representatives of *Prajasabha* also submitted a memorandum to Divanji stating the need of witness trial and requesting the permission to do so. They have also demanded Divanji to bear all expenses for this purpose. Most importantly it is pointed out that before the formation of committee, many Ezhava leaders had the opinion that Nair regulation can be modified and form Ezhava regulation and they have informed the government too. However the public opinion in this matter was different and they articulated the need to

¹³ Report says: Earlier Committee consisted, besides the President, of two officials and two non-official members. Out of these 4 members, two belonged to the Trivandrum Division and the remaining two to the Quilon Division. Again, three out of the four members followed the mixed system of inheritance, while one was a pure Marumakkathayee. Thinking, therefore, that it would be an advantage to have two more non-official members on the committee, preferably from the Ezhavas of the Kottayam Division who follow pure Marumakkathayam, the Government in their Order No. J. 5184, dated the 21st June, 1916, appointed two additional members. See The Ezhava regulation 773- 774.

¹⁴ Malayalam month

consider public opinion. In short this note argued for the need to conduct witness trial and demanded government to consider the request of committee members and *prajasabha* members (*Vivekodayam* 1917, 137-83).

The Ezhava Law Committee has examined the petition presented by the Christian Ezhavas of Neyyattinkara Taluk, letter of Bishops, resolution of various meetings of Ezhavas men and Ezhava women etc. But as Meera Velayudhan states, women were viewed generally as subjects incapable of expressing informed or competent opinion and among the 863 witnesses, only 10 were women (*Reform* 2481). However many Ezhava men and women showed their disagreement with the implementation of such law. Meera Velayudhan writes:

The Ezhava Law Committee decided to exclude the sections following makkathayam system of inheritance from the ambit of its proposed legislation owing to opposition from that section. A common law covering those who followed the marumakkathayam, misradayam, and makkathayam was considered to be too radical a step at that moment (*Reform* 2482).¹⁵

It was not only the *makkathayis* (people who belonged to patrilineal system) who had problem with this law rather the *marumakkathayis* (people who belong to matrilineal system) also showed their disinterest in this law. C. Kesavan, an Ezhava reformer addresses C. V. Kunjuraman¹⁶ as the one who initiated the changes and encouraged Ezhavas to change from matrilineal system to patrilineal system. According to C.

¹⁵ Ezhava Law Committee 1919:6

¹⁶ C. V. Kunjuraman was acclaimed social reformer of Ezhava Community. His daughter Vasanthi was married to C. Kesavan, another young social reformer of the period.

Kesavan, once this message was spread among community, Kunjuraman changed his mind and he argued for *misradayam* (Mixed System of Inheritance) (vol. 2: 191). As a result, *Keralakaumudi*¹⁷ restarted its function from Kollam–Paravoor to support this cause. There were many campaigns and also public meeting to support matrilineal system or mixed system of inheritance. During this time, as reported in Deshabhimani a *misramisramahayogam* was conducted in Mayyanadu to support this cause and section 33 was made in support of *misradayam*.

As articulated by C. Kesavan, his wife Vasanthi, disagreed with him and with the support of her father (C. V. Kunjuraman), signed in the petition which supports matriliney (vol. 2: 191-193). Vasanthi's act can be read as women's enthusiasm in keeping the matrilineal system of inheritance. And we can read this not as the history of one family, but as history of a community too. C. Kesavan tries to understand Kunjuraman's sympathetic attempt towards him. He states that Kunjuraman might have understood that if they continue in matrilineal system, it is going to benefit his daughter and indirectly his son-in-law (C. Kesavan) because there were not many women in the *tharavadu*. This points out that in the matrilineal system of Ezhavas, the property goes to women and indirectly men were also benefited. Nevertheless we see that the Thiruvithamkoor Ezhava regulation's definition of Ezhavas includes Chova, Thiyyas and others known or recognized as Ezhavas (*Ezhava Regulation* 783). And the regulation is applicable to all Ezhavas domiciled in Thiruvithamkoor other than those who follow *Makkathayam*, and apply to such Ezhavas, whether domiciled or not, as have or shall have marital relation with Ezhavas domiciled in Travancore (*Ezhava Regulation* 781). Most interestingly

¹⁷ Malayalam news paper or magazine.

Ezhavas Law Committee Report considers, those who migrated from Malabar to Thiruvithamkoor during Tipu's invasion and did not discard their caste name Thiyya (K. G. Narayanan 41). By including Thiyyas (here the migrated Thiyyas from Malabar) and also envisaging Thiyyas who are known as Ezhavas, Ezhava regulation has also contributed to homogenization of these two communities.

Now, coming to the Thiyyas's participation in the discourse around matrilineal system, as already pointed out, in Malabar, Madras Marumakkthayam Act of 1933 was applicable to Thiyyas with other matrilineal communities. Moorkkot Kumaran, a Thiyya reformer writes:

Since north Malayalam Thiyyas are matrilineal like Nairs it is not necessary to state that the honorable Raman Menon's bill is entrusted to them too. The absence of Thiyyas in the debates around these bills we see in the newspaper will lead us to assume that either they support the bill or they are least bothered about the implementation of the bill (*Mitavadi* 1914, 12).

There were many attempts to prove that Thiyyas were least bothered about the rules regarding succession and the implementation of the bill. Puthenkalam argues that since the large majority of Thiyyas were poor and powerless, inheritance customs were only of academic value (qtd. in Jeffery *Politics* 49). Gough also states, "The exact provisions of these acts are a somewhat academic matter for the poorer Thiyyar tenants and laborers, who own little property" (408). This seems as too simple and a sweeping generalisation. One needs to critically think about the reformers intentions during this period.

Moorkoth Kumaran states that there weren't many wealthy *tharavads* among North Malabar Thiyyas (*Mitavadi* 1914, 12). As a result those who have to meet daily expenses to live, usually stay with their wife and children. This statement was made to prove that there were many nuclear patriarchal families during this time. The educated Thiyyas' tendency to shift from matrilineal system to patrilineal system is also well drawn by him. He says "those who are educated and in government service has taken father's family name. We cannot identify one's *tharavadu* thorough the house name. Mr. Kottieth Kannan is from Adiyeri Tharavadu and Mr. Kottieth Krishnan belongs to Moorkoth Tharavadu. Moreover he states that "this shows their jump into *makkathayam*" ((*Mitavadi* 1914, 13). He concludes the article by proposing the marriage bill with the following sentence, "The Thiyyas who have empathy to patriliney, who do not want to make the marriage invalid and do not deny children's relationship with their father, definitely honour this Bill ((*Mitavadi* 1914, 12). This article is written in the male perspective and here we see how the reformers normalize and accept patriliney among Thiyyas. This becomes clearer when we go deep into the discourse around marriage and divorce.

In this section we have noted that though Thiyyas' inheritance was through female (Thurston (1975), Aiyar (1903) the reformers were silent about this. In Malabar, the Thiyya reformers' normalization and acceptance of patriliney among Thiyyas has in fact overshadowed the question of women as well as the question of community identity.¹⁸ And in Thiruvithamkoor in spite of opposition from women and men from different section, Ezhava regulation which homogenizes both communities was implemented.

¹⁸ In the matrilineal system of Thiyyas and Ezhavas inheritance to property was through females.

4. 3. Marriages, *Sambandham* and Family Structure among Thiyyas and Ezhavas

This section critically looks at different marital systems, *Sambandham* and family structures prevailed among Thiyyas and Ezhavas before reformation period and also the discourses around it during the reform period. *Sambandham* is a complex alliance between a man and woman among the matrilineal castes. The mainstream historiography mostly deals with the *sambandham* among Nairs. This section would attempt to understand whether Thiyyas' and Ezhavas' *sambandham* system was different from the *sambandham* system of Nairs. This section also examines the historians' and the social reformers' articulation of such customs and argues that such discourses projected Thiyyas and Ezhavas as one community and thereby helped the process of homogenization of both communities. Here one can see community identity, marital system and the system of inheritance as inseparably connected.

Before going to the debate on *sambandham*, we will look at other major reforms of customs which were related to the question of women, marriage as well as community. While introducing the new marriage system, during the reform period we see a lot of discussion about the eradication of customs like *Thalikettu Kalyanam* (marriage by tying the *tali*),¹⁹ *Thiranduuli* (Puberty Rite), *Pulikuti* (tasting tamarind juice) etc. According to Puthenkalam, *Talikettu Kalyanam* or *Kettukalyanam* was a special ceremony which every matrilineal community in Kerala used to perform (40). Puthenkalam argues that "In North Kerala among the Tiyas, *Tali Kettukalyanam* is more generally known as *Pandal*

¹⁹ Puthenkalam explains "the Malayalam word- *thalikettu kalyanam* –is made up 'tali', 'ketu' "kalyanam". Tali is a tiny gold ornament shaped like the leaf of a banyan tree; 'ketu' means tying, derived from the work 'kettuka', to tie. And 'kalyanam' stands for any auspicious event." For details see Puthenkalam 35.

Mangalam” (46). In Malabar, among Thiyyas, *Kettukalayanam* is also known as *Manjukulikalyanam* (smearing the girl with turmeric). Scholars have different opinions on *Tali Kettukalayanam*. According to M. D Raghavan and Achyutha Menon, it is a real marriage (qtd. in Puthenkalam 37). While Kathleen Gough argues that it was a ceremony signifying group marriage, Aiyappan considers it as an initiation rite for girls capacitating them to enter matrimony later.

As articulated by many reformists there are two motives for *Acharaparishkaranam* (reformation of customs) in the community. As Sree Narayana Guru states that such customs are useless and expensive and it brings unnecessary financial burden upon the community. The other argument was that it is better to put an end to such customs to “keep” or to build community honour. In an article “Acharaparishkaranam”, it is stated that our customs are different and it may seem that it is difficult to unify and modify it. Most interestingly one would see that *Kettukalyanam* has been called as *Midhya Vivaham* (fake marriage). The writer states that, as Guru points out *Midhya Vivaham* (fake marriage or *Kettukalayanam*) is useless and it is better to put an end to such customs. The other argument was that such marriages are not mentioned in any Hindu Texts. And since marriage is very important in one’s life it is shameful for a progressive community to celebrate the marriage which has been called as fake marriage. It is also states that if the women of Adi-Brahmanas can stay without tying *Tali* their entire life, an Ezhava woman can also do so (*Vivekodayam* 1903, 28-31). As we see here all questions are mainly concerned about community rather than women.

One should notice that all these customs are centered around women. According to C. Kesavan, an Ezhava social reformer, it was the young men who argues for the eradication

of *Thalikettu* and *Thirandukuli* (Jeevithasamaram 144). By examining the official and indigenous discourses on Sati, Lata Mani argues that women were neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground for the discourse on Sati. Similarly, when we examine the gender discourse in Ezhava reform movement, the notion that women's question was the primary focus of the movement becomes false. As already pointed out the above mentioned customs were huge economic burden on the community and this was the prominent reason behind its eradication and not women's progress. Moyyarathu Sankaran writes:

Each family's wealth and status would determine how they would celebrate *thalikettukalyanam* and *thirendukayanam*. If it were a big event the entire countryside would be invited. To be invited to such an event was a matter of pride...the Nayar *thalikettukalyanam* where women would gather in thousands was a big festival for them...while men would crowd around to gape at the women, the women would ignore them. They would renew old acquaintances, make new friends, chat and gossip. ...it was under Kesari Nayanar's leadership that practices such as this *kalyanam* were stopped amongst the Nayars of north Kerala. Occasions such as [these] were women's gatherings, and the men who attempted to prevent these through organized meetings were severely criticized by women in those days (qtd. in Arunima 24).

The above mentioned quote is an account taken from Moyyarath Shankaran's autobiography "Ente Jeetha Katha" [The Story of my Life]. Though it is an account of Nair's *Tali Kettukalyanam* and *Thirandukuli Kalayanam*, as far as the question of gender is concerned it may be applicable to Thiyyas as well. What happened during the reform

was as Sankaran argues, these customs and social gathering meant for women were rejected as being degraded customs and as a huge economic burden of the community. Here one should also notice that the same ceremonies that were counted to be the status of the community was later considered as a shameful activity. Together with this a new morality was also attached with the custom which celebrates the womanhood. However, we cannot avoid the fact that there women who have supported this cause. For instance, Mayyanattu Ikkavamma, an Ezhava woman acknowledges S. N. D. P Yogam's effort in reforming customs like *Tali Kettu*, *Thirandukuli* etc., and the new marriage system introduced by Sree Narayana guru and argues that it is women's duty to give support and help for the popularity of this (6).²⁰

Now coming to question of marriage, there are arguments that marriages among Thiyyas and Ezhavas were valid before the state's invention into it.²¹ Moorkoth Kumaran, a Thiyya social reformer strongly opposes the view that Thiyyas' marriage is invalid (Mitavadi 1914, 12.). According to him, matrilineal Thiyyas' marriage was accepted as valid long before and all property usually goes to wife and children. He cites section 325 & 326 of Moore's Malabar Law to support his argument (Mitavadi 1914, 9). Similarly, C. Kesavan, an Ezhava reformer calls the custom of *mundukoda* as *sambandham* of Ezhavas which had the validity of marriage. He describes *sambandham* as the custom in which the groom's sister takes the bride home by handing over *mundu* in darkness (Vol. 1: 149). Here we find Kesavan equating *mundukoda* with *sambandham* whereas historians like George Jacob use the term *putavakoda* and does not use the term *sambandham* while

²⁰ Ikkavamma' presiding speech at 4th Sthree Samajam of SNDP.

²¹ Moorkoth Kumaran states that marriages among Thiyyas were valid. As per the Ezhavas law committee report Ezhava *sambandham* has the elements of a valid marriage. Kesavan calls the custom of 'Mundukoda' as Sambandham of Ezhavas which had the validity of marriage. For details see Gough; Kumaran 1914, 12; Ezhava Regulation 786; Kesavan.

describing the marriage among Ezhavas. And he also adds that unlike the Nairs and Brahmins, Ezhava husband takes his wife home. Jacob writes:

Traditionally the marriage of Ilava girls consisted of two distinct rites, one before they attained puberty, called *talikettukalyanam* (auspicious event of tali tying) and the other generally after puberty called *putavakota* (giving the cloth). The boy who tied the *tali* could be any one but the future husband had to give a cloth in a formal ceremony in order to complete the rite of marriage. Traditionally the bride would be either the maternal uncle's or paternal aunt's daughter. Customarily there was also a ceremony for the wedded couple entering the house of the bridegroom. In all cases, unlike Nairs and Brahmins, the Ilava husband took his wife home and she stayed there with him (18).

As the above quote suggests, the discourses around marriage among Thiyyas and Ezhavas also tries to prove that the Thiyya and Ezhava wife generally stayed with her husband and the visiting husband therefore is very rare among them. For instance, according to Moorkoth Kunjappa, a Thiyya reformer, though northern Malabar Thiyyas were followers of matrilineal system, they usually marry and the husband takes the wife to his home. However he states that polygyny, *sambandham* and another marriage called *Paryam Cheyyuka* was also prevalent among Thiyyas. Most importantly, according to him, the wife in *sambandham* as well as in *paryam* were supposed to stay in her own house and she goes to her husband's house only to attend some religious ceremony (32).

According to Ananthan, though Brahmins and the lower castes like Thiyyas and others have the system of marriage, many of them keep a concubine which is known as

Sambandham or *Veetaram*. He states that it is mainly Nairs and communities placed between Brahmins, Kshatriyas on the one side and Nairs on the other (*antharalajathikal*) who do not have marriage system follow this *Sambandham*. He adds *Sambandham* is known as *putamuri*, *vasthradanam*, *veetaram kayaral*, *uzham perukkal*, *paryam cheyyal*, *veettil vekkal* etc. (132). We hardly see men in Thiyya community acknowledging *sambandham* system among them. Rather they distinguishes their marriage system from that of Nairs. For instance, Jankai Abraham writes about the educated Thiyya men's response in favour of legalization of marriage in front of Malabar Marriage Commission.²² She writes:

However, what is evident from the responses is the way in which all Thiyya respondents were categorical on the ways in which their marriage was both in nomenclature and in practice different from that of Nayers. All respondents said that marriage was never referred to as 'Sambandham' or 'Pudamuri' as it was for Nayers, instead the word used most commonly was *mangalam* and that the husband is not called the *sambandhakkaran* (person who has *sambandham*) but the *bhartavu* (husband). It is not a binding marriage in the legal sense. Among Thiyyas the union lasts for life. All respondents said that after marriage the bride moved to the husband's house. The relationship to the legalization was thus different (109).

Similarly, Puthenkalam also argues that visiting husband was rare among Ezhavas and Thiyyas. According to him, the new form of marriage among Ezhavas was known as

²² Janaki Abraham says, "In Thalassery 10/20 were Thiyyas, In Cannannore 7/23 were Thiyyas and in Calicut only one Thiyya (Ernakulam is called because he is from Kottayam amsam) and south Calicut have a history of makkathayam-which literally mean property of children." See Abraham 109.

Vivaham and the essential marriage previously was known as *Mundukoda* and *Pudavakoda* i.e., giving the cloth. He writes:

On the *visiting husband system* among Ezhavas and Tiya, it may be remarked that it was uncommon. On marriage, the Tiya woman had to be maintained by her husband. Husband had exclusive rights in his wife's sexuality, rights to her domestic services and outdoor work and the right to have her live with him for the duration of the marriage. He in turn undertook to shelter and maintain her and her children. *The visiting husband is therefore, very rare among them.* The Tiya wife generally stayed with her husband (121).

One should also notice that in Thiruvithamkoor, among Nairs the first bill regarding *sambandham* was introduced in the year 1897. It was Thanu Pilla's "Marumakkathaya Bill" which was presented in legislative assembly. The bill argued for the validity of *sambandham* as marriage. C. Kesavan considers this as the first attempt to legalise community customs in this country (Vol.1: 137). Kunjuraman, an Ezhava reformer who in the beginning supported *Makkathayam* (Patriliney) wrote a poem "Oru Sandesam" (A Message)²³ in support of Thanu Pillai's Marriage Bill which argued for the validity of *sambandham* among Nairs. In this poem, women meet the peacock of the old *Mayoorasandesam* and send it to Thiruvananthapuram with the message that these women strongly request legislative assembly members not to discard the Marumakkathaya Vivaha Bill (Vol.1: 138). Here women have been represented as the ones who really need get the validity for their *sambandham*.

²³ Sandesa kavyam is a poem contains message. See Kesavan vol. 1: 138.

As per the Ezhava regulation report Ezhava *sambandham* has the elements of a valid marriage. We will analyse some of the statements submitted by Ezhava men and women to Ezhava Law Committee. It is mentioned that the old custom of marriage is known as *Kettukanam Kotukkuka*,²⁴ *Pudavakoda*²⁵ etc. It is also generally agreed that in the old custom of marriage husband and wife stay together.²⁶ While all men had the opinion that *sambandham* is valid marriage²⁷ and should get legal validity, women like Chakki and Parvathi had the opinion that *sambandham* is not considered as valid marriage. According to them both marriage and *sambandham* is common. It has also been argued that for the goodness of community it is better to make marriage valid.²⁸ It is important to note the the same answers are given by Chakki and Parvathi and the answer that marriage is important is added in the record. However, statements by some men in Karunagappalli are important; they state that there are community members who consider both *putavakoda*, *sambandham* and new marriage system as valid. According to them for the material (*laukikam*) development of community it is necessary to accept validity for *sambandham*.²⁹

There were attempts among Nairs to equate Ezhava customs to Nairs' customs for the purpose of getting validity for their marriage. Velu Pillai writes:

In the matter of ceremonial observances there is not much difference between the Ilavas and the Nayars. Formerly the Thalickettu had to be performed before puberty.

²⁴ Memo no.121. Ettumanur Itikkamaran.

²⁵ Memo no.104. Karthikappally.

²⁶ Memo no.107. Karthikappalli thaluk. Statement submitted by Kesavan Sankaran, Memo no. 118. Statement signed and submitted by Chakki Kunji of Vaikom.

²⁷ Memo no.107. Karthikappalli thaluk. Statement submitted by Kesavan Sankaran, Memo no.124. Statement submitted by Sankaran Achuthan of muvatupuzha, Memo no.104. Karthikappally.

²⁸ Memo no. 118. Statement signed and submitted by Chakki Kunji of Vaikom, Statement signed and submitted by K. Parvathi of Vaikom.

²⁹ Memo no.110. Karunagappally. Remarks of 10 men signed and submitted.

But the trend of opinion in the communities concerned is against the continuance of the *Thalikettu* as a ceremony distinct and separate from actual marriage. The tying of the thali is now very common in Nayar marriages and is done in addition to the presentation of cloth; but the law does not prescribe it as a condition of a marriage legally valid. But among the Ilavas the tying of the thali is as much as essential of marriage as the presentation of cloth by the husband to the wife (417)

This quote suggests how the custom of *Tali Kettu* is similar among Nairs and Ezhavas and while such marriages among Nairs were legally invalid, it was legally valid among Ezhavas. But let us see the author's definition of the rites *Tali Kettu* or *Kettukalyanam* or *Sambandham* among Nairs.

Marriage among Nayars may mean either the formal ceremony of tying a thali round the neck of a girl accompanied by festive celebrations, known as the *Thalikettu* or *Kettukalyanam* or the ceremony of actual alliances as husband and wife, known as *Sambandham* or *Pudavaikoda* (literally cloth -giving) The former has degeragted into a mock marriage and has almost ceased to exist. The *Sambandham* (*Vivaham*) is the true wedlock (Velu Pillai 416).

This can be seen as Velu Pillai's, a Nair's deliberate attempt of making the Nair marriage system similar to Ezhavas and in order to justify *sambandham* among Nairs as valid as marriage.

Historians like Puthenkalam were also suspicious of government's attitude. He writes:

Sambandham among Tiyas and Ezhavas was surrounded by conditions analogous to those prevailing among Nayars, and changes came only at the same time as the

Nair Regulations in Travancore and Marumakkathayam act in Cochin and Madras.

We find, however a tendency in the judicial decision of the Travancore courts to interfere more easily and interpret Ezhava customs more strictly. The result was that Ezhava marriages were more easily declared valid and legal than Nayar Sambandhams (118).

He fails to substantiate his argument and ends up saying that Ezhavas had a unique *sambandham* in which wife stays with her husband and therefore the visiting husband was rare among them.

Nevertheless the new marriage system was introduced to community members and various reports that appeared in the Ezhava magazines show how the reformers spread such messages in the community. For instance, the new marriage customs introduced by Sree Narayana Guru has been published in *Vivekodayam* (1904, 83). We also find several notes which were published in the title “Parishkruthamaya Vivahavidhi” (Reformed Marriage Rules) in *Mitavadi*, a magazine which was published mainly for Thiyyas. For instance, in the note titled “Parishkruthamaya Vivahavidhi” (*Mitavadi* 1915, 12) it is stated that it is one of the most important customs reform of S. N. D. P. (12). In order to make the new marriage customs practical even in the absence of priests, Sree Narayana Guru’s suggestions was published in *Vivekodayam* 1904 (1080). The note states that though this new marriage system is practiced in many parts of Kerala and there is no uniformity in the ceremony and there are many problems created by priests. It has been suggested to look at the new reformed *Vivahavidhi* (marriage rule) by Guru which was attached with this note. Later in the article titled “Parishkrita Vivahavidhi”, K. N. Gopalan adds suggestions in the new marriage rules introduced by Sree Narayana Guru

(*Mitavadi* 1915, 13-15). According to him marriages should happen in the temples. He points out that until then marriage among *sudras* and us (Thiyya or Ezhava) was considered worldly (*laukikam*) and he wants it to be spiritual. He suggests we should give some amount in temples, keep a register to record marriages, and a witness if possible. And if there are no temples it can be held at *bhajanamadams*. Here we see the popular engagement in such reforms.

S. N. D. P. Yogam and similar Ezhava *samajams* also have played major role in propagating such reforms. For instance Palpu states:

In the field of social reform the yogam has been able to do a considerable amount of work. The wasteful and meaningless Talikettu ceremony has been practically done away with. A reformed form of marriage has been introduced some years ago and it is being widely adopted (*Vivekodayam* 1916, 35).³⁰

Similarly, a report shows that, Pazhavur Ezhava *Samajam* had banned the custom called *Tali kettukalyanam* and the new marriage system dictated by Swami has been introduced (*Vivekodyam* 1904, 83). It should also be noted that the Travancore Ezhava regulation has recognized the reform introduced by Sree Narayana Guru as legal (Puthenkalam 122). The next section discusses women's question in the discourse around marriage and divorce.

³⁰ This is a welcome address delivered by Dr.P.Palpu at the public meeting.

4. 4. Regulation regarding Marriage and Divorce

This section critically examines the discourses around marriage and divorce and points out how women's questions were marginalised by the Thiyya social reformist discourses which in turn helped forge a community identity for Thiyyas and Ezhavas. We see how through marriage contracts, male reformers were eager to control women who were property owners. S. Anandhi Bharadwaj writes:

When people were totally free without property in land, I do not think there were these slavish practices of women's oppression and compulsory marriage contracts. When there was no concept of accumulating private property...there could not have been any compulsion for acquiring heir for the family property through child birth. Only when the desire for private property came into practice the concept of marriage and imprisoning women to protect the family property also came into practice. Once a woman was made the guardian of man's property, she herself became his property to produce heir for the family ... women lost their right to worship their gods but only their husbands. The private property which has been the main reason for women's oppression has to be totally destroyed in order to achieve women's liberation (27).

Bharadwaj's argument brings out the issue of property as central to women's questions. Interestingly, many historians and ethnographers argue that a large number of divorce and remarriage has been recorded among Thiyya women compared to Nairs and the reason laid out is the economic independence of Thiyya women. Puthenkalam and Gough give an account of Thiyya women's divorce. According to Puthenkalam, the divorce rate among Thiyyas is comparatively more than among Nairs. Gough writes:

The majority of Nair women in North Kerala do not experience divorce, and those who are divorced or widowed seldom remarry if they are about the age of thirty. *By contrast most Tiya women of the middle age have married two or three times.* The economic independence of Tiya women as wage earners, may be responsible for this difference. Even previously, the fact that women could work independently for landlords may have given them the ability to terminate marriage at will (qtd. in Puthenkalam 119).

As per the quote, it was only independent women who dared to go for divorce and remarriage at their own will. And it also shows that men in the community were willing to marry a divorced woman who is a wage earner.

In the Malabar Gazetteer it is noted that:

Many Thiyyas of Northern Malayalam have blood relationship with Europeans. The Thiyyas caste will not be excluded because of their living relationship with Europeans. The relationship with Aryan blood has resulted in the betterment of health, eye sight, brilliance and increase in wealth like the way Nairs gained from Nair women relationship with Nambutiri Brahmin. But recently it has been considered a shameful activity among Thiyyas and Europeans (63).

The quotes suggest that at one point of time it was acceptable for Thiyyas to have relationship with Europeans. Later on such acts have been considered as shame on the community and Moorkoth Kumaran's father and other community leaders expelled such women and children from the community (Kunjappa 16).³¹ According to Moorkoth

³¹ As pointed out in the first chapter, Northern Malabar Thiyyas had a strong community system where each member of the community had to follow certain caste rules and they would be excommunicated if they violated such rules. See Kunjappa 16.

Kumaran, it was the poor Thiyya women who were greedy of wealth and were mistresses of Europeans and had children. Here we find how male reformers from the community justify that it was the poor women who had relationship with the Europeans. Janaki Abraham's observation seems important in such a context. Janaki Abraham in her thesis argues that kinship practices have been critically tied to the ways in which the boundaries of caste have been imagined and asserted. She says caste and kinship constitute each other. While dealing with the liaisons some Thiyya women had with British men she points out that the assertion of endogamy has been contingent in time and space rather than given ever all time. She writes:

Until the late 19th or early 20th century it would seem that the breach of endogamy by predominantly poor women who had these liaisons had not been seen as a matter of concern, or at least of censure and condemnation. This would suggest that those who fell outside the circle of endogamy (here due to class difference) were not considered the same caste or minimally were not considered a group over which control (through control over women's sexuality) was necessary. Thus contrary to the assumption that circle of endogamy were based on purity and pollution, class here merges as a critical to how caste was (and is) conceptualized and raised the question of who is considered part of caste and when (387).

According to Abraham it was the class question which mattered rather than the question of purity and pollution. However the caste question is also important here. It is said that Thiyya women were ostracized if they married below their caste.³² According to

³² Puthenkalam says that while Thiyya men marry the women of Kavudichi (barber caste), she will not be accepted on equal terms by the women of her husband's family. He refers to certain cases where he has been informed about Nair (man) - Thiyya (woman) marriages and Thiyya (man) - Nair (woman) marriages.

Moorkkoth Kumaran, polygyny was normal among Thiyyas and such custom was stopped when Thiyyas were English education (3). The strict patriarchal rules imposed upon women during the reformation period points out how caste, community prestige and women's sexuality are closely connected.

Though there are arguments that in the matrilineal system of Ezhavas divorce and remarriage were permitted, it is evident that it was permitted only for men. In a note taken from Kochi State Manual, titled "Kochiyile Thiyyar" it is stated that, in the matrilineal system of Ezhavas, divorce and remarriage is permitted (*Mitavadi* 1914).

The earliest declaration of the judicial validity of an Ezhava marriage was reported in 1890s, when the court prosecuted an Ezhava woman of bigamy, for having married another when her first marriage was subsisting and the full bench of the Highcourt in Travancore ratified on appeal the decision of the lower court. A. Aiyappan says that it was not the custom in British Malabar to resort to the British courts in the matter of caste laws. The Travancore court itself reversed its earlier stand in the case of another Full Bench decision when the judges declined to follow the ruling in *Karumpa Kochappi vs Sircar* and declared that there was no custom among Ezhavas which required any formalities to effect a divorce (*Puthenkalam* 118).

Puthenkalam quotes Joseph remarks: "it may be noted that both the judges who decided the earlier case were ardent social reformers; and in their anxiety to legalise marriage and to check the rights of free divorce among these people, the evidence let in that case,

According to him the general fate of the wife in both cases was that she was not accepted on equal terms by the upper castes. See *Puthenkalam* 126.

which was too meager to prove custom, was accepted as sufficient to prove the custom” (118). Rather than seeing this only as an attempt to prove the legality of marriage in their customs itself, one can assume that Ezhava social reformers were more anxious about the sexual rights of women too.

Many other instances also prove Ezhava male reformers anxiety of women’s sexual rights. K. V. Kunjan in his article titled “Nammute Vivaham” (Our Marriage), which appeared in the column called *Samudayikam* (related to community) of *Vivekodayam* critically address the male Ezhava anxiety of whether divorce is possible in the new marriage system introduced by Sreenarayana Guru. And it is argued that if it is possible why can not one follow old marriage system. He says rather than thinking whether remarriage is good or bad we need to think who is an ideal wife since the progress or retreat of a community depends upon wives (Kunjan 194 201) Here we see how Ezhava social reformers attempted to bring an ideal woman image and how the community’s honour is burdened upon her.

Women did express their opinion in these matters. As pointed out in the second chapter, in the fourth meeting of S. N. D. P *Stree Samajam* it has been decided that a request should be sent to the government regarding the implementation of a bill which rules strict monogamy for men like the Bills of Ezhavas’ inheritance system which made monogamy compulsory for women.³³

³³ See *Vivekodayam* 19. 1, 2. 1916 (1092). 19

According to Arunima, the “the new laws and legal procedures that were introduced in Malabar from the mid-nineteenth century onwards had an adverse impact on the rights of women within the Nair *tharavadus*(19). She writes:

By the late nineteenth century, the *karanavan* was the figure of power that both women and the younger male kin had to contend with within the *tharavadu*. However, the Nayar reform movements had challenged the power of *karanavar* of the *tharavadu* and the *karanavan* were unmitigatedly patriarchal in themselves. Their demands for marriage reforms, tenants’ rights or family partition were pressing for a modification of matrilineal practices that allowed no room for the rights that women had hitherto had within the *tharavadu* (20).

Arunima also pointed out that there was no autonomous sphere of women’s protest in Malabar in this period. The patriarchal values influenced women and men alike and women seemed to be gaining more out of the movement supporting the partition of the joint family system, and by the 1930 many *tharavadu* partition were initiated by women themselves (20). Women by then had begun to internalise patriarchal values which takes off their rights from them.

In a similar way, Ezhava reformers also tried to justify marriage and patrilineal system. In 1909, Sree Narayana Guru, in a message to the S. N. D. P had stated, “Where Marumakkathayam system is followed in the community, legal provision should be made to give wedded wife and children the right to a portion of the man's individual earnings. Otherwise, marriage would be meaningless. Necessary steps in this direction should be taken after careful consideration" (*Vivekodayam* 1909). Here the women in the

matrilineal system were also considered as depending upon the husband's property. Therefore, marriage has been considered as necessary condition for women than men.

There were women who argued against such a construction. In Devaki Netyaramma's speech she mentions that there were two arguments against Kochi Makkathaya Thiyya Bill (Kochi Patrilineal Thiyya Bill) which is presented in Kochi legislative assembly (Kochi *Niyamasabha*). According to this representation that in the paternal property, a girl child has the right to own only half of the property which is entitled to the boy child. Devaki supports the first group who criticize the bill for not arguing an equal share for women. She says that there is another group who even condemn the half share for women. She adds that there is no point in arguing with such people for equal share for men and women because they think women will always be protected by men (*Sthree* 1933. 29).

It is said that Fraternal Polyandry (several brothers having a single woman) was practiced by some Ezhavas (Rajendren 18). According to Aiyappan, Ezhavas of Central Kerala which includes the southern taluks of British Malabar district and northern taluk of Cochin State practiced fraternal polyandry (qtd. in Puthenkalam 121). C. Kesavan also states polyandry was common among the Ezhava community of Mayyanad (vol. 1:19). Similarly, about Thiyyas, Cornish mentions that:

The *Tiyars* sometimes have one wife between several brothers, and plurality of wives and divorce also are common. The sexual relations are extremely loose within the caste, and similar customs are more or less common amongst all the *shanar* tribes (163).

The absence of polygyny and the prevalence of fraternal Polyandry among some Thiyyas and Ezhavas also points out how caste and women's sexuality are interlinked.

Other than this we see strict rules followed regarding marriage among Thiyyas and Ezhavas. And as we see in the first chapter, Thiyyas and Ezhavas had an *illam* settlement. Gough refers to this *illam* settlement among Thiyyas as clan. According to her, clans have no function other than exogamy (*North* 406)³⁴. Though it can be critiqued one may find that one of the functions of these *illams* was to regulate marriage among the community members. Marriage within the members of *illams* was also prohibited for both Ezhavas and Thiyyas (Rajendran 27). It should also be noted inter-marriages among Thiyyas and Ezhavas as well as northern Malabar Thiyyas and southern Malabar Thiyyas were not in practice. For instance, Innes writes, "The influence of local residence may be seen in the differentiation of Izhuvan, Tandan, and Tiyan; as well as in the general rule that members of castes dwelling in North and South Malabar,³⁵ may not inter-marry" (163). According to Innes, Thiyyas are monogamous in the south, except in a few parts of Ponnani where fraternal polyandry is practiced and Ezhavas are monogamous, and among them it is very usual for a man to marry his father's sister's daughter. while pointing out that there are no inter-marriages between Thiyyas and Ezhavas, and North Malabar and South Malabar Thiyyas he laid out the difficulties that would arise in the questions of inheritance owing to the different family systems followed by the two communities (125). Bhaskaranunni (2005) also has the same opinion. It is noted in the Malabar Gazetteer thus:

³⁴ Kottayam (Malabar) is a former princely state in the erstwhile province of Malabar in Kerala and the Kingdom of Kottayam covered present Thalassery of Kannur district and Wynad District. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kottayam> (Malabar).

³⁵ The dividing line is the Korapuzha river, between the Calicut and Kurumbanad taluks.

Thiyyar-- In north they follow matrilineal system and in south patrilineal system. In south areas many follow the custom of one husband for a woman. Only some people in Ponnani Thaluk follow the custom of many brothers having one wife. Ezhavas follow only patrilineal system. Among them a wife has only one husband. Among them the man marries mostly his father's sister's daughter. Usually there is no marital relation between Thiyyas and Ezhavas. Northern Malayalam Thiyyas will not marry southern Malayalam Thiyyas. It may be because of the differences in inheritance system among the Thiyyas of two areas (61).

However Ezhava regulation considered Thiyyas as part of the community and it made the marriages between the members of Thiyya and Ezhava community from different regions possible. As Meera Velayudhan says:

Opposing compulsory registration of marriage on the ground that it would go against the sentiment of the community, the committee suggested legalising marriages between subdivisions and within members of the community in Travancore and outside. Among the propertied sections of the Ezhavas, marriages between members of the community from different regions was becoming a possibility (2481).

Nevertheless, the attempt of the Ezhava social reform movement was to forge a community identity by uniting all sections of the caste through a common law of inheritance.

In this chapter we see that the Thiyya matrilineal system and Ezhava matrilineal system share some common features. As articulated by the reformers they are distinct from the Nair matrilineal system. The first sub-section "A Critique of Studies on Matrilineal and

the Legalisation of Inheritance in Kerala” while pointing out the necessity to look at traditions of matriliney within Thiyya and Ezhava communities, also discussed ways in which men and women from both communities have engaged in the discourse around legalization of inheritance. The second section titled “Thiyya and Ezhava Matrilineal System: Community and Women” argued that the Thiyya reformers’ normalization and acceptance of patriliney among Thiyyas has in fact overshadowed the question of women as well as the question of community identity.

The third section titled “Marriage, *Sambandham* and Family Structure, among Thiyyas and Ezhavas” examined the marital systems, the practice of *Sambandham* and different family structures, that prevailed among Thiyyas and Ezhavas before reformation took place and argued how the homogenization of these through various accounts lead to the homogenization of these communities as well. The fourth sub-section titled “Regulation Regarding Marriage and Divorce” critically examined the discourses around marriage and divorce and points out how women’s question was marginalised by the Thiyya and Ezhava social reformist discourses which in turn helped forge a community identity for Thiyyas and Ezhavas. However the Thiyya and Ezhava reformers’ justification of valid a marriage system and the articulation of their matrilineal system which was akin to the patrilineal system can be seen as an attempt to forge a community identity by uniting all sections of the caste through a common law of inheritance.

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Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to examine the Thiyya and Ezhava social reform movements in Kerala through the years 1890 to 1940 to understand the dynamics of community formation among them. While problematising the imagined single community identity of Thiyyas and Ezhavas, the thesis addresses various questions of caste, community, gender and reform. As we see in the thesis, a homogeneous Ezhava caste community identity was constructed through history and ethnography and a political category called Ezhavas was formed by subsuming the Thiyya identity.

In conclusion, I bring out the recent debates around the issue. It is interesting that the efforts at unifying various communities under the category of Ezhava, that began more than a century ago, is an incomplete project and in being contested to this day. It is in this context that I place this dissertation.

The controversy regarding the event, Ezhava-Thiyya *Mahasangamam* (Ezhava-Thiyya Convention/Meet, henceforth) which was held under the leadership of S. N. D. P. at Calicut on 2nd February 2013 is very crucial in understanding the current vibrant debate on Thiyya Ezhava difference. Many reports that appeared in several newspapers discussed Thiyya Maha Sabha's (henceforth T. M. S., an organisation of Malabar Thiyyas), decision not to attend the meet. As per the *Matrubumi* report dated 2nd February

2013,¹ the meeting was held to make the activities of the Yogam strong in Malabar.² Yogam General Secretary, Vellappalli Natesan claimed that the community, especially the Thiyyas of Malabar were backward in terms of education.³ It is interesting to note the opinion that the meeting was held to make activities of S. N. D. P. strong in Malabar which points to the minimal participation of Thiyyas in the organisation. The Yogam secretary's usage of the term *samudayam* as well as his claim that especially Thiyyas are educationally backward also needs to be taken into consideration.

Another article in the Hindu titled "Thiyya Mahasabha" reported that Ezhava-Thiyya Malabar convention is considered a test of its strength in north Kerala where it had not been able to make its presence felt as a political and social force as it could in other parts of the State. The report also reports, the recently formed T. M. S.'s decision to observe the convention day as a betrayal day, its contention being that "S. N. D. P had at no time recognised Thiyyas as a separate group." The report quotes T. M. S's General Secretary, Puthukkudi Purushothaman's statement thus: "Vellappally Natesan always refers to Thiyyas as Ezhavas in Malabar, implying that he is not ready to recognise the Thiyyas of Malabar as a separate group."⁴

¹ S. N. D. P. leaders before the meeting claimed that they expected around two lakh people from 40 taluks of the Malabar for this meet. "Ezhava-Thiyya Malabar Sangamam Innu." *Matrubumi*. 2 February 2013. See <file:///C:/Users/hp/Desktop/imp%20files/ezhava/2-Feb-2013.htm>.

² It is mentioned that Malabar *Mahasangamam* was held at Kannur before 10 years.

³ According to Vellappalli, there are no aided schools in seven districts and the children from the community are not getting any opportunity for education. He criticises government for not allotting school to them.

⁴ "Thiyyamahasabha." Kozhikode, February 1, 2013. See <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/ezhavathiyya-convention-in-kozhikode/article4367837.ece>.

A report titled “Thiyya Forum Lashes out at S. N. D. P.” says: T. M. S has protested against the use of their community name by S. N. D. P. in the meet. T. M. S., in a press release, said they came to know of the programme only through flex boards displayed by S. N. D. P in the city. T. M. S. claimed that they had already moved the local court in this matter.⁵

Along with the claim that the Thiyyas are a separate community, the question of reservation was also brought out as the reason behind Thiyyas’ hesitation to be part of the meet. In the report “Thiyyas to stay away from S. N. D. P meet” it is mentioned that T. M. S. dismissed the claim that they are part of Ezhava community. As per the report, T. M. S.’s Vice-President M. C. Sadanandan and General Secretary Puthukkudi Purushothaman said to the reporters that concerted efforts were being made by Ezhavas to establish that Thiyyas were part of Ezhava Community eyeing reservation quota meant for the Thiyyas. In order to claim Thiyyas as a separate community both historically and socially, they pointed out Edgar Thurston's book *Castes and Tribes of South India*, that has corroborated this fact. They added that T. M. S. would submit a memorandum to the government seeking a seven per cent quota for the community soon.⁶

An IBN live news post “Thiyyas to move SC against Government order” reports that the dispute between Thiyyas of Malabar and the Ezhavas of Travancore is soon to enter a stage of legal battle as Thiyya organisations in Malabar have decided to challenge the state government order in the Supreme Court. The report points out the strong resentment

⁵Kozhikode, January 27, 2013. See <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/thiyya-forum-lashes-out-at-sndp/article4349866.ece>.

⁶Kozhikode, January 14. See http://www.newkerala.com/news/newsplus/worldnews-125528.html#.UT9gp1t3_BE.

of Thiyyas against S. N. D. P. and points out that the two communities are on the verge of parting ways. It is pointed out that the order by various departments including the state Public Service Commission that Thiyyas have to write 'Ezhava' in their application for jobs and government appointments is against the verdict of the Supreme Court dated March 28, 2006. It is also added that the decision of the state government to remove the Thiyya community from the purview of 14 per cent reservation for OBCs would have far reaching consequences in Malabar. In the Supreme Court order dated 28 March 2006, the Thiyyas and the Ezhavas together could claim 14 per cent reservation. It is mentioned that the state government removed the Thiyyas from the purview of reservation in defiance of the Supreme Court verdict. It is said that the Thiyyas would be eligible for reservation only if they write 'Ezhava' in applications. It is also mentioned that the T. M. S. and the Global Thiyya Initiate have decided to move the court against the injustice done to them by the state government under pressure from the S. N. D. P and the Ezhavas.⁷

A post that appeared in ukmalayalee.com, "Thiyyas claim they are not Ezhavas" dated 6th January also points out that the Thiyya community of Malabar has demanded that they should not be designated as Ezhavas. Most importantly it is stated that Purushothaman urged Thiyyas to register their caste properly during the upcoming caste census. But according to Vellapally Natesan, T. M. S. may have been set up by political elements trying to destroy the S. N. D. P . The post also says that Thiyyas, who mainly live in the Malabar region trace their lineage to Kyrgyzstan and claim that they have nothing in

⁷ See <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/thiyyas-to-move-sc-against-government-order/223328-60-116.html>.

common with Ezhavas mainly concentrated in the Travancore region. The post also refers to research which trace Thiyyas' link with Kyrgyzstan through DNA mapping.⁸

A post titled "Thiyya group challenges S. N. D. P. authority" by K. A Antony in the web Oman Tribune reported that apart from asking members of the Thiyya community to abstain from the meet, T. M. S. has also moved court against the S. N. D. P Yogam for using their caste name along with that of the Ezhava community. Interestingly, dismissing the boycott call by T. M. S. Thushar, who is also the vice-president of the S. N. D. P Yogam, said the aim of the meet is to bring the Ezhavas and Thiyyas under one umbrella for common benefit. According to him Ezhavas and Thiyyas are not different communities. Meanwhile T. M. S. leaders like Purushothaman Puthukkudy, assert that the Thiyya community of Malabar is a separate entity and has no genetic or historical linkage with the Ezhavas. Purushothaman said that the T. M. S. was formed because Thiyyas are ignored as the government treats them as a subsidiary wing of the Ezhava community. The S. N. D. P Yogam is also keen to snatch away all the benefits to our community, he said.⁹

However, as per the Mathrubumi report dated 3rd February, 2013, around 10 thousand people from 7 districts have participated¹⁰ in the meet. All the above mentioned reports point to Thiyyas' hesitation to be known or considered as belonging to the category of Ezhavas. Many website posts also strengthen the argument that there is a strong

⁸ See <http://www.ukmalayalee.com/kerala-news/news.php?id=MjA0Ng==>. 12 March 2013.

⁹ See <http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=news&id=136922&heading=India>

¹⁰ See "Janasagaram Theerthu Mahasangamam." file:///C:/Users/hp/Desktop/imp%20files/ezhava/03-Feb-2013.htm#page/3/1

resentment among Thiyyas in this matter. Another interesting post requests all Thiyyas of south Kerala to join facebook Thiyya groups such as Malabar Thiyya, Thiyya Mahasabha and Thiyyas. The post says there are two groups with the same name, and the group with address Kannurthiyyas is a fake Thiyya group of Ezhavas. It is also argued that Thiyyas and Ezhavas are not the same caste.¹¹

. . . .

The thesis critically examined mainstream narratives which argue for a homogenous nature of Thiyyas and Ezhavas and also analysed the historical circumstances in which these two communities came together with different agendas. The thesis could not bring out contemporary differences between the Thiyya and Ezhava communities. A call for further research is also needed to understand the genealogy of Thiyya community formation as well as Thiyya history without reference to Ezhavas. The thesis is also limited to textual analysis. A field work based study would have brought out many nuances to it. The community formation of Thiyyas can also be studied in the light of communist movements in Malabar.

¹¹ <http://boards.ancestry.com/localities.asia.india.general/846.5.3/mb.ashx>.

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