

Other religions :

Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are the other religions which are represented in the Territory although the members of these three religions do not form a significant number. Buddhists are found only in Pondicherry, Mahe and Yanam. Jains and Sikhs are found only in Pondicherry urban area. Bahais are represented in Pondicherry and Karaikal.

Atheism :

In all about 320 have registered themselves as atheists who are mostly concentrated in Pondicherry (urban) and Karaikal (rural) regions. This may be due to the impact of the self-respect movement (Suya Mariathai Iyakkam) launched by the Dravida Kazhagam which propagates atheism.

IV. SOCIAL LIFE

Caste structure :

Since time immemorial society in India was divided into four divisions known as Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. The Kasakkudi plates reveal that the Pallava rulers in general enforced the Paripalita Sakala Varnasramavyavastha visesah, i.e., the special rules of castes and orders. Although it is not known how long and to what extent this four fold classification was adhered to in practice in the areas that now fall under this Territory, it may be assumed that the four fold division of society in accordance with the Hindu sastras continued to be respected even during the Chola days. "Each caste was more or less a hereditary occupational group with an active organisation for the regulation and protection of its economic and social interests." 57 Caste and group life formed no hindrance to social co-operation for common ends.

There were waves of immigrants of various races, castes and communities from the north. Many new castes found a place in the social strata of the Tamil districts including Pondicherry and Karaikal regions with the influx of Telugu and Kanarese people during the Vijayanagar days. Among them may be mentioned Reddiars, Cavarai Naidus, Baliyas, Uppiliars (salt manufacturers), Senians (Telugu weavers), Telugu speaking Brahmins, etc.

The French having come here originally as traders did not interfere in matters of customs and practices. Even after they established themselves as the rulers of the land they allowed the natives to follow their own customs and practices so as to maintain good relations with them. These customs and practices were closely linked to the system of castism.

Many of the communities in the Vijayanagar empire were divided into two groups known as the Valangai and Idangai groups i.e., right-hand or left-hand castes. Julien Vinson points out that in the last decade of the XVII century, members of the right-hand castes were predominant in Pondicherry. But the French Company was particularly anxious to have more traders, mostly chettys who belonged to the left-hand sect. On 8 November 1690 François Martin obtained the consent of the members of the right-hand sect to allow chettys to build three streets to the north of the fort. They were also granted the right to hold their religious ceremonies without any let or hindrance. Very soon Pondicherry became the scene of strife between the left and right-hand castes. The Valangai and Idangai classes living in the town quarrelled among themselves for certain privileges like the use of savalakkali, white umbrella, white horse and the five *sembus*.⁵⁸ Speaking about the occasions when they quarrelled among themselves, Abbé Dubois remarks thus: "perhaps the sole cause of the contest is the right to wear slippers or to ride through the streets in a palanquin or on horseback during marriage festivals. Sometimes it is the privilege of being escorted on certain occasions by armed retainers, sometimes that of having a trumpet sounded in front of a procession, or of being accompanied by native musicians, at public ceremonies. Perhaps it is simply the particular kind of musical instrument suitable for such occasions, that is in dispute, or perhaps it may be the right of carrying flags of certain colours or of certain devices during these ceremonies."⁵⁹

These disputes caused a great deal of concern to the French. The settlement of caste disputes was, however, out of the scope of ordinary tribunals and fell within the jurisdiction of the Governor. During the Pongal festival in 1717 a major dispute arose among Hindus. Members of the left-hand castes took out a procession along the Madras road beyond the limits fixed by convention. People of the right-hand castes objected to the procession being taken into their area. A clash ensued in which one of the ears of a right-hand caste member was mutilated. The chief of the right-hand castes demanded by way of compensation the ear of one of the left-hand caste members. This

was followed by further tumult. This ultimately led to a meeting of the **Conseil Supérieur** which after a great deal of deliberation brought about a compromise in February 1717. The Governor ordered the arrest of the chiefs and threatened them with a heavy fine. This brought temporary peace. When new disputes arose, members of the left-hand castes were fined. It was not until 1730 the right-hand castes granted some more concessions to the left-hand castes in the town.

The year 1741 will go down as a significant landmark, for it was then that the **Conseil Supérieur** issued the following order under royal command : "Whereas it has been represented to us that the men of the right-hand caste object to Chettis and other sectarians of the left-hand caste entering the town by the Madras Street, either on horseback or in palanquins; and whereas they urge, on the ground of long-standing custom of the country, that this privilege should be reserved to them alone, we, the members of the Supreme Council of Pondicherry, hereby pronounce that the claim of the right-hand caste to the exclusive use of this road cannot be admitted. It is the emphatic declaration of His Majesty that this town shall be free to all its inhabitants, irrespective of caste or creed; that there shall be no bar or restriction in the case of any particular sect and that all shall be allowed unrestrained enjoyment of the street so long as the laws of the State are not infringed. The new Madras Street has been thrown open to the public as a highway, in order that the left-hand caste may share the benefit of it equally with the right-hand. We, therefore, give publicity to the order authorising the free passage of all traders and Chettis along the Valudavur or Madras roads, on horseback or in palanquins. Men of all castes, right-hand or left-hand, are hereby informed that they can, after entering the town-gates, repair to their respective streets by either of the roads running on the right or the left of the town-wall. Whoever, whether of the higher classes or not, contravenes this order shall be deemed guilty of disturbing the public peace and shall be liable to the penalty attaching to that offence. In order that no one may plead ignorance of the existence of this notice, copies of it will be pasted at all public places in the town. Issued by order of the Supreme Council, under date the 31 July 1741."60

In spite of this clear order there erupted another controversy the very next year. It centred on the right of the members of the left-hand caste to go on horseback in a palanquin along the prohibited streets. In 1767 there was yet another controversy regarding a small lane where there were 12 houses of the

left-hand caste and eight houses of the right-hand castes. The *arrêté* of 15 July 1768 once again upheld the principle of equality between these two groups but rivalry continued. In another incident, Vanniyas who were supposed to belong to the neutral group, sided with the right-hand castes. Law de Lauriston declared that Vanniyas shall have no say in the matter and restrained the Chettys within their bounds. ⁶¹

The *règlement* of 18 November 1769 issued by Law de Lauriston ordered that in all civil matters local customs and usages shall be followed. Naturally so, when Law de Lauriston reconstituted the sepoy companies in 1773 one 'fusiliers' company was so organised to consist entirely of pariah converts. This innovation by which Law emphasised the segregation of the out-castes was abolished by the Royal Ordinance of 20 January 1776. It made clear that soldiers shall be recruited from religious communities without any distinction based on caste and creed. While this august proclamation could be enforced among the soldiers caste consciousness reigned supreme in civilian life.

The plight of the socially depressed classes was almost deplorable. Until the abolition of slavery in 1792, a good number of them were bought, more often in a clandestine manner, and despatched to the French colonies in Africa. Even Dumas, one-time Governor of Pondicherry, carried the stigma of a slave trader. There were perhaps also people like Madame François Martin who in their generosity granted freedom to their slaves. She even left a small legacy in her will as a token of her love for her faithful slaves. ⁶²

The French when they returned in 1816 were a changed lot carrying some of the sparks of the French Revolution. The order of the Governor dated 6 January 1819 extended the French Civil Code to the French establishments, without prejudice to local customs and usages. The order enjoined that Hindus shall be governed by the provisions of the French Civil Code only in matters when the provisions of this Code were not contrary to Hindu customs.*

* The modified Commercial Code was extended to Pondicherry subsequently by the law of 7 December 1850 and came into operation in 1851. The Code of Criminal Procedure was introduced in 1883.

The administration also recognised the right of each caste to have its own tribunal to deal with caste affairs. However, the Government retained the authority to review the decisions of such tribunals. Among the affairs of caste, some were simple and could be disposed of by **Juge de Paix** although an appeal could lie with the Governor. Disputes of a serious nature fell within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Governor.

That there were violent clashes again in January 1822 is confirmed by Julien Vinson. These clashes occurred as the administration had inadvertently accorded to an oil-monger the rights and privileges of the right-hand castes. These disputes often led to protracted litigation. Viewed against these events, the constitution of a Consultative Committee on Indian Jurisprudence by the local ordinance of 30 October 1827 turns out to be an important development. This Committee was constituted with a view to helping the government and the courts in deciding questions where a knowledge of local laws, usages and customs were necessary. A plethora of orders had to be issued either stipulating or determining the rights and privileges of one or other caste.

According to a report prepared by Bedier in 1824, the following right-hand, left-hand and neutral castes were identified in Pondicherry region : 63

Right-hand castes :

Ambattère	Nattouvère	Tassie
Caicolavère	Parias	Tondammandale Vellalère
Cavaré	Pattanavère	Toullouvère Vellalère
Comoutty	Sanapère	Vallouvère
Coravère	Sanare	Vaniaire
Cosavère	Sedaire	Vannare
Moutchière	Sembadavère	Villière
Moutrière	Senecodèare	Yadavère
Nattamanne	Sojière Vellalère	

Left-hand castes :

Caicolavères	Pallys	Tassies
Camalers	Sacquilis	Vaniers
Chettys		

Neutral castes :

Brames	Pandaroms	Rettys
Canacars	Patonoulkarers	Sattany
Edears	Rajas	Taders
Morattiers	Rajapouttres	Toudoucars
Pallys		

In a similar report prepared by Cordier in 1825 in respect of Karaikal region the following castes were identified: 64

Barbier (Navithar)	Couttady	Potier (Kusavar)
Berger (Idayar)	Etrangers	Raja
Blanchisseur (Vannar)	Macois	Retty
Brames	Maure	Salipen
Callère	Molacara	Sattani
Camalen	Mouchy	Sembadeva
Cammalere	Moudaly	Souraire
Cannadier	Naïnar	Taden
Carava (Corava)	Nattaman	Tisserand
Caréan	Nattouven	Vaïcheterouva
Cavaré	Nockar	Vallouven
Chennen (Chenia)	Oudéan	Vania
Chetty	Pallen	Vellaja
Choulia	Pally	Viabary
Collar	Paréas	Viroudéan
Comoutty	Pattanava	

According to a census carried out at Karaikal in 1856, there were in all 42,474 Hindus, made up of 11,284 Vellalas, 1,888 Kavarais, 1,196 Yadavals, 188 Komutties, 710 Chetties, 1,824 Weavers, 1,900 Macouvas, 5,607 Pallis, 1,499 Kammalas, 296 Devadasies and temple musicians, 490 Ambattars, 448 Vannars, 1,552 Brahmins, and 9,056 Pariahs. 65

All these lists, however, do not provide an accurate picture of the caste structure in the regions. While in certain cases the caste names are given, in others the profession alone is indicated. Cannadier stands for the country of their origin. The word 'Etrangers' stands for foreigners.

The earliest attempt at improving the lot of the depressed classes centred mainly on the provision of educational facilities for them. On 21 July 1828 the first free school for members of the depressed classes was opened in Pondicherry. In 1843 the fathers of *Missions Etrangères* were given authorisation to construct a chapel on a plot of land belonging to them at Kuruchchikuppam on condition that members of the depressed classes of Kuruchchikuppam would be permitted to enter the chapel and offer prayers without, however, resorting to any processions or ceremonies outside its precincts.⁶⁶ In 1849 three more schools were opened, one for *Créoles*, another for Tamils (caste Hindus) and the third for Pariahs. Administrative efforts were also directed towards providing them better housing facilities. On 26 August 1872, twentyeight parcels of land (each measuring 13.72 m x 23.86 m) near the forest of Adivipolam (Farampeta in Yanam) were freely assigned to the so-called out-castes for the formation of a village.⁶⁷

Around 1870 A. Esquer made a more detailed study of the castes and sub-castes in all the four regions together with their religious affiliations, traditional profession, etc.

With the establishment of the Third Republic in France a new wind started blowing. There grew up a clamour among some enlightened Indians for equality with the French. The French came forward to bridge one of the gaps that separated the natives from French citizens, i.e., to enable them to be governed by French laws. The *décret* of 21 September 1881 promulgated by the *arrêté* of 3 January 1882 was almost a revolutionary development in that it authorised natives to renounce the native personal laws that governed them. This process was known as *renonciation* which once made was final and irrevocable and those who made this option came to be known as *renonçants*.

In 1893 some prominent Valangamougattars who became *renonçants* formed an association called *Société Progressiste de renonçants Valangamougattars* to work for the welfare of members of their community.* Prizes were awarded and

* The *Société* still continues to function in Pondicherry.

every encouragement was given to them so as to wipe out the educational backwardness of members of their community. 68 Some Valangamougattars embraced Christianity in order to escape from the disabilities of castism. The education of such converts was taken care of by the missionaries. A large number of them left their villages and sought employment in and around the town. Chunnambukalavai-pet (Tiruvalluvarnagar), Kuruchchikuppam, Dupuypet and Savariarpet were some of the areas where they settled down. The missionaries built churches in all these areas and carried on their yeoman service. Some of them were absorbed in government service, especially in the lower ranks. Some sought employment in the textile mills. Some were employed by the missionaries themselves. Yet others took to military service under the French and went to serve in the colonies.

The years 1903-1912 may go down in history as the period of renewed agitation for equality in public premises like churches, theatres, etc. R.P. Babilonne was in the forefront of this agitation. Latour Sambrama, a veteran of World War I spearheaded the movement to pull down the walls that separated the cemetery among French citizens, caste and depressed class Christians.

Another association by name '**Réveil Social**' was started in 1907 to work for the welfare of the depressed classes. Besides the Clairon brothers, Lazare, François Lesel, Horace and M. Noël and many other members of the community played a prominent role in the movement for the uplift of the community. '**Réveil Social**' became another nerve centre fighting for social reforms. Schools for educating the young and the old were run by this organisation. The members often met and discussed the problems of their community. Teams of social workers went round the rural areas to study the conditions of the depressed classes and offered suggestions to improve their lot. Hard-working and intelligent youngsters were encouraged to prosecute higher studies and financial assistance was given to needy students. Attached to Réveil Social, was another organisation called '**La Jeunesse Républicaine**' (The Young Republicans).* The betterment of the backward classes was the motto of this société. **La Ligue du Relèvement Social** was yet another organisation that fought for the rights of the depressed classes. '**Solidarité des dames de l'Inde Française**', '**Gramapunarutharanam**' were some of the other organisations which lent support

* Started in 1911, **La Jeunesse Républicaine** continued to function till 1955.

to the cause of the depressed classes. Several other associations were formed to work for the welfare of particular communities e.g. *Alliance éducative des Vannias* (1919), *Visvakarma sabai* (1923), *Yadavakula sangame* (1924), etc. Thus a good deal of discussions and debate was carried on in the first quarter of the present century. The educated among these communities worked unitedly to put an end to the stigma of untouchability.

In 1926 E. V. Ramasamy Naicker visited Muttiyalupettai along with Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu and addressed a gathering there. E.V. Ramasamy again visited Pondicherry in 1931 and addressed a meeting in Gaebelé Theatre. His radical ideas won him many followers in Pondicherry, notable among them being Poet Bharathi Dasan and M. Noël. In the 'Puduvai Murasu', a journal which served as a mouthpiece of the self-respect movement, Bharathi Dasan was a regular contributor. Through his poems he made a scathing attack on the caste system. Noël wrote a series of articles condemning the church and the priests for upholding caste distinctions in churches for which he was sued in the court of law. He was sentenced and fined in the lower court. The *Tribunal Supérieur d'Appel* in Pondicherry also confirmed the judgement of the lower court. But the Supreme Court in Paris set aside the judgement.

In November 1933 Gandhiji started his All-India tour to appeal to Hindus to make amends for their sins in having kept the Harijans under subjugation. In December 1933 a branch of the Tamil Nadu Harijana Seva Sangham was started in Pondicherry. Maurice Clairon, Ganapathy Sagraire, D. Durairaj, J. Swaminathan and a few others, who took keen interest in removing the bane of untouchability, were members of the Executive Committee of the Pondicherry Harijana Seva Sangham. A similar sangham was also started in Karaikal with Arangasamy Naicker as its President.

Gandhiji visited Pondicherry on 17 February 1934 in the course of his tour of Tamil Nadu. The Harijana Seva Sangham carried on a campaign among the people and collected funds to present him a purse at the time of his visit to Pondicherry. Several thousand people gathered at Odiansalai maidan to see and hear the Mahatma. In a brief speech Gandhiji advised the audience to eschew castism and communalism and to remove the blot of untouchability from their midst. He paid glowing tributes to the noble ideals of equality and brotherhood enshrined in the French Constitution. While Gandhiji addressed the gathering from the dais, Georges Bourret, the then Governor of Pondicherry,

stood up in his car parked at the Police Station near Odiansalai and had a glimpse of the Mahatma from a distance. In deference to the advice of Gandhiji, members of the Harijana Seva Sangham dedicated themselves vigorously to the service of the Harijans. In 1936 the *Conseil Général* called upon the *Cercle de Pondichéry* to throw itself open to all without any distinction of colour.

In 1912 Sri Narayana Guru paid a visit to Mahe to spread the message of brotherhood of men. The first conference of Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham, Mahe, was held the same year. Sri Narayana Guru visited Mahe a second time in 1928. Six years later, Mahatma Gandhi visited Mahe. All these events underline the penetration of reformist ideas into Mahe.

The Deena Poshaka Samajam in Yanam was started in 1931 with the main object of spreading education among the depressed classes.⁶⁹ Prominent members of the community in the region were associated with the activities of this Samajam. The names of Pamu Rama Murthy, Pantagada Birava Murthy, Dunna Venkata Ratnam, Kamidi Venkata Subbiah, Gurrappu Venkatarathnam, Dadala Ramanayya (Raphale) will be remembered. In the beginning the Samajam was housed in a mud building. But with the active co-operation of the members and a liberal grant made by the Administration, a pukka building was constructed and declared open on 25 October 1950. The Samajam conducted a free school for both boys and girls upto VI Standard and maintained a well-equipped library of books donated by well wishers.

All these developments and the radical ideas permeating through the length and breadth of India left their impact on the French Administration in India. In a report submitted to the President of the French Republic, the Minister for the Colonies and the Minister for Law recommended that mention of caste in the *Etat-Civil* records and *Notaire* deeds might be dispensed with in French India since the people in this colony were clamouring for the abolition of these age old conventions of caste system. It was suggested that only the proper name, family name, father's name and details of residence need be mentioned in the public records. This recommendation was accepted by the President and the *décret* of 16 June 1937 was promulgated by the *arrêté* of 15 July 1937.⁷⁰ This was the first and the foremost decision of the government headed by Governor

Croccichia that paved the way for further reforms designed to erase the stigma of castism in the Territory.* The local associations were also vociferous and brought to the notice of the government the various disabilities suffered by the low caste people.

In 1940 the 'Valangas' represented to the government that their villages were all known as 'cherry' and this nomenclature at once proclaimed their low status in society and degradation and appealed that the suffix 'cherry' to the village names should be changed into 'pet'. Hoping that this step would have a psychological effect, the government considered their representation favourably and ordered in their *arrêté* of 20 August 1940 that the expressions 'cherry', 'parachery', 'paraterou', 'pallachery', 'pallaterou', 'sakiliparaterou', 'vettiaparachery' and 'vettiaparaterou' inhabited only by the pariahs should henceforth be known as 'peth' throughout French India with the exception of Pondicherry, Kottuchcheri, Mel Kottuchcheri, Naivachcheri and Agara Naivachcheri. 71

As early as in 1947 a resolution was passed on the Thirteenth Anniversary of the Senji Salai Students' Association calling upon the government to change the name of Chunnambukalavaipet (in Pondicherry Commune) as Tiruvalluvar-nagar. By the *arrêté* of 10 December 1953 the government ordered that 'Chounamboucalavapeth' should thenceforth be known as 'Tirouvallouvarnagar' and 'Malapally' in Yanam Commune as 'Adi Andrapet'. Though these measures did not themselves alter very much the status of the depressed classes, they were symbolic of the new wind of change sweeping through the nation. But soon after merger, in one of the first steps, the administration extended the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 to Pondicherry.

The first post-merger census carried out in 1961 did not attempt to collect details of castes in the Territory. However, the monographic studies carried out as part of the 1961 census identified the following castes in Pondicherry and Karaikal regions :

Ahamudaya Thevar	Pathar
Alwar	Pattinavar (Chettiar)
Brahmin (Iyer)	Reddiar
Chettiar	Sengunda Mudaliar

* It was in 1935 that the so called untouchables were 'scheduled' for special treatment under British Rule. Thus the term 'Scheduled Castes' became the official designation of untouchables.

Desigar	Sozhia Vellala Pillai
Gramani (Nadar)	Thondaimandala Mudaliar
Isai Vellala Pillai	Udayar
Kammala Asari	Valluvar
Kavarai Naidu	Vannar (Washermen)
Maruthuvar (Barber)	Vanniar (Padayachi-Kavoundar)
Navithar (Barber) (Pandithar)	Vellala Mudaliar
Parayan	Yadava Pillai

Besides those mentioned above, several other castes are represented in the Territory.

The village community is bound together economically on the basis of castes which follow their traditional occupations. The Vanniars or Pallis are also known as Padayachi, Nainar, Naicker or Kavoundar although a majority of them are known as Padayachis. By and large, Vannia Padayachis appear to be more prosperous than Naickers and Kavounders. They are mostly agriculturists and weavers. The Reddiars are a powerful community and are owners of extensive land holdings. The Kavarais from the Telugu country were mostly soldiers and traders of jewelry and precious stones. The Yadavals are shepherds and milkmen by profession. Chetties are mostly merchants, traders and bankers. There are two groups of Komutties viz., the southern sect and northern sect who are mostly traders. Elavaniyars were also merchants. Although Malayamans are cultivators in general, in Pondicherry they are mostly merchants. They add the caste suffix of Odayar to their names. Both the northern and southern group of Vanuvass are oilmongers and carry the suffix of Chetty to their names. The Sembadavars are apparently descendants of migrants from the neighbouring districts. The Sembadavars of Virampattinam have assumed the title of Nattar and are engaged in fishing in the nearby rivers and lakes.

There are two clans of Sengunda Mudaliars according to legend, one which complied with the request of Poet Ottakkoothar and another dissident group. Members of the dissident group are said to be found mostly in Thanjavur District as well as in Tirumalarajanpattinam and Karaikal. Those who complied with Ottakkoothar's request are said to be residing in Pondicherry. They are mostly weavers. Besides Kaikolars, such communities as Chedars, Seniers or Kannada Seniers, Saliers and Pattunoolkarars are also weavers by profession.

Isai Vellalas are none other than that section of Sengunda Mudaliars or Kaikolars who were associated with the system of devadasis. There are two clans among Isai Vellala Pillais, one known as Parikulam and the other as Kaikolar. It is said that members of the Parikulam assume the title of Pillai and Kaikolars the title of Mudaliars. The Isai Vellala Pillais of the Parikulam class were traditional temple musicians. Pari means horse and music is said to flow with the swiftness of a horse. Cattle rearing is the main occupation of Yadava Pillais. They take to agriculture as a subsidiary occupation. Desigars originally belonged to the Sozhia Vellala Pillai caste.

The caste of Kammalas included Thattars, Thatchars, Karumars, Kannars, Kalthatchars, Pathars, etc. They were mostly engaged in different kinds of smithcrafts. Asaris were goldsmiths by tradition and called themselves pathars. The Asaris were also engaged in blacksmithy and carpentry. The Mouchis were mostly painters, decorators and carpentry workers. The Shanars, divided into the southern and northern sect, were mostly toddy tappers. The Satanis were flower sellers and garland makers. Kosavars were professional potters. The Panichavars attended to duties connected with funerals. Pariahs were traditional agricultural labourers. The Navidars and Ambattars are barbers. Vannars who are washermen are divided into several endogamous sects on territorial basis. Valluvans were priests of pariahs. Vettians are custodians of the burial ground. They also regulate the flow of river water into the fields. The Maravars, though not many, were soldiers. The Sakkilis were mostly cobblers. Koravars formed a clan of wandering gypsies. The Otters were mostly engaged in digging wells, tanks, etc. They also tended the pigs.⁷² The spread of education, however, has been responsible for considerable occupational mobility these days.

The residential pattern in villages is very often based on the caste system. Houses are very often built in rows, on two sides of a street or lane. Settlements of the depressed classes are even now called 'pets'. It will be of some interest to recall that the *arrêté* of 5 November 1856 authorised members of the low caste Hindus of Karaikal to reside in the streets of the high castes on the ground that there was no established *mamul* (tradition) on this point.⁷³ Some of the villages which began as single caste villages grew up into multi-caste villages in due course in order to meet social requirements. Kadirkamam, for instance, grew up as a settlement of weavers. A few muslim families migrated to this village later. They were all engaged in 'Aachekattuthal', an important item of work for weaving. Still later some Pariah families migrated

from Tamil Nadu and settled down as agricultural labourers. Thus it had grown into a multi-caste village. Bahur, for instance, is a multi-caste village where there are Brahmins, Vanniars, Chettiars, Udayars, Gramanis, Vannars and Navithars besides some Christians and Muslims.

Caste panchayats were prevalent among certain castes until about two decades ago. It was seen that the Consultative Committee of Indian Jurisprudence constituted in 1827 consisted of caste chiefs. These chiefs of castes called Nattanmaikarar were elected on the basis of majority vote by all heads of families. Once elected, they held office for life and were not free to take a second wife. In fact among Sengundars marriage *thambulam* used to be exchanged in the presence of a Nattanmaikarar. The system has almost died out and not much importance is attached to the position of Nattanmaikarars nowadays.

Manners and customs :

A good many of the castes found in Tamil Nadu are represented in Pondicherry and Karaikal regions. Their manners and customs do not differ much from those in Tamil Nadu. Hence it will not be practical to give a detailed account of the manners and customs of all the different communities. Nevertheless, a few vignettes of the scenario may perhaps be presented, based primarily on the monographic studies carried out by the Census Authorities in the sixties about some of the communities living in Kadirkamam, Thimmanayakanpalayam, Virampattinam and Thengathittu in Pondicherry region and Tirunallar in Karaikal region.

Ear-boring ceremony : Ear-boring and tonsuring are very common among villagers. The ceremonies are held in childhood, sometime when the child is about one year old or even three years. Prior to these ceremonies, *pongi eāuthal* is celebrated in propitiation of the family deity. The first hair of the child is offered to some deity. These offerings are carried out either in the local temple or at places like Tirupati, Palani, Mylam, etc. Sometimes the whole family shave off their hair on such occasions.

Puberty rites : The attainment of puberty by a girl is considered to be an important event. It entails pollution for certain number of days at the end of which the *manjal neer suba sadangu, ruthu mangala snanam* or *ruthu santhi* is arranged. The girl is given an oil-bath to terminate pollution. Among Reddiars

the ceremonial oil-bath is given usually by a washerwoman who takes for herself the clothes whether old or new worn by the girl at the time. A new saree and a blouse are presented to her by her maternal uncle and given *puttu* (baked rice flour) to eat. Among some communities a *nalangu* ceremony is performed to ward off the effects of evil eyes. In the past, girls were not allowed out of their houses even to attend school and were given in marriage soon after. This restriction is fast disappearing. Nowadays the ceremony is gradually tending to become more informal especially among those who have come under the influence of modern ideas.

Marriage customs and rituals : In the XVIII century marriage ceremonies lasted several days. A *pandal* beautifully decorated for the performance of dancing girls used to be erected in front of the house in the middle of the road. The bride and bridegroom, seated in a decorated palanquin, were taken on a procession to the accompaniment of music and fire-works according to the status of the family.⁷⁴ Nowadays the fashion is to take in procession the newly married couple in an open decorated car on slow motion to the accompaniment of band music.

Marriage is preceded by a betrothal ceremony known as *nichaya thartham*, *kaithamboolam matruthal* or *pariam panam varthal* which takes place in the bride's place after ensuring the compatibility of the horoscopes of the bride and bridegroom. Prior to this, the bridegroom goes to the bride's place to see her. The marriage ceremony is marked by *pandakkal nattuthal*, *penn azhaithal*, *mappillai azhaippu*, *kappu kattuthal*, *gowri pooja*, *thalikattu*, *moi seithal*, *ennai nalangu*, *dharai varthal* (*kannikadhanam*), *ammi mithithal* and *arunthathi parthal*. The second day function is called *boothakalam*, *ambogam* and *maruvunnal*. Certain months are considered favourable for marriages. For instance, more marriages are celebrated in the months of Thai, Panguni, Chittirai, Vaikasi, Ani and Avani.

One effect of the French rule is that marriage contracts are to be registered in the Commune Registry under article 63 of the Civil Code. Marriages will otherwise be invalid even if solemnised by priests according to religious rites whatever may be the *bona fide* of the persons concerned.

Pregnancy ritual : Some communities observe a ceremony known as *poo-choodal* or *valaikappu* on the fifth, seventh or ninth month of a woman's first pregnancy. Among Asaris the ceremony is known as *sool seithal* which is performed by their own priests known as *upathyayars*. Some communities

observe *seemantham* which takes place in the husband's place. Among Brahmins the *valaikappu* is performed in the house of the woman's parents during the fifth month of pregnancy. After a holy bath, the woman decked in flowers and surrounded by women relatives, is dressed in new clothes. A group of elderly married women perform the *arathi* to cast off any evil eye on her. Among some communities the ceremony is known as *muthuneer kottuthal*. This function is performed to ward off the effects of evil eye on her. *Seemantham* is held usually in the husband's house before the *homakundams* prepared by purohits to propitiate the gods to endow the first born with health, both mental and physical.

The delivery of the first child takes place in the house of the pregnant woman's mother. The new born among some communities is fed with *seennai** or sugar water. During the post-delivery period the mother is subjected to certain diet restrictions for the first few days. A delivery entails pollution for nine days. On the tenth day, the purificatory ceremony known as *punyahahavachanam* is performed with due ceremonies to terminate pollution. The Brahmin priest who prepares the *homam* (sacred fire) sprinkles water sanctified by *mantras* all over the house in order to purify the house. Among some communities, an informal naming ceremony takes place on the eleventh day i.e., the day after *punyahahavachanam* when the horoscope is prepared. Usually a child is given the name of its grand parents or the name of some popular deity. The mother is usually allowed to go out of the house only after this.

Funeral rites : Among Hindus the dead are either buried or cremated. The period of pollution, however, varies from community to community. Some communities like the Asari's bury the dead in the sitting posture. The body, before being placed on the bier, is bathed in cold water. The eldest son or the next to him acts as the funeral celebrant, who lights the funeral pyre. In case of the death of a virgin, a token marriage is performed in the cremation ground. The milk pouring ceremony known as *pal eduppu* or *pal sadangu* takes place on the second day and is done to propitiate the soul of the deceased. On the fifteenth day *kal eduppu* ceremony is performed. The sixteenth day ceremony is known as *karumathi*. On this day the funeral celebrant is subjected to *thalai kattal* i.e. the ceremony of wearing a turban or *subha sweekaram*. Mourning is observed for the whole year. Brahmins and certain other communities perform what is called *masyam* i.e., monthly obsequies to the soul of the dead in all the twelve months during the first year.

* *Seennai* is an admixture of castor oil with palmgur, dry ginger and other herbs.

Beliefs and practices :

Tradition, taboos and superstitions : The evil eye known as *kan thristy* is said to be the cause of many minor ailments such as stomach disorder, loss of appetite, etc. In the case of adults, the evil eye may be cast by praising one's health or wealth or if watched by a dog or other people while eating. A remark that one works day and night like a bull is sufficient to cause body-ache, fever, indigestion and other ailments. The spell of the evil eye is sought to be prevented by putting a black dot either on the forehead or on the cheeks of the child. Some perform the ritual of *thristy sutral*.

When a girl is pregnant *margosa* leaves are placed on the roof or tied across the door to ward off evil spirits. The new borns are sometimes branded with hot iron needles on the body to ward off evil spirits. Some still believe that death among children is caused by the entry of evil spirits into the body. To avoid this after delivery, the mother is kept in a dark room and a footwear is kept near the feet. A sickle with *margosa* leaves are kept near the hand. The room is also covered with these leaves. Even when it is necessary for the women to go out of her room, she is expected to carry the leaves in one hand and the sickle in the other.

Sorcery is said to be the cause of the death of young babies which die of symptoms of diarrhoea or general debility. Very often one may come across a baby with a black or red or saffron coloured thread tied round the neck or wrist. Some tie a *thayathu* sold by some magician. This is considered to protect or prevent the effect of evil spell cast by magicians. It is also used for fever, fits, ghost trouble or due to what is called *kurivithosham*, *kokku thosham*, *thevangu*, etc.

When the eldest child in a family dies, the body is cremated and the bones are powdered without the knowledge of others and thrown into a river. It is feared that if this is not done, some magician may exhume the bones of the deceased and use them for his black magic. It is also feared that the mother of the child whose bones are thus exhumed may not beget any child thereafter. Sometimes in order to prevent this calamity, the dead are buried in the back-yard of the house itself or someone is put on a watch for three or four days. The *sooniam* is detected in the shape of a tin (folded) and placed on the roof of the house or buried under the earth. Some exhume it after it is investigated by *pujaris*.

People also believe that the soul of the person dying of an unnatural death, like suicide, drowning, accident, etc. haunt particular places, houses, foot paths etc. These evil spirits, it is believed, attack the people or follow anyone carrying non-vegetarian food or women taking bath in the evening. On the news of an unnatural death in the village, people especially women and children do not stir out of their house at night. The person in whom the ghost enters, runs amuck, jumps, dances, gets fever, hysteria, hears strange noises, etc. These cases are treated by magicians who drive away the ghosts by tying a coloured thread with knots round the neck or by offering special water to drink. Although elderly people still believe in magic and witchcraft, their popularity is very much on the decline.

Auspicious times : Certain hours of each day known as *ragukalam* are considered inauspicious for starting any activity or for performing any function. It is considered inauspicious even for treatment, hospitalisation and surgical operations. Tuesdays, Fridays and festival days are inauspicious for travel, for spending money and even for calling on a doctor for urgent treatment.

Fasting : Fasting is observed by Hindus to appease their gods and especially by the ladies for their husband's life. Usually, only one meal is taken a day.

Oil bath: To have an oil bath once a week is a common custom. The whole body is smeared literally with oil and bath is taken after some hours with soapnut powder to remove extra oil. It is supposed to remove excess heat from the body, improve complexion and appetite. Even infants are given oil bath and oil is poured into eyes, ears and nose.

Inter-caste relations :

Some curious instances of mixed castes and their duties are recorded in the inscriptions. These show that there were mixed castes known as *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. From an inscription dated 1169 A.D. the class of *rathakaras* is and understood to have included blacksmiths, goldsmiths and stone masons, besides carpenters. The *smriti* makes them children of *vaisya* women and *sudra* men; one of the inscriptions calls them children of Brahma Vaisya. They seem to have been accepted as a *pratiloma* caste. Their profession was weaving and it was their privilege to supply fresh cloth for *upanayana* and

other domestic ceremonies, for *djvaja-patas* to the temples during festivals and generally to supply all things made of yarn and required by gods, brahmins and kings. In 1127 A.D. some families of this caste accepted some *iraiyili* land at Tirubhuvanai and in return undertook to supply clothes to the local temple on specified occasions and in stated quantities; they authorised the Sri Vaishnavas of the temple to surround (their dwellings), to imprison them and to take all steps necessary to force them to keep the engagement if they were in default.

Although caste distinctions are still maintained, they are not so rigorous as some years ago. Inter-caste marriages are, however, still very rare. The Brahmins attach great importance to *gotras* although of late inter-marriages among sub-groups viz., Vadamas, Vathimas, Brahacharnam, Ashtasahasram and Sholiar are met with. Pathars and Asaris inter-dine and inter-marry. In spite of the fact that Sembadavar and Pattanavar are fishermen, the former consider themselves superior to the latter and do not inter-dine or inter-marry with Pattanavars although economically they are more backward. Vanniars inter-marry and inter-dine among their sub-sects. Though there are exogamous sects among Reddiars, it is not a barrier to marital relations. Saivites and Vaishnavites also inter-marry. But other kinds of social relationships exist between members of different castes more particularly among the educated and urban population.

Property and inheritance :

Article 6 of the *arrêté* of 6 January 1819 stipulated that all Indians, whether Christians, Muslims or Gentiles shall be judged as in the past, according to the laws, usages and customs of their castes. Such laws, usages and customs were applicable to all matters relating to adoption, marriages, succession, inheritance of property, etc. The right of inheritance was determined as per the law of Mitakshara.

A widow was not entitled to dispose off the properties inherited by her in the manner she liked although she was entitled to the enjoyment of the income derived from it. Whenever a person left behind two widows, each one was entitled to an equal share of the property, and on the death of one of them, the property devolved on the surviving widow. This was the position till 1917, when the *Cour d'Appel* proclaimed the absolute right of the widow

over property inherited from her husband. Similarly there was a major departure from the Hindu law on the rights of daughters over properties inherited by them from their father. Accordingly they were allowed to bequeath their ancestral properties to their children. Illegitimate children were not entitled to the properties of their father. However, they inherited the property of their mother.

According to the Hindu law whenever a person gave up his religion or was expelled from his religion or caste, he would forfeit his right of inheritance to his ancestral property. This position was altered by a decision of the **Tribunal** in 1915. 75

The joint family system is still in vogue especially in the rural areas. A survey carried out in 1965 at Bahur showed that out of 65 houses surveyed as many as 47 fell under the category of joint families. Such families are under the authority of the father and after his death, the eldest son takes over as the head of the family. As long as the properties remain undivided, the eldest son must have towards his brothers the affection which a father has for his sons and the wife of the eldest son must be considered as the mother. In families where all the grown-ups go for work, the children are looked after by the older siblings.

As early as in 1769, the question whether it was open to the natives to make their will came up for consideration. Article 10 of the **règlement** issued in the same year settled the matter beyond doubt. The natives were required to execute a will in the presence of a native registrar and other witnesses. This may be regarded as the first nail driven on the coffin of the joint family system in Pondicherry.

Soon after merger, the Partition Act, 1893, the Hindu Disposition of Property Act, 1916, the Hindu Inheritance (Removal of Disabilities) Act, 1928 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (with modifications) were extended to this Territory with effect from 1 October 1963.

Marriage and morals :

Although polygamy is allowed among Hindus, monogamy is generally the socially accepted norm nowadays. Among Sembadavars polygamy is freely allowed. In some cases, soon after betrothal, a man and woman start living as husband and wife without going through the marriage ceremony

Their issues are considered legitimate and the father and mother get married at any time convenient to them. Even if a man lives with a woman the community recognises them as husband and wife. But all this happens chiefly due to the poor economic status which makes marriage celebration an inexpensive affair. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 were extended to this Territory together with the modifications on 1 October 1963.

Child marriage : The average marriageable age was about sixteen years although there were numerous instances where persons got married at the age of thirteen and fourteen.⁷⁶ The system of child marriage has now almost disappeared. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 was extended to this Territory on 24 May 1968.

Consanguineous marriages : Marriages are contracted mostly with consanguineous relatives. The preference is for one's own sister's daughter followed by paternal aunt's daughter as well as maternal uncle's daughter. This practice is fast disappearing among the educated.

Dowry system : The dowry system is prevalent among most communities with the rates varying according to the economic status of the parties entering into marriage. Among Brahmins especially, when the grooms are educated, the rate vary according to the standard of education and status of the groom. Among Sozhia Vellalas dowry is neither given nor taken. The system is not prevalent among Reddiars and Sengunda Mudaliars although it is called *seer varisai* which is presented by the bride's father. The quantum of these gifts too vary according to the economic status of the families concerned. Though dowry is not accepted in certain other communities, the groom's party may insist that a certain quantum of jewels be given to the bride. Dowry system is not prevalent among Pattanavars but bride price known as *pariam panam* is given by the groom's party to the bride. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 was extended to this Territory on 24 May 1968.⁷⁷

Widow marriage : As late as in XIX century the practise of *sati* was found to exist in Pondicherry. For instance, a Brahmin lady committed herself to funeral pyre to join her late husband in heaven.⁷⁸ In fact the *arrêté* of 22 January 1830 prevented a widow committing *sati* and accorded her a life pension. Widow marriages are not common although widowers are at full liberty to remarry. Among Reddiars a stigma is attached to the

remarriage of widows although widowers remarry. Among pariahs, remarriages of widows and widowers are common. It is also allowed for a woman in this community to live with a man without being legally married to him. This practice is known as *serthu kolluthal*. Sometimes such persons get married conveniently at any time even after the birth of some children. Among Pattanavars no ceremony is attached to a widow marriage. In an informal and simple function the man marrying the widow ties round the lady's neck a turmeric stained twine and with that the function concludes. This is known as *naduveetu thali kattuthal*.

Among Sengunda Mudaliars, widow and widower's remarriage is not prohibited although widows do not generally remarry.

Divorce : Among most communities divorce is not prevalent. Among Vannars, however, divorce is freely allowed to either party on payment of twice the bride price and they can marry again.

The question of divorce among Hindus is now governed by the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 which was extended to this Territory on 1 October 1963. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 was extended to this Territory on 24 May 1968.

The Devadasi system : *Devadasis* or *dasis* formed a separate caste. Under this system a girl from each family was dedicated for temple service by *pottukattal*, the ceremony of imprinting a *tilak* mark on the forehead with a hot iron. These girls were attached to some of the temples in Pondicherry, Karaikal, Tirunallar and Villiyanur. Le Gentil writing in 1769 attests to the fact that no festival, marriage or procession would be held in Pondicherry without their performance and that they were held in respect by the community. 79 In due course, however, the *devadasi* system degenerated into open prostitution. In 1913, the Tribunal of Pondicherry pointed out that the system had altogether lost its original significance. But with the abolition of this practise in British India, the system gradually disappeared in Pondicherry too. However, those employing minor girls in the profession came to be charged under Article 334 of the French Penal Code. 80

The *Devadasi* system confined to the Isai Vellala community was in vogue in Tirunallar till about 1940, when there were about eight girls attached to the temple. Their duties included fanning the deities while taking them out in

procession, singing and dancing on important occasions. Following a resolution passed by the conference of members of this community in Kumbakonam, the practice was stopped. The male members of the community, however, continue to play musical instruments in the temple.

Prostitution : The absence of dry law, the flow of tourists and sea traffic were inducements enough for the growth of prostitution especially in the towns of Pondicherry and Karaikal. As the indiscriminate proliferation of prostitution in the town posed a health hazard, the French administration came forward to license the profession in 1954. This measure was, however, withdrawn subsequently.⁸¹ Those found indulging in the profession were rounded up on charges of vagabondage (Art. 269 and 270 of the French Penal Code).

After merger, however, there was further proliferation of prostitution in the towns mostly confined to lodges. With the extension of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act, 1956 to this Territory on 24 May 1968 and the opening of the Rescue and Protective (Shelter) Home at Reddiarpalaiyam in June 1973, facility was provided for the first time for separate confinement of those convicted under the Act. Those remanded to custody are detained in the Central Prison.

Addictions : Alcoholism, smoking and betel chewing are the three common types of addictions among grown-ups, especially among those above fifteen years old. Certain communities are found to be more addicted to drinking than others. For instance, Brahmins and Asaris are not so much addicted to drinks. Fishermen are proverbially addicted to drinking. By and large, members of the economically backward communities are more addicted to drinks. The poor man's drink is toddy, while the well-to-do go in for foreign type of liquors like brandy, whisky, rum, gin etc. Brandy is very popular among the retired French personnel. Toddy is obtained from palmyra and palm tree. An incision is made in the spadix and a mud pot is tied to it in such a position that the juice trickles into it. The juice gets fermented after a few hours. It is a rich source of vitamin B which is deficient in the diet. Some people resort to excessive drinking of toddy during harvest season. In the villages the agricultural workers, lime workers and the nomadic tribes drink toddy. The latter sometimes cook their food with toddy.

Betel chewing with or without tobacco is another common addiction, more common among women. Some use betel nuts alone or in combination with lime and betel leaves. Sometimes it is the first thing put in the mouth in the morning and removed only at meal times. Some use it to suppress hunger. Women beautify their face by reddening their lips. Some believe, it cleans the mouth and teeth. Others use it to mask foul smell. Betel chewing is slowly loosing its clients while smoking is on the ascendancy.

Home life :

Types of dwellings : The dwellings can broadly be placed under three categories viz., thatched huts, houses with tiled roofs and terraced houses. Houses are either thatched with *vezhal*, coconut or palmyrah leaves. Terraced structures are few in the rural areas. While the first type of houses are common in villages, the last two are found in urban as well as urbanised centres. A house generally contains a *therukuradu* (verandah) with tiled roof built in a slope with *thinai* (pial) on either side opening into a small verandah known as *therunadai*. Adjoining to the *therunadai* some houses have a room called *nadai arai*. The *therunadai* takes one into the house to the square shaped *thavaram* running on all four sides or three sides. This portion of the house is either tiled or terraced with a square shaped patio like opening at the centre serving as a kind of wind tunnel for houses that do not have openings on the side. Adjoining the *thavaram* are built one or two rooms known as *koodam*. Some houses have facilities for *pooja* in the *koodam* itself or have separate *pooja* rooms. The *thavaram* often serves as a kind of drawing room as well. The *koodam* provides privacy for the family. Beyond the *thavaram* lies the kitchen. The *thottanadai* leads to the backyard. Some houses have wells and latrines in the open garden or backyard. Most of the urban houses have open backyards where generally the well and the cattle sheds are located. Huts are built with mud walls. The foundation is not very deep. Bamboo poles, coir ropes and sometimes wooden rafters are used to build the huts. Generally mud floors are pressed, levelled and smeared with cowdung. Such huts do not have pials. The cooking is done in a corner. Tiled houses are built on firm foundations.

A simple ceremony is held while laying the foundation for house construction. On an auspicious day a small pit known as *sani moolai* is dug at the northern end of a site and an elderly married woman sprinkles turmeric water on the pit. Pillayar poojai is then performed by a group of *sumangalis*

(married women with their husbands alive) after lighting camphor near the *sani moolai*. A small quantity of cowdung made into a conical shape symbolises God Pillaiyar to whom pooja is performed. Dharba weeds are placed on the image, a coconut is cracked and camphor is lighted. Betel leaves, plantain and arecanuts are distributed to those present. The construction is begun on any day after that, convenient to the family. Sometimes, a similar ceremony is observed at the time of fixing the *vasal* i.e., the door which forms the main entrance to the house. The door frame is smeared with turmeric paste, vermilion and decorated with flowers. Then pooja is performed. Five *sumangalis* perform the ritual with the help of male members who fix the door frame. The masons and carpenters engaged in the construction work are honoured on this day with presentation of dhoties and towels by the prospective house owner. *Pan supari* is then distributed to one and all present. In all Hindu communities, after completion of the house construction, a function known as *grahapravesam* (formal occupation of the house) is performed before occupation.

Most Hindus draw *kolams* i.e., symmetrically shaped floral designs with white powder in front of their homes. Some also use red powder and saffron. In the month of *margazhi* they adorn them with flowers which are fixed on cowdung balls. Some still paint the mud and tiled floor of their house with cowdung mixed with water, especially on Fridays. The house cleaned thus is believed to be free from pollution. Some say that it serves as a germ killer.

Furniture : The kind of furniture used in a house serves as an index of one's wealth. The more one's wealth, the greater are the items of furniture in a house. It could also be taken as an indication of the cultural orientation of the family or household. Benches and stools are more common in villages while chairs, sofas, almirahs and cots are met with more often in urban areas.

Dress : La Farelle has left us a description of the dress worn by women in XVIII century Pondicherry. They wore sarees and were not particular to wear upper garments like blouse or jacket. The rich women wore silk sarees with gold or silver *ottiyanam*. The hair was decked with gold or silver pins adorned with gems. ⁸² The fact that women were not particular to wear the jacket is corroborated by Le Gentil. According to him the wearing of jackets was the prerogative of the women of Telugu origin. ⁸³ Dancing girls were, however, an exception.

There is no marked difference in the dress style of people belonging to the various communities in the villages nowadays. Generally, the villagers use only cotton clothes all round the year. Men wear dhoti with or without shirt, towel, shawl or banian. Those working in the field or engaged in manual work tie the towel round their head. Women wear saree and blouse. Aged women among certain communities do not wear the blouse. The mode of wearing the saree by women, other than those of the Brahmin community, does not differ very much. Middle aged Brahmin women follow the traditional mode of wearing the saree with *madissaru*. Under this style, the portion between the knees and ankles on both legs have the appearance of pyjama. In the Iyer style of *madissaru*, this pyjama-like appearance is on the right leg, while on the left leg a number of pleats hang down from the waist. The saree pallav always rests on the right shoulder. The Brahmin style of wearing the dhoti is known as *panchakacchan*. School boys use shirts and pants while girls use skirts known as *pavadai* in Tamil and jackets. Poor children use old pieces of unsewn cloth round their waists leaving the upper part of their bodies bare.

It may be recalled here that as late as in 1828, the *Tribunal de simple police* condemned the pariahs for having worn chappals in violation of the local ordinance of 25 May 1827. This was confirmed by the *arrêté* of 5 May 1857. Further in 1828, a dispute arose in Grand' Aldée between Vellalas and Cavarais on the one hand and Kammalas on the other, touching on the right of Kammalas to wear chappals. This right was confirmed by the order of 27 October 1828 based on the advice of the Consultative Committee. People are increasingly getting accustomed to the habit of wearing sandals and wrist-watches.

Ornaments : Speaking about women in the early part of the XVIII century, La Farelle says that their sole ambition was to get themselves bedecked with jewels, the scale and value of which varied according to their wealth. Costly pearls and gems set on heavy gold or silver adorn the ears which, according to the taste of the country, was the more beautiful depending on the length.⁸⁴ Some of the jewels commonly used in villages are *addikai*, *jada billai*, *mustheppu* and *vakku chitti*. The rich use the *mustheppu* which is worn along the parting of the hair. *Addikai* is a chain made of gold studded fully with stones of red or green colour. *Jada billai* is a round shaped jewel studded with either white or coloured stones with a

hook at its back. It is placed at the back of the head, the plaits holding tightly the hook of the ornament. Some of the women also wear *metti* in their toes. The *jalara kolusu* made of silver is worn by girls and young women as a sort of anklet. Women sometimes wear nose screws and earrings. *Vanki* is worn in the upper arm. Ladies apply turmeric to their body while bathing to keep their skin smooth, clean and in order to improve their complexion. Applying black paint to the eyelids to heighten their beauty is also common. Women sometimes use *mehendi* known as *maruthani* for colouring their palms, fingers and toes. Painting of vermilion on the forehead is considered sacred and a symbol of womanhood by women belonging to all communities in the village. Mostly men and very rarely women, especially the old, wear the saivite mark known as *poosai* on their forehead.

Food : Rice is the staple food. Except Brahmins, most other communities are non-vegetarian. The poor take cold rice or *kanji* in the morning. Some take *kevuru kuzhu* prepared out of ragi. In many of the households, on Fridays and on auspicious occasions like '*amnavasai*' (New moon day) and *kiruthigai*, food is offered to their gods before commencing of dining.

Utensils : Stainless steel, brass, aluminium, bronze and mud vessels are in use according to the circumstances of the family concerned. There are neither urban nor rural characteristics as such. The common utensils used are *kudam*, *thekkusal*, *anda*, *bohini*, *sombu*, *tumbler*, *kuvalai* and sometimes *anaikal kuvalai*, *thavalai*, *adduku satti*, *kundan*. *Kudam* is used to carry water. *Anaikal kuvalai* which is made of brass is used for storing water. *Thekkusal* or *thavalai* also made of brass is used for cooking rice. *Anda* is used for storing water. Small cups known as *sarvam* are also used. *Sombu* is a small vessel for taking water for minor uses.

Mud vessels known as *sal satti* is used as bathing tub and *satti* for cooking food. *Karandi*, made of brass or iron, is used for serving food. *Thambalam* also made of brass, is used for drying grams or for serving food or *pan supary*. The *panikkam* is used for spitting. This utensil is invariably found in all Sembadavar's houses. *Vettrilai thepai* with bifurcations inside is used for keeping betel, arecanut, spices, tobacco and lime. Plates and saucers are becoming popular and the use of leaves for serving food is loosing ground.

Recreation and amusement :

Noticeable variations are discernible in the recreational habits of people in urban areas as well as among those of different social status. In general, the urban male population spend their evenings in the out, some in recreational clubs, others in sports clubs, etc. There were clubs, popularly known as 'Cercles' in urbanised areas for different groups of citizens. The **Cercle de Pondichéry** and the **Cercle Sportif Pondichérien** are two of the old prominent clubs in the town of Pondicherry. There were also some places where cock-fights with bets were arranged.

A number of youth clubs have sprung up in the town and in the rural areas recently providing facilities for playing caroms, chess, weight lifting, etc. In some clubs, games like cards, bridge, caroms, chess, etc. are played. Dramatic and other cultural performances by troupes from outside the Territory are also organised by local *sabhas* from time to time providing entertainment to the people. Circuses, wrestling bouts, tournaments and exhibitions also draw large crowds. *Mascarade* and *puliattams* are held seasonally.

With the advent of the movies, cinema halls came up in the town of Pondicherry. They are frequented by individuals, groups or families. The statement below gives a picture of the growth of cinema halls in the Territory between 1956 and 1976:

<i>Permanent and touring talkies region-wise</i>		1956 <i>Number</i>	1966 <i>No. Seating capacity</i>	1976 <i>No. Seating capacity</i>
<i>Pondicherry region :</i>				
Permanent talkies	..	4	9 8,062	19 15,910
Touring talkies	..	6	25 18,625	14 9,349
<i>Karaikal region :</i>				
Permanent talkies	..	3	3 2,278	4 3,247
Touring talkies	..	2	2 1,300	3 2,052
<i>Mahe region :</i>				
Permanent talkies	..	—	—	—
Touring talkies	..	1	—	1 500
<i>Yanam region :</i>				
Permanent talkies	..	—	1 650	1 620
Touring talkies	..	1	—	—

There are a few urban dwellers who go hunting for birds to Usteri, Bahur, Pakkamudiyanpet, etc.

Petangue is a game unique to Pondicherry in India. This game is usually played by retired soldiers of the French army settled in Pondicherry. Players may be seen in action near Gingee Salai, around the church in rue Dumas, within the campus of Cercle Sportif, etc. Sri Aurobindo Ashram has its own play grounds, swimming pool, library, theatre and stadium to provide recreational facilities for its inmates. While radio is popular among all sections of the population, television has made its entry recently, the rich having their sets at home and the poor viewing them at public places.

The villagers have very little recreation. They spend their time in idle gossip, playing cards, smoking or drinking. Village fairs and festivals also provide occasions for joy and gaiety through *teru koothu*, *kathakalakshepam* and *villu pattu*. Youngsters perform *chilambattam*, the traditional art of self-defence although rarely. The large number of community listening sets and libraries in the rural areas provide entertainment combined with education.

Communal life :

The Territory's communal life has by and large been marked by harmony except for occasional flare-ups between different castes and religious communities. The Governors of French India were the final arbiters in all disputes between castes. Since 1827, the Committee for Indian Jurisprudence guided the administration in resolving many a caste dispute which seemed to threaten communal harmony in the Territory. Effective and timely intervention by the law and order authorities have helped to defuse such flare-ups. Julien Vinson refers to a Hindu-Muslim conflict which occurred in 1884 at Karaikal. Some Muslims objected to a Hindu funeral procession passing through a road behind a mosque. They had not objected to Christian funeral processions passing through the same road. The Court naturally dismissed the plea of the Muslims. 85

Since merger, there have been few major instances of communal disturbances in the Territory. There have been instances of quarrels leading to open fights between villages. Such quarrels purely fall within the realm of law and order and cannot be treated as communal disturbances.

Pilgrim Centres : Pondicherry town, because of Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Villianur on account of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, may be regarded as pilgrim centres in Pondicherry region. The temple of Chengazhuneer-
 amman at Virampattinam is also visited by people from surrounding villages. The shrine of Saneeswara Bhagavan secures for Tirunallar the title of a pilgrim centre. The Church of St. Therese of Avila in Mahe has acquired some fame as a pilgrim centre. (For more details see Chapter XX-Places of Interest).

Festivities : The Bogi Pandigai, Pongal, Maha Sivarathri, Sri Ramanavami, Panguni Uthiram, Chittraipournami, Krishnajanayanthi, Vinayaka Chaturthi, Ayudha Pooja, Navarathri, Deepavali and Vaikunda Ekadasi are not only days of religious importance but also occasions marked by festivities. During Pongal, the poor rickshaw pullers of Pondicherry build hut-like enclosures with sugar-cane stems and pass the night, singing and dancing to the rhythm of drum music and folk songs. The Karinal following Mattupongal is marked by exchange of gifts, presents and sweets. Keralites in Pondicherry celebrate Onam.

Since merger, the Republic Day and the Independence Day are celebrated on a grand scale. The celebration on both the days is marked by a ceremonial parade, march past and flag hoisting. A reception hosted by the Lieutenant-Governor is held in the evening. The Republic Day is marked by pageantry and procession of floats presented by various Departments depicting achievements in different fields. The Raj Nivas, the Monument at the centre of 'Place', Hôtel de Ville, the Secretariat, the Legislative Assembly and many other buildings are illuminated on the occasion which attracts a large crowd of people from the villages. The Pondicherry Municipality arranges for games and competitions in the evenings.

In the outlying regions, the day is marked by flag hoisting and a parade in the morning and a reception in the evening. Although *de jure* Transfer Day (16 August) is a public holiday, it is not marked by any festivity.

The birthday of Mahatma Gandhi which falls on 2 October is also a day of celebration. The Cleanliness Week and the Leprosy Week are launched on the same day every year. A ceremony of garlanding the statue of Mahatma Gandhi is observed followed by charka-spinning and recitations from the Gita, Quran and Bible.

Since 1955, May Day is a public holiday in Pondicherry. In 1971 the Pondicherry Industrial Establishment (National and Festival Holidays) Act, 1964 was amended to declare May Day as a national holiday for industrial workers. The day is marked by processions and public meetings organised by workers, trade-unions and political parties.

The French community in Pondicherry observe 14 July as 'Bastille day' which used to be a holiday during the French period. Prior to merger, the occasion used to be marked by gun salutes, flag hoisting, ceremonial parades, processions, illumination of buildings and ships at anchor. The Pondicherry Municipality used to arrange skill games, competitions and water sports on sea. Since merger, the day is celebrated in a subdued manner. Wreaths are laid at the War Memorial by the **Consul Général de France**, and a representative of the Administration takes part in the function. In the evening the French **Consul Général** holds a reception.

The **Mascarade** is another form of popular festivity in Pondicherry. Wearing fantastic masks and fancy costumes, revellers go round the streets singing and dancing to the accompaniment of accordion and trumpet music on certain festival days.

Mahe Region :

According to a study carried out by Esquer more than 100 years ago, besides a few Brahmin sub-sects, several sub-castes under the fourth division of Sudras were represented in the region. Members of the Kshatriya and Vaisya castes were conspicuous by their absence.⁸⁶ Under the fourth division of Sudras there were those who formed the nobility of the country viz., Nambiar, Nair, Kurup, Panikkar, Adiyodi, Menon, etc., those engaged in temple service viz., Ambalavasigal, Akapoduvals, Bicharadi, Nambisen, etc., the third group of emigrant bankers, merchants, oil-mongers, tradesmen or weavers from the Tamil, Telugu and Canarese countries like Komutties, Chetties, Vaniens, Chaliens etc. Thiyyas formed the fourth group. They were mostly cultivators, agricultural workers or tappers. There were different classes of Kammalas like Asary, Thattan, Kollan, etc. Mukkuvas were fishermen. Then there were Navien, Vannan, Vettuvan and Valluvan. The sixth group consisted of Pariahs (Pulayas).

The above caste structure of society had almost crumbled, although the association of certain castes with certain professions is still very much evident especially in the rural areas of Chalakara, Pallur and Pandakkal. Thiyyas

are associated with agricultural labour although there are now traders, shop keepers, *vaidyas* (physicians) and civil servants among them. Mukkuvas are mostly fishermen. Besides these, there are Nairs, Vaniars, Chaliars, Chettis, etc. But with the spread of the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru and the temple entry movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi there is a change in the outlook of the people.

The social life of the people in Mahe is almost the same as that of northern Kerala. Special ceremonies such as *thalikattukalyanam* observed even before a girl attains puberty, and the *tirandukuli* which is performed after a girl attains puberty, have now become obsolete. Marriage customs among Thiyyas and Nairs do not differ much. It usually starts with *ashtamangaliam* and ends with *grihapravesa*. Even the ceremony of *pulikudi* (tamarind juice drinking) performed during the pregnancy of a woman has practically disappeared. The dead bodies are usually cremated after a ceremonial bath. The *sanchayanam* which is the ceremony for the disposal of the remains is held on the seventh or fourteenth day. *Beliyidal* which is the ceremony of offering rice balls to crows is still observed by some families. *Sradha* is performed once a year to make offering to the departed soul.

Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are still very rare although marriages between various sub-castes among Nairs are not objected to. Both the *Marumakkathayam* and *Makkathayam* system of inheritance were followed in Mahe till Marumakkathayam system was abolished by the *arrêté* of 28 April 1943. With the extension of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 to this Territory in October 1963, men and women enjoy equal rights over property.

While the main enclave of Mahe is well advanced with many modern amenities, better houses, roads, drinking water facilities, transport, shopping centre, etc., Chalakkara and Pallur are backward. Pandakkal seems more backward probably because of its distance from Mahe proper. Some kind of a practice of bonded labour is found to exist in Mahe especially among Mukkuvas who are mostly fishermen.

Even the traditional polygamous communities have come to accept monogamy. Monogamy is now the generally accepted norm, though polygamy is not looked down upon. Polyandry is almost a thing of the past. Marriages between children of two brothers or two sisters is forbidden among most communities. Marriages with the daughter of a maternal uncle or paternal aunt is still prevalent. Among Nairs and Thiyyas, girls used to be given in

marriage at a very early age, i.e., even before they attain twelve years. In recent years, the practice has almost died out. The practice of giving dowry is not so prevalent among most communities. Wherever it is done, it is usually paid in cash. Widow remarriage is permitted among Nairs and Thiyyas as well as among Christians. There have been no known instances of prostitution or organised gambling in the region in recent times. The region has all along been a wet area. The people, especially the elders, are addicted to pan-chewing. Smoking is also common. Except rarely, houses are built in separate home-steads in the midst of an orchard or garden. The houses are generally provided with a *kolaye* (verandah) and a *kolayilagam*, *padinjattagam* at the centre, *vadakkini* and *tekkin* or *kizhakkini*. The *padinjattapura* is provided with a *chaypu* which serves as a storeroom. In some houses, the well is built close to the bathroom from where water is drawn through an opening in the wall, which is covered with a box-like wooden screen. The walls are usually built with large-sized laterite bricks cut from nearby quarries.

Families generally use brass plates and saucers, a betel box, a pot known as *kindi* for serving water, straw mats, coir cots and *nilavilakku*. The sophisticated and well-to-do families use modern items of furniture. In almost every Hindu home, the *nilavilakku* is lit and placed at the verandah both before sunset and sunrise which is altogether a beautiful sight.

Men generally wear the *mundu* and shirt. Those engaged in manual labour cover their body with a *torthu* which they tie round their head when at work. Even the poor, like those engaged in manual labour, show a preference to wear clean clothes. Women from educated and socially advanced families wear saree. Young boys have taken to trousers and shirts. Some old women still move about bare bodied except for a *mundu* reaching up to their waist. As for ornaments, *kadukkan*, *mukkuthi* and *thakka* were the fashion in the olden days. Now women wear chains, bangles and ear-rings. Most of the Hindus eat meat and fish. Rice is the staple food of the people although wheat has entered their menu in recent times. Popular items of breakfast are *puttu*, *appam* and *patiri*. Tapioca with fish is an important menu for the poor. The people usually take tea or coffee, although tea drinking is more popular. They use coconut oil for frying purposes. To most curries, coconut is added in some form or other.

The observance of fasts on important occasions like Shasti, Ekadesi, Prodosham, full-moon and new moon days is still common among religious minded elders. They avoid non-vegetarian diet on these days. Among festivals, Thiruvathira is celebrated in January. Husbands are expected to visit their

wives without fail on the occasion of Thiruvathira. Vishu, the Malayalam New Year day, is observed during April which is marked by display of fireworks. Rohini (August-September) and Navarathri (September-October) are also celebrated. The Karkidaka Amavasi, Sri Krishna Jayanthi and Sri Narayanaguru Jayanthi are also marked by some festivities. Vijayadasami is considered auspicious for *vidyarambha*, the beginning of children's education. Onam is the most important of all Malayali festivals celebrated in Mahe.

The 5-day Puthalam Thira in March and the 7-day Vaikunta Ekadesi in January and the 3-day Guruvayoor Ekadesi in December attract a few thousand people from the surrounding villages.

The three-day Thira festival of Theyyattam is celebrated at Pallur in the Malayalam month of Makaram (January-February), at Mahe Puthalam in the month of Kumbam (February-March) and also at Pando Koolam and Pando Kavu by the respective Nair or Thiyya *tarwads*. The ancient customs connected with these festivities are no doubt fast dying out although the celebration is held regularly. The Thira, beginning with an invocation to the ruling deity, commences in the evening and continues through the night to a good portion of the following day. The costumed and personated deity is then led to a raised platform called 'thara' where *pooja* is performed accompanied by hymns glorifying the deity. Music is provided by drums, pipes and cymbals. Drummers maintain perfect tuning and cadence increasing the tempo according to the mood of the deity. By the time the *pooja* concludes, the individual personifying the deity gets possessed. The festival attracts a large crowd.

Poorakkali is the usual form of dance performed by Thiyya men in their old temples. *Kolkali* is another popular dance although these days they are performed only by young girls in schools.

Yanam Region :

According to a study conducted more than hundred years ago by A. Esquer, three out of the four-fold division of castes viz., Brahmins, Vaisyas and Sudras were represented in Yanam. Among Vaisyas, otherwise known as Komutties, he identified many sub-divisions. Kapus topped the list of Sudras. According to Esquer, there were as many as 32 sub-castes among Sudras in Yanam. Apart from these, there were several castes lower than the Sudras.

There were some castes whose members were engaged in temple service while three sub-castes subscribed to the *devadasi* system. Although nowadays it is difficult to identify all the different ramifications of the four-fold division of castes in Yanam, there are Brahmins, Vaisyas or Komutties, Kapus, Chetti Baljas, Gollas or Yadavas, Palli or Agnikula Kshatriyas in the region. Madigas, Malas, Pakis, Yerragollas are some of the depressed classes in Yanam. Although the sanctions upholding castism have weakened they have not been completely broken.

The Brahmins in Yanam are few. Most of them have taken to English education and have entered the learned professions. Kapus constitute the major cultivating community and wield considerable influence in the region. The Vaisyas or Komutties form the next predominant community here. Trade is their principal occupation. Baliyas form another important community. The Bogans or Kalavanthulus also call themselves Chettibalijas. Gollas or Yadavas belong to the shepherd caste. The Kammalas are mostly artisans. The scheduled castes together with the Palli fishermen count a little more or less than half the total population of Yanam. Madigas and Malas are mostly agricultural labourers and are employed in menial duties like burying the dead or beating the drums, etc. Some are cobblers. Untouchability was widely practised until recently and it prevented contacts among the different castes. The well-to-do among them no more follow their traditional occupations. The progress of education has no doubt opened the way for better occupational mobility. Some traces of bonded labour are found to exist among the poor agricultural workers in Yanam.

In the life of the Hindus, ceremonies like *garbhadanam*, *simantham*, *namakaram*, *annaprasanam*, *kesakandanam* are still observed among orthodox families. Marriages are preceded by *nischithartam*, *kanyadhanam* and followed by *mangelyadharna talambralu*. The dead are mostly cremated. The bodies of the unmarried are buried. Baliyas also bury the dead.

The joint family system is still prevalent in Yanam and the pattern of inheritance is based on the patriarchal system. Inter-dining and inter-caste marriages are still very rare although old concepts are fast dying out. Marriage alliances are mostly contracted only between families of the same caste or sub-caste. But with the minute differences among castes breaking down very fast, marriages between various sub-castes, for example between Baliyas and Kapus, are now accepted.

Monogamy is the generally accepted norm among all Hindu communities. The practice of dowry (*oli*) is still common among certain communities like Balijas. It is usually paid in cash and sometimes in the form of property and jewellery. The practice of early marriages, especially of girls before they reach puberty, has almost disappeared. Divorce is not common among any of the Hindu communities except Pallis (fishermen) and Chetti Balijas. Widow remarriage is accepted among some lower castes and not objected to by other communities in recent times.

A few Kalavanthulus in Yanam followed the *devadasi* system until some years ago. They have since given up the practice and have taken to married life. Yanam having all along been a wet area, drinking is not looked down upon as a social evil although women folk have sentimental objections. Smoking, pan-chewing and the use of snuff are common. Men and women in Yanam smoke cigars. Some men and women smoke the cigar with the burning end inside their mouth.

The town of Yanam and the hamlets around it present an archaic look with very few modern terraced houses. Most houses are built with a low ceiling or roof. Some of the larger houses have verandahs in front supported by wooden pillars with a beautifully carved wooden door frame at the entrance. In the neighbouring villages, houses are mostly thatched with very little ventilation. These houses have a pial or an outer verandah.

Villagers sprinkle water in their front courtyard and also draw beautiful designs with *muggu* (white powder). Such designs are drawn even on the walls and all around doors and windows.

Men wear the long or short dhothi together with a *jibba* or *lalchi*, i.e., a collarless shirt. The poor labourers wear dhothi and *banialu* (upper garment). Women wear the saree which is passed round the waist and a knot is tied to keep it fixed and then folds are made in front. The saree is then tied tightly round the waist and its end is thrown over the left shoulder. They also wear the *ravica* (short tight jacket) and underwear called *langa*. All Hindu women wear *bottu* with *kum kum*.

The upper classes use necklaces, girdles, bangles, ear-rings and nose screws. The well-to-do women use jewellery made of silver, like *bundi* on the upper arms and *vaddanam* round the waist. A gold chain with a large pendant embedded with stones called *namapattakam* or *pattidi* is worn by rich women. Vaisya women prefer the *vaddanam*, *vanki*, *rettakadivam*, *nagottu*, *kasuladanta*, etc.

Rice is the staple food. The poor take cold rice or broken rice or ragi. Madigas and Malas eat beef. Pork is eaten by Yerukulas. The people have a special liking for hot *chutney* made of tamarind, chillies and salt. They use groundnut oil for all culinary purposes.

People in Yanam proper as well as in the rural areas are accustomed to the use of furniture like table, bench, chair, stool, shelves, teapoys, chest of drawers, etc.

Some of the famous festivals celebrated in Yanam includes Sankaranti in January, Aydha Pooja and Deepavali in October. Sri Vaishnavites celebrate Sriramanavami, Sri Krishna Jayanthi, Vinayaka Chadurthi, Navararthri, Vijayadasami and Vaikunda Ekadesi. The Vishnu festival held in March in Yanam is a restricted holiday for the region. Similarly Mahasivarathri is sacred for Saivites. The Telugu New Year day is an occasion of communal festivity in Yanam.

Christians :

The early missionaries found that the caste system was deeply entrenched among their first converts. In fact, Roman Catholicism spread rapidly among Hindus as the observance of caste customs and practices was tolerated by missionaries among the converts. There were many converts from among Vellalas, Mudaliars and Reddiars. They continued to use the same Hindu religious marks and follow the same old practices which helped to minimise friction in their daily intercourse with their Hindu brethren. Christians of different castes followed their own caste customs and never intermingled with those belonging to other castes. The Christian converts continued to bear on their body the marks made with ash and always avoided the society of pariahs who were considered ignoble. Although most missionaries found that these practices were inconsistent with the teachings of Christ, they seem to have tolerated it as an unavoidable evil.

Anandarangapillai points out that a distinction was made in churches between the caste Christians and pariahs.⁸⁷ A separate wall was erected as a barrier on the northern side of the interior of the church. On one side of this, the pariahs collected for worship, and on the other, caste Christians, Eurasians and Europeans assembled. This privilege seems to have been obtained by the native Christians at some former time, and the distinction between castes was maintained. Father Coeurdoux, a missionary serving at Pondicherry was offended at this (1745) and instigated the low caste Christians to remonstrate.

They all went in a body to the senior priest and complained. The priest, having listened to them, declared that their complaint was just and ordered the demolition of the barrier. An evening service was held on that day in the church. No distinction of caste was observed. Eurasians, Europeans, Tamilians and members of the low castes mingled together and attended service. A few days later, however, the caste Christians objected to this new move and refused to enter the church. Subsequently a few Christians attended service, although a barrier of chairs was put up to separate the pariahs from others.⁸⁸

As for the fervour of native Christians, the *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses* reveal that their faith was strong and their piety very pronounced. Nevertheless they had their weaknesses which resulted out of their ignorance. M. Magny who served here as a missionary from 1774 to 1821 says that for the most part, Christians here followed Hindus. Sometimes they carried their sick children to be blessed by Hindu priests. They actively participated in Hindu festivals. Anandarangapillai records an interesting incident in his diary. The wife of Kanakaraya Mudali went to church, decked with all the ornaments that were worn by the women of her caste and a muslin gauze which was perfumed. She was admonished by the priest for this. He then summoned all the caste Christians and ordered that thereafter their women should not dress themselves with ornaments of the kind worn by Tamilians, that they should tie their hair after the manner of Eurasians etc. The local Christians strongly objected to this and refused to enter the portals of the church. The Christians turned out to be so adamant that the priest had to beg the Governor to issue an order compelling them to attend church.⁸⁹

The Christian women, however, continued to bear the *pottu* mark on their forehead and also wear the *tali*. Christian women were not permitted to go alone to the church for it was considered indecent and contrary to the honour of their respective castes. Even at wedding ceremonies, the Tamil Christians followed the local rites, such as the *manjal neer subha sadangu* etc. The neo-Christians continued to be very superstitious.

As caste Christians were particular in observing the caste regulations, the missionaries did not push their reforms too much fearing reprisals in parishes. In some of the churches, pariahs continued to be segregated by a small wall erected in the middle. Nevertheless, there were frequent quarrels between the upper caste and lower caste Christians.

Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there were symptoms of a new awakening among low caste Christians. This awakening gave rise to strifes between the upper caste and lower caste Christians, during the first decade

of this century. Small issues often flared up into major conflagration, whenever missionaries tried to mitigate the evils of castism among their laity. In Nellitoppu, the efforts of that ardent missionary Fr. Voltaire to put together the children of different castes of Pakkamudiyampet and those of Nellitoppu at the time of their first communion angered some of the caste Christians who in an act of revenge burnt down the houses of their low caste brethren in Nellitoppu.

Between 1907 and 1910, such measures as the removal of tufts among seminarians, inclusion of beef in the menu of the acolytes, the admission of low caste Christians to priesthood caused a great deal of resentment among caste Christians. Some families withdrew their children from the major seminary and the institution had to be closed down for some time. The resentment caused by the reforms was such that Archbishop Morel (1909) had to be consecrated under police protection. However, to assuage the feelings of caste conscious Christians, separate services were arranged for them in the chapel of Petit Seminaire.

There were again troubles in the twenties and in the thirties, particularly during the period of Archbishop Colas who insisted on the removal of rails etc., that separated the low caste Christians from the caste Christians in churches. Indignant Christians called him 'Para Colas' for having initiated these measures. Fr. Huguet bore the brunt of the opposition of caste Christians in Nellitoppu. The resultant strife led to the closure of the church for about four years there. In Pondicherry, a large number of families left the Catholic fold and joined the congregation of Seventh Day Adventists. Finding that many prominent caste Hindus themselves were in the vanguard of the movement for the removal of social disabilities, many caste Christians submitted to the dictates of church authorities. There were still remnants of segregation in some of the churches. But with the passing of the Untouchability Act, 1955, Archbishop Colas of Pondicherry issued a pastoral letter on 6 June 1955, drawing the attention of all Christians to the new enactment and directed them to shed all caste prejudices and practices. He made it clear in the pastoral letter that no separate enclosures would anymore be allowed for any group of Christians and that all would be treated alike with effect from 19 June 1955. The letter also contained a note of warning to the effect that erring Christians would not only be debarred from attending services in the church but also be open to penalisation for criminal offence under the laws of the land. Thus castism which plagued the Christian community for almost three centuries was finally removed from its body politic.

In matters of marriage and divorce, Christians were governed by the provisions of the French Civil Code. In all other matters, they were governed by Hindu law or to put it more precisely by Hindu law as modified by local customs, probably accepting that conversion to a new religion does not necessarily alter the Indian or Hindu way of life.

Christian marriages are solemnised in churches by the priest. Although marriages between close consanguineous relations are not allowed, exemptions are granted under special circumstances.

As for their mode of dress, the well-to-do and the educated men have taken to western style of dress like suit and tie with hat. Ladies still retain the Indian mode of dress. The style of living and the household manner of Christians resemble that of Europeans. Drinking is not very much looked down upon among Christian households. Even if it were so in some cases, it is purely on sentimental grounds. Inter-caste marriages among Christians could hardly be thought of in the olden days. Such marriages are more frequent nowadays. In most Christian houses, the centre of the *thavaram* is set apart for the *koodam* where the families gather for their daily prayers. Christians observe fasting during the Lent season.

Roman Catholics in Mahe mostly belong to the Mukkuva community of fishermen who are known as Kollakkar. They are said to have come from Quilon in South Travancore about two centuries ago. They are mainly occupied in fishing, rope-making and making fish-nets.⁹⁰ Christians follow the Makkathayam system. Marriages between children of two brothers or two sisters is not allowed. The dowry system is prevalent among Christians in Mahe. According to common law, girls above 16 years and boys above 18 years were permitted to marry. Widow marriage is generally allowed. As Catholics, marriages are solemnised in churches by the priest. The dead are buried. But otherwise their home life is very similar to that of Hindus.

There are very few Christians in Yanam. While their social life is very similar to that of Hindus, their religious customs do not differ much from their counterparts elsewhere. Like Hindus they celebrate the *seemantham* and observe the *sradha*. Marriages are blessed by the priest in the church. Widows remove the *tali*, bangles, kum-kum and flowers and wear white saree. The dead body is washed, dressed and placed in a coffin and then buried in the cemetery after it is blessed by the priest. On the eleventh day, the house is cleaned and the close relatives visit the burial ground.

Muslims:

The Tamil speaking Mohammedans, known as Labbais or Sonakars, are said to be descendants of Arab traders who settled on the west coast around VIII century A.D. They soon spread into the interior and everywhere adopted the local language. Most of the Labbais in Karaikal region are known by the title of Marakkayar or Ravuthar. Those who settled near the coast carried the title of Marakkayar and those who settled in the interior of the country adopted the title of Ravuthar. Tamil is their mother-tongue. As for Muslims in Pondicherry, they are believed to be mostly descendants of those who came with the conquering armies from the north. A good number of them are mopplas who migrated to Pondicherry from Malabar to serve in the native army organised by the French to fight the British. Notable among them were Sheik Abdul Rahman and his brother Sheik Hassan whose valour and courage brought victory to the French in the battle of 17 August 1749.

The Labbais are a singularly industrious people. Their chief occupations are trade, the sea and fishing but there is hardly anything to which they will not turn their hands.

Some kind of caste rules are followed by some Mohammedans. The caste panchayat was found to exist among the muslims when some studies were carried by the Census authorities after the 1961 census. The panchayat consisted of five members who were elected from among Muslims in a particular locality. Once elected, they hold office for life. Besides helping to preserve caste solidarity, the panchayat accords permission for such social or communal functions like marriage, circumcision, puberty, etc. Except in the case of deaths, a prescribed fee is collected by the panchayat for all functions. It also looks after the maintenance of the mosque, and the Hazarat (priest) is paid every month from the panchayat funds. Islamic classes are arranged at the mosque for Muslim children. The panchayat funds are also utilized for repairing the burial ground of the community. One of its other chief functions is to arbitrate in disputes among members of the community.

Coming to property and inheritance, the Muslims follow the Makkathayam system. As per the règlement of 1769, they were permitted to execute a will in the presence of their Kazi or Mullah.

Although there are differences in the rituals followed by Muslims, their social life resembles very much that of Hindus. The only difference is that they recite passages from the Quran. Another point of difference is that their women unlike their Hindu counterparts do not appear in public, even during marriages.

Just as Hindus perform *valaikappu* the Muslims perform *sollikappu* on the seventh month. In Pondicherry the function is known as *sool seithal*. Unlike in the Hindu community, delivery entails pollution for 40 days. Among some groups, the naming ceremony takes place on the third day after birth. The Ustad names the child, after feeding the child with a spoon of milk. While naming the child, the Ustad chants *Natia* in its ears. Some Muslims also resort to tonsure and ear-boring ceremonies. At the age of five the children are sent to *Islamya Maya Palli*.

Another ritual observed among Muslims is *sunnath* or circumcision. The fee charged is credited to the funds of the mosque. The well-to-do take their boys in procession after the ceremony. On the seventh day *poo poduthal* ceremony takes place. When a girl attains puberty, pollution is observed for seven or nine days. On the last day the girl is given a ceremonial oil bath and presented with new clothes. Like Hindus, Muslims call this ceremony as *manjal neer suttruthal*. The attainment of puberty by a Muslim girl is a significant event in her life cycle as it confers her with certain civil rights. Henceforth she becomes a shareholder of the property of her mother. However, certain restrictions are imposed on her movements and sometimes her education is stopped.

Marriage is preceded by the betrothal which is known as *seeni poduthal* or *mangan*. After *seeni poduthal*, the marriage may take place even after six months. Marriage ceremonies begin with a ceremonial bath given to the bride which is known as *nikkah thanneer uthal*. The marriage is celebrated only at night after eight o'clock as they calculate the auspicious days with reference to the phase and movements of the moon. On the wedding night, the groom is taken in procession in a car or a horse to the *pallivasal* where prayers are offered by the groom in the presence of the Mullah. Then, when the procession reaches the bride's place, the brother of the bride receives the groom and presents him with a ring in token of his willingness to give his sister in marriage to him. After prayers are offered by the Mullahs, the *thali* is tied by the groom's sister around the bride's neck. Before tying the *thali*, the terms between the parties are divulged before all. Then the groom is allowed to see the bride's face through a mirror. The marriage is then entered in the

Pallivasal register where even details of Mahur (bride price) are entered. Sometimes the Muslim priest 'Hazarat' is invited to officiate at the ceremony. Widow or widower remarriages take place only at nights. The ceremonies come to a close with *taluva*, a ceremony similar to *kappu kalaithal*. Consummation ceremony known as *kai izhaithu viduthal* takes place on the marriage night itself.

The system of dowry is prevalent among Muslims. Polygamy as well as widow marriages are common. Marital contracts with consanguineous relatives are also prevalent. It is customary for Muslims to marry one's paternal aunt's daughter or maternal uncle's daughter. A Muslim is allowed to have as many wives as he can afford to feed. The women are generally very loyal and very submissive to their husbands. The senior most exercises authority over the other ladies. Divorce known as *thalak* is prevalent in the community. It is to be noted that the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939 was extended to this Territory on 24 May 1968.

Muslims bury the dead after the *kaban iruthuthal* ceremony. Among Muslims a ceremony known as *jarat* somewhat similar to the *pal sadangu* of the Hindus takes place on the third day. The 39th day ceremony is marked by special ritual very similar to the Hindu custom of *kalasam*. While Hindus perform this on auspicious occasions, Muslims do it for death rituals. They call this ceremony as *ruhani*.

Muslims show a preference for striped lungies which is tucked on to the left. They sometimes wear a fez or silk scarf. They wear caps while going to the mosque or while celebrating Ramzan or Bakrid. The *purdah* system is slowly giving way especially among the educated. Their women are crazy for costly muslin dress with embroidery. *Keezzatti* is a kind of necklace used by women. They use more of porcelain vessels in their homes. The *panikkam* made of brass is used for spitting.

Muslims are given to many of the superstitious beliefs of Hindus. Some believe in evil spirits and use a *taveez* to be worn round the neck to prevent spirit intrusion.

Moharam, Ramzan and Bakrid are the most important festivals celebrated by all Muslims. They observe fast for forty days prior to Ramzan.

Muslims in Mahe are known as Mopplas. They are mostly merchants and fishermen. As businessmen they have longstanding business contacts with neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka. They followed the Marumakkathayam system until it was replaced by the Makkathayam in 1943. Widow marriages

are also allowed. After marriage, the old custom was for the wife to stay in her own house like Nair women. Nowadays, girls prefer to live with their husbands preferably in a separate house. Although the religion permits them to have four wives very few take as many. Marriages with a daughter of a maternal uncle or paternal aunt are allowed. Muslim women wear *mundu* and a longish blouse resembling the shirt. They cover their head with a square shaped veil called *thattam*. Even very young girls wear the *thattam* over their head more as a matter of habit than as a *purdah*. Muslims as a rule are non-vegetarians. Muslim women wear a great variety of ornaments such as necklace, ear-rings, bracelets and anklets. Besides the lobes, even the rim of their ear is bored into ten or more holes to wear ornaments. Those in Mahe sing the Mappilapattu like those in the adjoining districts of Kerala. These songs are composed in a language which is said to be a mixture of Arabic and Malayalam.

Muslims in Yanam are mostly merchants. They dress almost like Hindus and speak Telugu as well as Urdu at home. Although known for their religious fervour they have been living in harmony with their neighbours. In all religious ceremonies they follow the tenets of their religion while their social customs are not so different from that of their Hindu neighbours. Muslims bury the dead after a ceremonial wash. They follow the Muslim law of inheritance and the property is divided among the heirs of the deceased. Divorce is allowed by Muslim law. Muslims wear the fez cap while young boys put on shirts and shorts. While young girls wear *pavada* or *pyjama* and *kurtha*, Muslim women generally wear sarees. Men mostly put on silver rings. Women wear necklaces, *chandravankas* and bracelets. *Duppata* is carried by women observing *purdah*.

Renonçants :

All natives who came forward to abandon their Indian personal laws and be governed by the French Civil law are known as **renonçants**. A good number, mostly from the depressed classes, conscious of their own degradation, willingly opted to become French citizens so as to attain equality of status and position. They thus liberated themselves from the clutches of the age old laws and customs which had till then relegated them as untouchables. The **décret** of 21 September 1881 decreed that the **renonçants** should be regarded as French citizens in the true sense of the term with all its implications and the Court of Appeal had also held that their names should be included in the same list alongwith the Europeans. Considering the political and social advantages, quite a few among caste Hindus also opted to become **renonçants**. The **renonçants** were required to adopt a family name, the choice of which was not always so easy.

Many chose the names of the former French officials while others preferred the names of historical personages. Some preferred to choose typically Indian or Tamil names.⁹¹ Ponnoutamby poullé adopted the name 'La Porte' (which means the door) to signify the fact that renunciation had opened the door towards West.⁹²

He along with a team of followers worked for the uplift of Valangamougattars. As a social reformer he was the first to oppose castism in Pondicherry and did much to improve the lot of Valangamougattars. Hindus surrendering their personal laws ceased to be French subjects and became French citizens. As such, they were entitled to all rights the French citizens enjoyed in the colony and in France, particularly the right to be enrolled as a voter in the electoral rolls, while Hindus who fell under the category of subjects could exercise their voting rights only in India. This act of 'renonciation' could be made either at the time of marriage or at any other time. If done at the time of marriage, it was to be mentioned in the record drawn up by the Officer of the Registry. Otherwise, it may be received by the Officer of the Registry from the residence of the persons concerned as notification of births and deaths are received and entered in a register set for the purpose in all communes. This may be done either before a Justice of Peace assisted by his Registrar and two witnesses or before a notary. In the last two cases, a copy of the deed made before the notary or of the report of the Justice of Peace was forwarded to a competent officer of the Registry who entered it in the register set for the purpose. By this Act, the **renonçants**, their wives and their children came to be governed by the civil and political laws applicable to Frenchmen in the colonies. Moreover, from the date of renunciation, a **renonçant** was considered a co-owner of a joint estate or a partner in a joint partnership, subject to the provisions of article 1837 of the Civil Code. His property is to be bequeathed to his heirs as determined by French law without discrimination between citizens and subjects (article 745 to 768 of the Civil Code). Under the French law only monogamy was admitted among **renonçants**. As for marital age, article 144 of the Civil Code was applicable i.e., the minimum marital age was 18 years for males and 15 years for females.

Créoles/Métis :

The term 'Créole' stands for all those born to French parents in the colonies. In due course, however, it came to be applied to all born of mixed marriage i.e., between Europeans and natives. The progenies of such mixed marriages were otherwise known as Métis. Such persons were also called '**topas**' or '**Gens de Chapeau**' on account of their wearing the hat (topi). As early as in 1706 the new town of Pondicherry accounted for about 300 topas.

They were mostly French officials and soldiers who had married *créoles*. As some of those who contracted marriage with the natives were Portuguese settlers, they invariably adopted family names like Rozario, De Cruz, Pereira, De Costa, De Monte etc., which were of Portuguese origin, as many of these marriages were between Portuguese settlers in Pondicherry and natives. Most of them were Catholics. They were treated by the pure whites as second class citizens.

A report sent to the King on 25 July 1827 said that the *Métis* or *Topas* were "made up of a mixture of European and Indian blood. This population combined the vanity of the whiteman and the indolence of the Indian races and nothing could match its inactivity, if not its immorality." Since 1827 special attention was paid to the uplift of the community. Members of this community were given training and employment in the newly established *Ateliers de Charité*. Indigent families received cash doles from the *Comité de Bienfaisance*.

In due course they earned the good-will of the administration and secured high positions in the administration, judiciary and other technical cadres. Some joined the army and distinguished themselves in the World Wars I and II.

After merger a good number of them not only opted for French nationality, but went away and settled in France and other French colonies. The few who still remain here have established links with Anglo-Indians whose social background is very much similar except for the language barrier. The well-to-do among them live in clean and well maintained western type houses. Their affinity to the French is reflected in their food, dress, religion and culture. They prefer bread to rice, beef to mutton and foreign liquors. The *Société de Secours Mutuels des Créoles* takes care of those not so well off in the community.

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