

Executive Summary of the UGC Minor Research Project titled “Present Socio-Economic Conditions of Ezhava Community in Kerala”, completed by Dileepan K M, Assistant Professor of History, Payyanur College, Payyanur.(Sanction order No: MRP (H)-0381/12-13/KLKA002 UGC-SWRO dated 23rd September 2013)

The state of Kerala. In South India is well known in the international and national academia for its development indicators like literacy, health indicators, rich natural resources and traditions. During the earlier times, Kerala witnessed several social evils especially based on the caste system. The concept of caste is the black evil which affected the Kerala society. The distinction of higher class and lower class is very crucial in Kerala during the pre independent period. The higher castes enjoyed several privileged and the inferior castes are regarded as the downtrodden and unprivileged sections of the society. But among this inferior caste, the Ezhavas of Kerala enjoyed several privileges and enjoyed social status and attained education and transformed themselves as ‘superior among the inferior’ caste of Kerala. The study entitled “The Present Socio Economic Conditions of Ezhavas Community in Kerala’ focus on the role of Ezhavas in socio economic transformation and their present socio-economic status and their role in the present day Kerala Society.

The introduction of the study provides a brief review of literature on the historical origin and evolution of Ezhavas along with stated objectives of the research and its methodology. The first chapter gives an elaborate idea about the evolution of Ezhava community. Different arguments regarding the evolution of ezhavas are discussed in this chapter. The economic educational and political status during pre British and British period is clearly discussed in the chapter. The evils of caste system and untouchability and how it affected the Ezhavas and how they become an influential group with these barriers is clarified in this chapter. The chapter also throws light on the role of social reformers and the impact of social reformation of Ezhava community. Reformers like Sree Naraya Guru and Organisations like SNDP helped and promoted the development inferior caste Ezhavas. From a downtrodden inferior caste Ezhavas raised to an influential community of Kerala with the help of education especially English education, Representation in government jobs and with the influence of social reform movement. The chapter concludes with the statement that

Ezhavas emerged as the 'superior among the inferior castes' and became the developing middle class of Kerala society.

The role of Ezhavas in the transformation of Kerala and their influence in the socio economic sector of Kerala forms the subject matter of the second chapter. The colonial process made significant changes in the structure of Kerala society economically and politically. Ezhavas greatly utilized the available resources and created themselves a platform for their development and upliftment. The chapter discuss about their economic social and political development and how they created a platform for their social upliftment and made themselves as a part social transformation and change. The introduction of English education by the Britisher's changed the social life of the Ezhavas. This helped them to achieve significant position in government jobs and the educated group among the Ezhavas made contributions for the eradication of social evils in the society. Thus they paved the way for the upliftment of downtrodden sections of the society. The chapter also discusses and explains about the emergence of SNDP and its role in shaping and sharing of social ideas among the Ezhavas and how it helped to transform the society. The efforts and activities undertaken by SNDP influenced and le to the creation and formation of several other movements, which stressed on social equality and the eradication of social evils faced by the downtrodden and marginalized sections of the society. Another area of discussion is the political role played by Ezhavas in Kerala since early times. From the beginning itself they are the part of Kerala politics and had a clear role in the policy formulation and decision making. Politically they are the powerful group and even influence the vote bank politics in Kerala. Moreover 40% of the Hindu population is constituted by Ezhava community, which also helped them to gain an upper hand in political affairs also.

Economically, Ezhavas emerged as significant community. Employment in government sector and other economic activities helped them to develop as a powerful economic community. External migration also helped them to achieve a stable income, which helped them to make necessary changes in the society. The economic status of Ezhavas developed with the spread of cash economy. Many factories are owned by Ezhava and they emerged as great entrepreneurs. This boosted them economically and provided them several opportunities for economic

transformation. The chapter concludes with a clear idea about the role of Ezhava in socio economic and political transformation of Kerala. It also states that Ezhavas of Kerala transformed themselves from a lower class to an influential economic and social upper middle class.

In the third chapter, I have tried to examine some of key components in Kerala which shows the present socio economic status of the Ezhavas of Kerala. A survey is conducted based on a well constructed questionnaire which consists of components related to socio-economic political and educational status. The chapter clearly gives an idea regarding the socio-economic status of Ezhavas with respect to the respective components. Survey shows that the social status of Ezhavas in the present day is in a stage of transformation. They are gaining prestige and social mobility through various activities. The elimination of caste evils and liberalization in caste system helped them to achieve a good social life and status. The activities of SNDP and programmes of social mobility also helped the Ezhavas. I have also discussed about the role of public employment in attaining social status to Ezhavas. Employment in government sector provided them with stable income which promoted them as the socially powerful class in the Kerala society. The social conditions and status helped them for their economic development. Survey shows that most of the Ezhavas are economically developed today. Most of them had material development and had stable income. The comparison between the traditional occupation and present day job opportunities depicted a clear picture about the economic status of the Ezhavas. The shift from traditional occupation helped the Ezhavas to improve their economic condition. The idea of migration as a result of globalization also increased and developed the economic status of the Ezhavas today. Majority of the migrants to abroad are from Ezhava community. It also provided them with higher income and economic prestige and had influence in almost every field. Educationally and politically, Ezhavas remained unbeaten than other downtrodden communities of Kerala. They are the part of public education system and had influence and control over policy making and decision making. Public education system is strengthened by the activities of SNDP especially by establishing schools and colleges. Ezhavas strongly participated in politics and got clear representation since the formation of state. The chapter concludes by giving clear analysis regarding the present socio-

economic conditions of Ezhavas, which is broadly described as the birth of an emerging powerful upper middle class.

To summarize Ezhavas emerged as a significant and powerful caste community of Kerala. They had influence in almost all area of society and with the present socio-economic conditions they have the ability to develop as the dominant class of the society than other higher castes.