

**SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND RAMAKRISHNA
MOVEMENT IN KERALA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO THE ROLE OF SWAMI NIRMALANANDA**

*Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY*

in
HISTORY

Submitted by
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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
2023**

DECLARATION

I, K. Sreelatha do hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**Social Transformation and Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala, with special reference to the Role of Swami Nirmalananda**' submitted to the University of Calicut is a bonafide research work carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Muhammed Maheen A., Professor, Department of History, University of Calicut, and it has not previously formed the basis of the award of any Degree or diploma.

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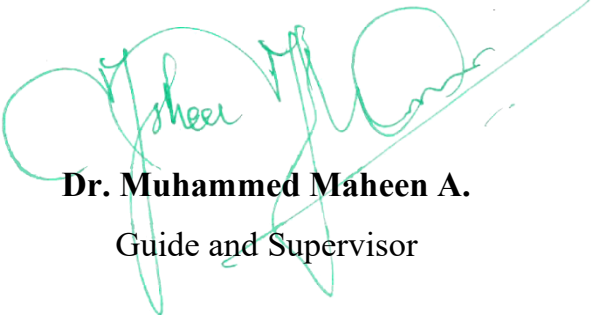

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CERTIFICATE

This is to Certify that the thesis entitled '**Social Transformation and Ramakrishna movement in Kerala with special reference to the Role of Swami Nirmalananda**' is a bonafide record of research work done by K. Sreelatha, Submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History and that the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other titles and the thesis is a record of independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my guidance.

The examiners have not recommended any modifications or suggestions and therefore the original thesis is resubmitted as such. Soft copy attached is the same as that of the resubmitted copy.



Dr. Muhammed Maheen A.
Guide and Supervisor

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Date:

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K. Sreelatha

**SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT
IN KERALA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF
SWAMI NIRMALANANDA**

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Abstract

Though there are studies on the Ramakrishna Mission and its impact on different parts of India, studies on the Mission's impact on Kerala society are comparatively less, and the role played by Swami Nirmalanada, the fore runner of Ramakrishna movement in Kerala is almost absent in Kerala history. The present study is an attempt to analyse how far the Ramakrishna Movement could create an awakening in the caste-ridden society of Kerala and the relevance of their immense contribution in the field of education, health, and other fields in the social scenario of Kerala.

Objectives: The study aims: to analyse how far the Movement could create an awakening in the society; to assess Swami Nirmalananda's contribution as the pioneer of the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala; to examine how far the Ramakrishna Mission addresses the question of caste system and untouchability in Kerala.

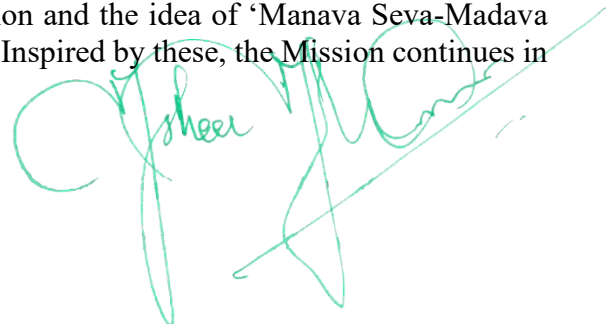
Relevance and Scope of the Study: Unlike the other all Indian Socio-religious movements, the Ramakrishna Movement influenced the social life of Kerala and to a great extent created a new thought among the intellectuals and inspired the people indirectly. It paved the way for social transformation and influenced the ideas of other social reformers. In this context it is necessary to examine why this Movement, inspite of all its limitations, still exists in Kerala and how far this movement was able to reach the ordinary people through their social activities.

Methodology: The methodology used in this study is descriptive, empirical, and analytical.

Hypotheses of Study: The present study aims to prove or disprove the following hypotheses with source of information rationally and objectively: the Ramakrishna Mission had influenced the society of Kerala than the other similar social movements; the Order could bring social transformation in Kerala through their activities; the Movement in Kerala left an impact on various issues like educational rights, temple entry, relief activities etc; the Mission could address the question of caste system and untouchability in Kerala through inter-dining and admitting all people in the Ashrams irrespective of caste distinctions.

Design of the Study: The present work is structured into four chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. The first chapter details the background of Socio-Religious Reform Movement in Kerala. The second chapter is on the Origin and growth of Ramakrishna Movement. The third chapter is titled 'Swami Nirmalananda, initiator of the Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala'. The fourth chapter is on the 'Activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Kerala'.

Conclusion: Apart from the summary, the limitations of the Mission are also addressed in the Conclusion. The concept of Universal religion and the idea of 'Manava Seva-Madava Seva' makes the Mission a distinct organisation. Inspired by these, the Mission continues in its endeavour to bring social change in Kerala.



**കേരളത്തിലെ സാമൂഹിക പരിവർത്തനവും രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനവും, സ്വാമി
നിർമ്മലാനന്ദയുടെ പങ്കിനെക്കുറിച്ച് പ്രത്യേക പരാമർശത്തോടെ**

കെ. ശ്രീലത
ഗവേഷക

ഡോ. മുഹമ്മദ് മഹീൻ എ.
ഗവേഷണ മാർഗ്ഗദർശി

സംഗ്രഹം

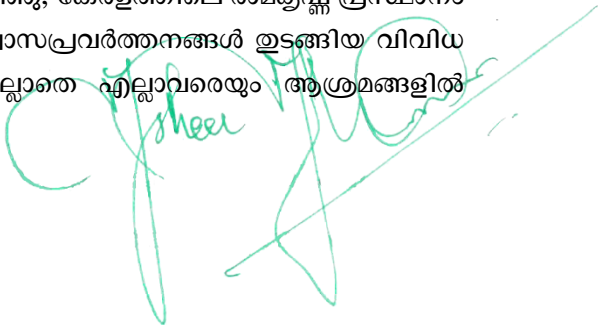
രാമകൃഷ്ണ മിഷനെക്കുറിച്ചും, ഇന്ത്യയുടെ വിവിധ ഭാഗങ്ങളിൽ അതിന്റെ സ്വാധീനത്തെക്കുറിച്ചും പഠനങ്ങൾ നടക്കുന്നുണ്ടെങ്കിലും, കേരള സമൂഹത്തിൽ മിഷന്റെ സ്വാധീനത്തെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള പഠനങ്ങൾ താരതമ്യേന കുറവാണ്. കൂടാതെ രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ കേരളത്തിലെ മുൻനിരക്കാരനായ സ്വാമി നിർമ്മലാനന്ദ വഹിച്ച പങ്ക് കേരളചരിത്രത്തിൽ ഇല്ല. ജാതീയമായ കേരളസമൂഹത്തിൽ രാമകൃഷ്ണപ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന് എത്രത്തോളം ഉണർവ് സൃഷ്ടിക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞു എന്നും, കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹികസാഹചര്യത്തിൽ വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം, ആരോഗ്യം, മറ്റ് മേഖലകൾ എന്നിവയിൽ അവർ നൽകിയ മഹത്തായ സംഭാവനകളുടെ പ്രസക്തി എന്നിവ വിശകലനം ചെയ്യാനുള്ള ശ്രമമാണ് ഈ പഠനം.

ലക്ഷ്യങ്ങൾ: പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന് സമൂഹത്തിൽ എത്രത്തോളം ഉണർവ് സൃഷ്ടിക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞു എന്ന് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുക; കേരളത്തിലെ രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ തുടക്കക്കാരൻ എന്ന നിലയിൽ സ്വാമി നിർമ്മലാനന്ദയുടെ സംഭാവനകൾ വിലയിരുത്തുക; കേരളത്തിലെ ജാതി വ്യവസ്ഥയുടെയും തൊട്ടുകൂട്ടിയുടെയും രാമകൃഷ്ണ മിഷൻ എത്രത്തോളം അഭിസംബോധന ചെയ്തു എന്ന് പരിശോധിക്കുക എന്നിവയാണ് പഠനം ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നത്.

പഠനത്തിന്റെ പ്രസക്തിയും വ്യാപ്തിയും: മറ്റ് എല്ലാ ഇന്ത്യൻ സാമൂഹിക-മതപ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും വ്യത്യസ്തമായി, രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനം കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാമൂഹിക ജീവിതത്തെ സ്വാധീനിക്കുകയും, ഒരു പരിധിവരെ ബുദ്ധിജീവികൾക്കിടയിൽ ഒരു പുതിയ ചിന്ത സൃഷ്ടിക്കുകയും പരോക്ഷമായി ജനങ്ങളെ പ്രചോദിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു. അത് സാമൂഹിക പരിവർത്തനത്തിന് വഴിയൊരുക്കുകയും മറ്റ് സാമൂഹിക പരിഷ്കർത്താക്കളുടെ ആശയങ്ങളെ സ്വാധീനിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു. ഈ പ്രസ്ഥാനം അതിന്റെ എല്ലാ പരിമിതികൾക്കിടയിലും കേരളത്തിൽ ഇപ്പോഴും നിലനിൽക്കുന്നത് എന്തുകൊണ്ടാണെന്നും, അവരുടെ സാമൂഹിക പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിലൂടെ സാധാരണക്കാരിലേക്ക് ഈ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന് എത്രത്തോളം എത്തിച്ചേരാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞുവെന്നും ഈ സാഹചര്യത്തിൽ പരിശോധിക്കേണ്ടതുണ്ട്.

രീതിശാസ്ത്രം: ഈ പഠനത്തിൽ ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന പഠനരീതി വിവരണാത്മകവും അനുഭവപരവും വിശകലനപരവുമാണ്.

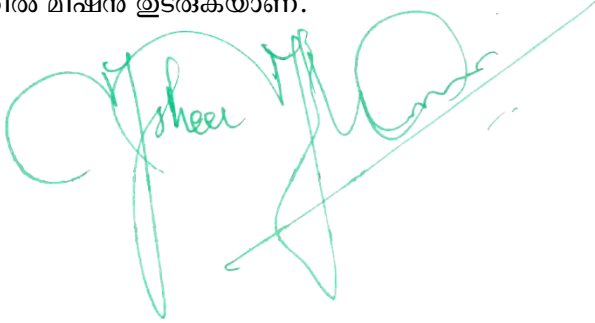
പഠനത്തിന്റെ അനുമാനങ്ങൾ: താഴെപ്പറയുന്ന സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങൾ യുക്തിസഹമായും വസ്തുനിഷ്ഠമായും വിവരങ്ങളുടെ ഉറവിടം ഉപയോഗിച്ച് തെളിയിക്കുകയോ നിരാകരിക്കുകയോ ചെയ്യുക എന്നതാണ് ഇപ്പോഴത്തെ പഠനം ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നത്. സമാനമായ മറ്റ് സാമൂഹികപ്രസ്ഥാനങ്ങളെ അപേക്ഷിച്ച് രാമകൃഷ്ണ മിഷൻ കേരളസമൂഹത്തെ സ്വാധീനിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്; അവരുടെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളിലൂടെ കേരളത്തിൽ സാമൂഹികപരിവർത്തനം കൊണ്ടുവരാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞു; കേരളത്തിലെ രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനം വിദ്യാഭ്യാസ അവകാശങ്ങൾ, ക്ഷേത്രപ്രവേശനം, ദുരിതാശ്വാസപ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ തുടങ്ങിയ വിവിധ വിഷയങ്ങളിൽ സ്വാധീനം ചെലുത്തി; ജാതിവ്യത്യാസമില്ലാതെ എല്ലാവരെയും ആശ്രമങ്ങളിൽ



പ്രവേശിപ്പിക്കുകയും ഒരുമിച്ച് ഭക്ഷണം കഴിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുകൊണ്ട് കേരളത്തിലെ ജാതിവ്യവസ്ഥയെയും തൊട്ടുകൂടായയെയും മിഷൻ അഭിമുഖീകരിക്കാൻ കഴിഞ്ഞു.

പഠനത്തിന്റെ രൂപകല്പന: ആമുഖവും ഉപസംഹാരവും ഒഴികെ, നാല് അധ്യായങ്ങളായി ഈ പഠനം ക്രമീകരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. കേരളത്തിലെ സാമൂഹിക-മതനവീകരണ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ പശ്ചാത്തലം ആദ്യ അധ്യായത്തിൽ വിശദീകരിക്കുന്നു. രണ്ടാമത്തെ അധ്യായം രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ ഉത്ഭവവും വളർച്ചയും ആണ്. 'കേരളത്തിലെ രാമകൃഷ്ണ പ്രസ്ഥാനത്തിന്റെ തുടക്കക്കാരനായ സ്വാമി നിർമ്മലാനന്ദ' എന്നാണ് മൂന്നാമത്തെ അധ്യായത്തിന്റെ തലക്കെട്ട്. നാലാമത്തെ അധ്യായം 'കേരളത്തിലെ രാമകൃഷ്ണ മാന്ത്രികതയും മിഷന്റെയും പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങൾ' എന്ന വിഷയത്തിലാണ്.

ഉപസംഹാരം: സംഗ്രഹത്തിന് പുറമേ, മിഷന്റെ പരിമിതികളും ഉപസംഹാരത്തിൽ അഭിസംബോധന ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്. സാർവത്രിക മതത്തിന്റെ ആശയവും 'മാനവ സേവ-മാധവ സേവ' എന്ന ആശയവും മിഷനെ ഒരു വേറിട്ട സംഘടനയാക്കുന്നു. ഇവയിൽ നിന്ന് പ്രചോദനം ഉൾക്കൊണ്ട് കേരളത്തിൽ സാമൂഹിക മാറ്റം കൊണ്ടുവരാനുള്ള ശ്രമത്തിൽ മിഷൻ തുടരുകയാണ്.



CONTENTS

| Chapters | Page No. |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 – 18 |
| 1. Background of Socio-Religious Reform Movement in Kerala, an overview | 19 – 66 |
| 2. Origin and Growth of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala | 68 – 89 |
| 3. Swami Nirmalananda, Initiator of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala | 91 – 134 |
| 4. Activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Kerala | 136 – 178 |
| Conclusion | 180 – 190 |
| Glossary | 191 – 192 |
| Bibliography | 193 – 225 |
| Appendices | 226 – 240 |

INTRODUCTION

India has been considered as the most stratified of all known societies in human history because of its peculiar type of caste system. The system is 'peculiar,' in the sense that it protects one of the greatest separating forces that divides human beings into higher castes and lower castes.¹ The history of backward people in the caste ridden society of India is the history of their continuous suffering and oppression by the higher caste. They suffered from multiple degradations and were victims of 'Cumulative domination'.² India is the only country where a rigorous caste system exists, and she is the only country which has to face the problem of the untouchables.³ Distinction in society can be seen in other countries as well, but nowhere is one's birth the criterion to determine one's position in society. In India, the rigid caste rules prevent an able person to rise to the highest rank in the social ladder. Caste system had its origin in the remotest past, but it continues though in a very much diluting form, despite the attempts of great religious and social reformers for its removal. But it is true that untouchability and unapproachability have

¹ Raj Kumar, *Dalit Personal Narratives Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*, New Delhi, 2010, p.115.

² Swapna H. Samel, *Dalit Movement in South India 1857-1950*, New Delhi, 2004, p.9

³ Census of India, 1931. Volume XXVIII Travancore, Part I Report 1932, Prepared by Rao Sahib N. Kunjan Pillai, Census Commissioner, Travancore, State Archives, Trivandrum, p. 431.

practically disappeared from the urban areas and are fast disappearing from rural parts as well. The British administration, English education, and European literature brought to India a group of fresh ideas which constituted a challenge to the new intellectuals.⁴

When we look at the issue of social problems from a theoretical framework, there are multiple perspectives in social sciences which depict the changes in social structure which gradually form a social transformation. The influence of Christian Missionaries created great changes in the attitude and approaches of people to open their eyes and to fight against the evils and irrelevant traditions and superstitions.⁵ Christian Missionaries, focused by humanitarian and religious motivation, introduced a generous arrangement of education for all people, irrespective of caste or religion. Definitely social changes do not happen suddenly but is a culmination of a long process of change in the traditional pattern of our caste ridden society. In India, the social changes were mainly due to the selfless services of many indigenous reformers, and religious thinkers, national leaders, and the intelligentsia of the country, who consistently challenged the dominant values legitimizing inherited inequalities based upon the doctrine of "Karma and Rebirth".⁶

⁴ J.T.F. Jordens, *'Hindu Religious and Social Reform in British India'* In A.L.Basham, (ed) *A Cultural History of India*, London, 1975, p.36.

⁵ J.W, Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and Peoples Movement in Kerala, 1850-1936*. Trivandrum, 1984, pp.396-397.

⁶ J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India, its Nature, Function and Origins*, London 1963, pp.149-169.

Right from the beginning of the nineteenth century, India witnessed several social reform movements and the efforts of enlightened Indians to bring about social change. The word “reform” is a multidimensional phrase and it contains many implications. Consequently, a social reform movement is a series of concrete valuable attempts to define and establish the native rights of man. The literal meaning of the word “reform” is the removal of faults or abuses, especially of a moral or political or social kind. Each reform aims at modifying the belief system and life styles of the members of a group⁷. Theoretically all social movements consist of component like objectives, ideology, programs, leadership, organizations etc. which are inter dependent. Mass mobilization programs of action and ideology are strategies adopted by leaders to bring qualitative changes in structural patterns and power relations in society.⁸

The efforts taken by various social reform movements and enlightened Indians for bringing about a social change in the caste-ridden society of Indian should be treated as an important episode in the pages of Indian history.

All the social reformers including Iswara Chandra Vidya Sagar, Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswathi were convinced that mere official enactment and ceremonial breaking of existing local customs would not bring

⁷ M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1978, p.18.

⁸ Asish Kumar Das, *Contemporary Issues and Social Movement in India*, New Delhi, 2009. pp.1-2.

much social change. They therefore established schools, formed public associations, organized public meetings and started newspapers and magazines to focus public attention.⁹

The middle class of Calcutta in the late nineteenth century, was in fact dominated politically, economically and culturally by the British intervention, But its contestation of this relation was to be premised upon its cultural leadership of the Indigenous colonized people.¹⁰

The Saints and Social reformers like Swami Dayanada Saraswathi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Sri. Aurobindo Ghosh, and Swami Vivekanada instilled a kind of fighting spirit in the Indian culture and religion, through their preaching, teachings and lives of saints and Sages form a valuable part of our heritage. The Saints included great thinkers, intellectual, singers, musicians, poets and composers, their approaches might be different but the quest for truth was common.¹¹

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's preachings influenced the educated middle class of Bengal to live up to their responsibilities as leaders of the nation. His social and spiritual discourse is taken to be wholly consistent with

⁹ V.A. Narian, *Social History of Modern India*, New Delhi, 1972, p.121.

¹⁰ Partha Chatterjee "A Religion of Urban Domestically: Sri Ramakrishna and the Culture Middle Class" in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (ed.) *Subaltern Studies VII Writing on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi, 1997, P.41.

¹¹ G.R. Sholapurkar, *Saints and Sages of India*, Delhi, 1992, P.XII.

the altruistic and activist social gospel later propagated by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and the Ramakrishna Mission again quite unjustifiably.¹²

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission was the third successful venture after the Brahma Samaj and the Arya Samaj. Even today the Ramakrishna order enjoys a global presence and adopts different modern methods of works, specifically, publicist networks and social or philanthropical works. Ramakrishna Mission played a dominant role in the Bengal Renaissance of nineteenth and twentieth Century. After Bengal, Kerala was also influenced by the thoughts of the great saint Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The various centres of the mission, big and small, scattered throughout Kerala are rendering valuable services for the welfare of the people, irrespective of caste and creed.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Many works have been done so far about the Ramakrishna Mission and its impact on different parts of India. But the studies on Ramakrishna Mission's impact on Kerala society is comparatively less and the role played by Swami Nirmalanada, the fore runner of Ramakrishna movement in Kerala is almost absent in Kerala history. The present study is an attempt to analyse how far the Ramakrishna Movement could create an awakening in the caste-ridden society

¹² Amiya P. Sen. 'Sri Ramakrishna, the *Kathamitra* and the Calcutta Middle Class: an old Problematic revisited' in *Post Colonial Studies* Vol.9, issue 2. Published Online 20 Nov., 2006. pp.165-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790600657835>.

of Kerala and the relevance of their immense contribution in the field of education, health, and other fields in the social scenario of Kerala. The present work is an attempt to evaluate Ramakrishna Mission as a socio-religious reform movement in Kerala. Besides critically examine the works and contributions made by the movement for creating awareness in social reform among the people of Kerala.

In this thesis an attempt has been made to examine whether it is possible to consider the Ramakrishna Movement as a movement in the commonly accepted sense, and how far Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's teachings helped to promote social transformation in Kerala. The Research tries to examine how the emergence and the institutional consequences of the Ramakrishna Mission acted as an impetus for social transformation. Therefore, this research problem is closer to the structural functional perspectives in which the institutionalisation of philosophies and social uprisings due to authoritarian influence are best fitted attempt has also been made to examine. How did the Ramakrishna Mission attend the question of caste system and untouchability in Kerala? How did they address it? and what were the limitations of the movement in Kerala? What are the specific elements that appeared in the movement in Kerala. How far the ideology of Socialism and the concept of universal religion advocated by Swami Vivekananda influenced the early political leaders and scholars of Kerala.

Relevance and Scope of the Study

The study is relevant for various reasons because unlike the other all Indian Socio-religious movements like the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Movement, the Ramakrishna Movement had influenced the social life of Kerala and to a great extent it created a new thought among the intellectuals and inspired the people indirectly. Though we cannot say that the movement reformed the whole society, it paved the way for social transformation and influenced the ideas of other social reformers. In this context it is necessary to examine why this Movement, inspite of all its limitations, still exists in Kerala and how far this movement was able to reach the ordinary people through their social activities.

Hypotheses of Study

The present study aims to prove or disprove the following hypotheses with source of information rationally and objectively.

1. The Ramakrishna Mission, though it did not originate in Kerala had influenced the society of Kerala than the other similar social movements.
2. Prominent monks of the Ramakrishna order, though silently, could bring social transformation in Kerala through their activities.
3. There was no well designed, pre-conceived plan for the whole movement as such.

4. Despite its limitations the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala had left an impact on various issues like educational rights, temple entry, relief activities etc.

The Ramakrishna Mission could attend the question of caste system and untouchability in Kerala through inter-dining and admitting all people in the Ashrams irrespective of caste distinctions.

Though the movement is not free from limitations there are certain specific elements which distinguish it from other socio religious movements of Kerala.

Methodology

Research Methodology is used for solving a research problem. The methodology used in this study is descriptive, empirical, and analytical. Footnotes and Bibliography are used as per the rules and regulations of research.

Period of Study

Though the period of study is not given in the title, it is assumed that reform attempts made by the Ramakrishna Mission began after the Mission was founded and since the Mission activities are continuing up to the present day no specific date is given as the period of the study.

Sources

Primary and secondary sources, private collections, and interviews are used for the completion of the present study.

Primary Sources

Archival records include Government orders, official letters, census reports available at Kerala State Archives Thiruvananthapuram, Regional Archives, Kozhikode, State Archives, Kolkata, West Bengal, have been utilized. These records are treated as a clear proof for the Ramakrishna Mission's activities among the poor and downtrodden,

The news reports about Mission's philanthropical work undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission at various centres in leading newspapers like Mathrubhumi, Malayala Manorama, Deshabhimani and old Malayalam daily 'Mithavadi' also taken as valid proofs.

The annual reports which explain about the activities of Ramakrishna Mission centres throughout India published by Belur Math, West Bengal, information and activity Reports published by Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar, Kolkatta. The journals published by the Mission centres including *Prabhuddha Keralam*, *Tulasee Sugandham*, and *Vedanta Kesari* are also used to gather information regarding the activities of the Mission at various centres.

Yearbooks, Calendar, Souvenirs, Diaries and Articles related to the topic published in important journals have provided valuable information for the present research. To strengthen the scope, published materials including books, unpublished theses, and articles have been used.

Interviews

Data was collected based on personal interviews, conducted with the president and secretary of the Belur Math, West Bengal and other prominent monks of the Ramakrishna order provided very useful information regarding the present-day activities of the Math and the Mission. Interviews with Swami Swaprabhananda, Swami Sampoorananda, Swami Sadbhavananda, Swami Nandathmajananda, Swami Dheerananda, Swami Kaivalyananda and Dr. V.S. Sharma (Former Head of the Department of Malayalam, Kerala University), Prof. Deepak Gupta (retired Professor of Vidya Sagar College, Kolkatta) were immensely helpful for collecting the details of Swami Nirmalananda and his role in spreading the ideals of Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala.

Interview with veteran historians like Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan (Former, ICHR Chairman and Dr. K. Gopalan Kutty (Former Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut) helped to gather useful Information for writing this thesis, Choorai Chandran, the former leftist leader and writer also gave a clear picture of the activities of Swami Agamananda in Thalasseri especially

his campaign against Untouchability. Ideological inputs were provided by S. Rajasekharan, Retired Professor, V.T.B College, (presently working as the Public Relation Officer Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram, Ottapalam) and Dr. C. Sreekumaran Retired Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Kozhikode.

Review of Literature

The Review of Literature is not done in a chronological order but based on themes in the chapters. This research focuses on the Ramakrishna Movement and its impact on Kerala Society. Though several works have been done so far by various scholars about the Ramakrishna Movement and its apostle Swami Vivekananda, works on this specific area are few. Apart from primary sources, I have used numerous secondary sources in this thesis. Among them important ones are given, and the main contents are discussed in this review.

Social change is the significant transformation of social strictures including consequences and disclosing of such structures embodied in rules of conduct, values and cultural products and symbols. Cultural change requires social change is likely to have cultural counterparts. To understand the social conditions prevailed in India during the nineteenth century and about various social and religious movements many published books are available.

J.H. Hutton in his *Caste in India, its nature, function and origins* (1946) has presented the structures, sanctions and functions of castes in India. This book provides a clear understanding of the caste system and the several factors behind its emergence.

Kenneth W. Jones in his *Socio-religious Reform Movement in British India* (1994) clearly examines the concept of Socio-religious Movement, and states that the uneven development of a colonial social environment and the persistence of indigenous form of socio-religious dissent paved way for the creation of two different types of movements in British India transitional and acculturative movements.

M.S.A Rao, in his *Social movement in India* (1978) focuses on the different social movements of India and its impact on society.

T.K. Oommen in his *Social Movements*, concerns of equity and security (2010) examines views of various prominent sociologists about social movements.

J.N. Farquhar's work on *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1967) deals with the intellectual awakening of India after the appearance of modern religious movements.

H.C.E. Zacharias' book *Renascent India from Ram Mohan Roy to Mohandas Gandhi* (1989) opens with the analysis of the social reform

movement initiated by Ram Mohan Roy and then taken up by various societies such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, the theosophical society, the servant of India society under the guidance of leaders and surveys how far they would achieve their aims such as for the upliftment of the oppressed classes in Indian society.

There are some works which focuses on social economic and political conditions of marginalised groups are B. Kuruppaswamy's social change in India (1972) Swapna H. Samel's *Dalit Movement in South India* (2004) Dilip M.Menon's *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*.

The book which discusses the social history of Kerala provides useful information regarding the social background of Kerala before the emergence of socio-religious reform movements in the nineteenth century. Samuel Mateer's *Land of Charity* (1971) discusses the rigidity of caste system existed in Kerala society. P.K. Balakrishnan's work *Jaathi Vyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum* (Mal.) discusses the social history of Kerala. K.N. Ganesh's work *Keralathinte Innalekal* (Mal.) mainly deals with the economic and cultural history of Kerala.

Western Education and the rise of the middle class created enormous transformation on Kerala Society. P. Sanal Mohan in his work *Modernity of Slavery, struggles against caste. Inequality in colonial Kerala* (2015), provides useful information about the social change that occurred in Kerala as a result of colonial intervention. M.G.S. Narayanan's *Kerala Charitrazhiyile*

Velichangal (Mal.) (2017) examines the factors that were responsible for the social change in Kerala.

The books which directly deal with the Ramakrishna Movement and the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa are *The Life of Rama Krishna* (1929) F. Maxmuller's *Ramakrishna Paramahansa*. The Rational Mystic (1898) discusses Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's philosophy and about his disciples. Hans Torwestern's work *Ramakrishna and Christ or the Paradox of the incarnation* (1999) is a comparative study and analysis of the incarnation as embodied in Jesus Christ and Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The author Hans Torwestern who has had practical experience of religious life in India and Europe is in an excellent position to compare both these phenomena.

Swami Prabhananda's *The early history of the Ramakrishna Movement* (2009) explains the origin and growth of Ramakrishna Movement and the services rendered by the prominent monks of the mission.

Swami Gambhirananda in his work *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (1957) gives a detailed description about the Ramakrishna Movement and the activities of the mission in different fields, including the service rendered by the mission during the time of partition for the victims of communal riots irrespective of caste or creed.

There are few works which deals with the Ramakrishna Mission's activities in Kerala and the service rendered by prominent monks.

Tulaseetherthan's *Swami Nirmalananda on Sri Ramakrishna* (2007) gives information about Swami Nirmalananda, the initiator of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala, and another book named *Swami Nirmalananda, His life and mission* (1997) mentions about the important ashrams established by Swami Nirmalananda and about the lectures and conversation delivered by him.

Brahma Gopal Dutt's work *Nirmalananda Tulasi Maharaj, A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna: A focus on facts and facets* (1991) gives a deep insight into the history of Ramakrishna Movement and about Swami Nirmalananda.

Rajeev Irinjalakuda's *Sri Ramakrishna Sangam Sanyasimar Keralathil* (Mal.) (2006) discusses about the prominent monks of Ramakrishna Mission who served Kerala.

Swami Vishadananada's work *Swami Nirmalananda: The unique Apostle of Sri Ramakrishna* (1943) explains the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement in general and Kerala in particular.

Swami Vivekananda on Indian Reconstruction (2009) by N. Lekshmikutty mainly focuses on Swami Vivekananda who had exerted a profound impact on the ideology of Indian freedom struggle. But the last chapter mentions the activities of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala.

An insiders accounts provided by Swami Amarthyananda in his autobiography *Ardha Viramam* (1991) which has won Kerala Sahithya Award in the year 1993 also used as a valuable source material for this study.

Though there are a few studies available on the Ramakrishna Movement, major research work on its impact in Kerala society has not been done from the historical point of view. Therefore, the present attempt seems to be relevant and it is necessary to study the movement from a historical perspective. The whole thesis runs into four chapters excluding an introduction and conclusion.

Though there are few studies available on the Rama Krishna Movement, major research work on its impact on Kerala society has not been done from a historical point of view. Hence the thesis focuses on the impact of the movement from a historical perspective. The whole thesis runs into four chapters with an introduction and conclusion.

Chapterisation

The present study includes four chapters excluding introduction and conclusion.

In the Introduction, a description about the relevance and scope of the study and sources, both primary and secondary used for the completion of the

work, are given in the review of literature. Few works on the specific area of the thesis are also mentioned.

The first chapter titled 'Background of Socio-Religious Reform Movement in Kerala - An Overview', discusses the nature of various social movements, evaluation of some of the sociological theories which has been used to study the social movements. This chapter also examines the nature of the caste-ridden society that existed in Kerala in the nineteenth century and the impact of western education and colonial modernity.

The second chapter 'Origin and growth of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala' examines the major socio religious reform movements in Kerala in general and the origin and growth of Ramakrishna movement in Bengal and the measures taken by the mission to propagate the ideas throughout India especially in Kerala in particular.

The third chapter 'Swami Nirmalananda, initiator of the Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala' focuses on the role played by Swami Nirmalananda and other prominent monks who took initiative to spread the idea of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa in Kerala.

The fourth chapter 'Activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Kerala' attempts to trace their activities in the fields of education, health and other fields. Efforts made by the Mission are discussed in full length.

A summary of the activities of the Ramakrishna mission and its impacts are given in the concluding chapters. Apart from examining the relevance of such ideas and attempts at reforms a brief note about the challenges faced by the mission and concluding remarks etc. are also given in the conclusion.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENT IN KERALA – AN OVERVIEW

The present study explores the role of Ramakrishna Mission in the Social transformation of Kerala and an effort has been made to document the activities of Ramakrishna Mission and the prominent members like Swami Nirmalananda who played a great role in spreading the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. It is a fact that the social reform movements initiated by various leaders and their organisations had effectively transformed the Kerala society into a modern society.

Social Movements

Social movement generally regarded as an instrument of social change, from structure and function of an existing system.¹ In a harmonious society, interpersonal relationships between different social groups do not encourage social friction. But when some social groups start dominating others and exploiting them, social values decline, and social problems appear leading to social instability. The under privileged sections all over the world are organizing themselves to fight against inequalities, discrimination, and

¹ Asish Kumar Das, *Contemporary Issues and Social Movements in India*, New Delhi, 2009, p. 1.

deprivation. Their agitations and collective mobilization had led to organized social movements with defined ideologies and leadership, which have brought about significant structural and organizational changes in the societies from where they originate.² Blumer, a well-known social scientist argued that social movements arise out of undefined or unstructured situations which cause stresses in the system.³ A social movement is generally oriented towards bringing about change, either or partial or total, in the existing system of relationships, values and norms, although there are efforts which are oriented towards resisting change and maintaining the status quo.⁴ Some social movements necessarily arise out of negative conditions of relative deprivation and strain. According to Wallace “Social Movements develop out of a deliberate, organized conscious effort by the member of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.”⁵ The term ‘Social Movement’ gained currency in European languages in the early nineteenth century. This was the period of social upheaval. No society can exist static forever. The influence of progressive thoughts and attitudes always creates certain changes within society. The term ‘social change implies the adoption of certain real attitudes

² M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements and Social Transformation, A Study of Two Backward Classes Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1987, pp.15-16.

³ H. Blumer, ‘Collective Behaviour’ in A.M. Lee (ed) *New Outline of the Principles of Sociology*, New York, 1951, pp. 199-214.

⁴ M.S.A. Rao, op.cit., p.13.

⁵ A.F.C. Wallace, 'Revitalization Movements', article in *'This Week's Citation Classic'*, 58: 264.81. New York, 1956, p.265.

acceptable to the context of modernity and detaining the old identity. A complete transformation of society or a community is not possible by abandoning the old attitudes and customs together. Social consciousness develops, and various sections of society fuel the need to effect change. Social movements are the important forces of social change in the modern world. Although not all social change originates from them, other factors like technological innovation, climate change, natural calamities and wars are also causes. Social movements are unique because they are guided purposively and strategically by the people who join them.⁶

The conception of a social movement is linked with the conception of society. The two conceptions are the faces of the same reality since movement remain in and rises from the conflictual core of society. It evidently follows that the universalism of society presupposes the universal existence of social movement articulating the claims and disputes of people in society.⁷ The role of ideology, leadership, strategy, communication, and mobilizations, etc. may constitute the contingent aspect of movements.⁸ The term “movement” is often used differently by different social activists, political leaders and scholars who have written on movements. Some scholars use the term ‘movement’

⁶ Hank Johnston, *What is a Social Movement?*, Cambridge, 2014, p. 24.

⁷ Rajendra Singh, *Social Movements, Old and New, A Post Modernist Critique*, New Delhi, 2001. P.40.

⁸ Ibid.

interchangeably with 'organization or union'. Some use it to mean a historical trend or tendency such as Renaissance, analytic movement, 'empiricist movement etc.'⁹

It is a trend among political leaders and social reformers to call their activities, which are essentially confined to lobbying or advocacy, as 'Movements' even though their activities are restricted to forming organisation with less than a dozen members. The term social movement became currency in European languages in the early nineteenth century. This was the period of social upheaval¹⁰ The aims of the movement change from narrow local issues to broad aims for social transformation. Sometimes a movement which begins with many broad objectives may in the process slow down to one or two issues. Ideology is also subjected to change.¹¹

The phrase, new social movement is in vogue in the contemporary discourse among social scientists and activists. Some scholars view the social movements as the product of the post-modern society.¹²

These movements are not class based and they do not raise economic issues. Nor are they concerned with state power. They raise the issue of

⁹ Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements and the State, Readings in Indian Government and Politics*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 15.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹² Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature*, New Delhi, 2004, p.23.

humanity, cutting across the interests of all classes. In this sense new social movements are social and not political.¹³

Scholars who follow the Marxist approach usually consider the economic structure of society to be the reason for the emergence of social movements. However, more scholars who take this approach have started considering the role played by ethnic, religious, and cultural factors too in spearheading social movements.¹⁴

The American sociologist Neil Smelser developed the structural strain theory in which he explained that one of the factors that cause social movements to rise is when people start thinking that their society has some problems, which may include economic, social, cultural or political problems.¹⁵ The great American sociologist Ruth A. Wallace considered social movements as instruments for change.¹⁶

Kenneth W. Jones in his *Socio Religious Reform Movements in British India* clearly defines the concept of ‘Socio-religious Movement. The term ‘Socio’ means an attempt to reorder society in the areas of social behaviour custom, structure, or control. All socio-religious movements demanded

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁵ Amites Mukhopadhyay, *Social Movements in India*, New Delhi, 2012, p. 7.

¹⁶ T.K. Oommen, *Social Movement II, Concerns of Equity and Security (Sociology and Social Anthropology)*, New Delhi, 2010, p. 8.

changes, ranging from the relatively limited approach of defensive and self-consciously orthodox groups to radical, which articulated a sweeping condemnation of the status quo.¹⁷

He further clarified that such 'socio-religious movement advocated modifications in social behaviour justified such advocacy by one or another form of religious authority, and then built an organizational structure it maintained over time.¹⁸ Social changes that took place in the West European Countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not only more rapid but also more drastic.¹⁹

The advent of the industrial revolution and the great political revolutions brought about many social and economic changes in Western Europe. This makes us to realize that a new era in the history of man had opened.²⁰

Distinguished thinkers like Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) developed grand theories of social change which included not only the changes which they are witnessing,

¹⁷ Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, New York, 1994, p.2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ B. Kuruppaswamy *Social Change in India*, 1972, Delhi. p.4.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that a writer in a college magazine in 1944 called for the revolutionary activities brought about by the industrial revolution and the scientific revolutions be directed to beneficial channels and to form them into a silent social revolution. See in K.A. Joseph, "Gimplses of Human Programmes" article in Govt. Victoria College Magazine Palakkad, March 1944, p.6

but also the changes in human society as a whole at all times and in all claims.²¹ The theories put forward by these 19th century thinkers can help us to understand the problem of social change to some extent.

M.S.A Rao, in his work *Social Movement and Social Transformation* opines that collective mobilization is crucial in any movement and it is related to ideology and nature of leadership.²²

Amiya P Sen in her edited book *Social and Religious Reform: The Hindus of British India*, states that social reform is like cleaning the water with insecticide or baling out the water to clean the tank. She argues that it destroys the pond, so the first step was to educate the nation, create a legislative body, and enact law. Amiya stressed the importance of female education by saying that "The status given to women all over the world is bad: more so in India. The rules of chastity imposed on them make one shudder. Woman's freedom and equality with man is therefore essential for civilization and this is what a reformer should strive for".²³

Karl Marx, the Great German thinker asserted that the development of the productive forces changes the relations among the classes leading to

²¹ B. Kuruppu Swamy, op.cit., p. 4.

²² M.S.A. Rao, op.cit., p. 250.

²³ Amiya P. Sen, *Social and Religious Reform: The Hindus of British India*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 68.

inevitable social conflict and the emergence of a new social order.²⁴ The communist idea of social development is also universalistic in its scope. Karl Marx states that every society goes through these stages until it reaches the final state of classless society.²⁵

Max Weber's theory of routinization of '*charisma*' fits well into his general theory of social change. He gives a dramatic and compelling sense of social change as the product of the eruption of charisma into history and diffusion of rationality through history.²⁶

One of the first book on social movements in independent India was published in 1972 by an Indian sociologist T.K. Oommen. He distinguished between three ideal types of movements ideological, organizational, and charismatic based on which the three crucial elements of a movement Ideology, organization and leadership emerge. This typology assumes that when societies or communities within them experience strain, mechanisms, viz., formulating a new ideology, establishing a new organization, or throwing up a new leadership emerge irrespective of which component emerges first and become a social movement.²⁷

²⁴ B. Kuruppaswami, op.cit., p. 6.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ T.K. Oommen, *Social Movements Issues of Identity*, New Delhi, 2010. p. 4.

²⁷ Ibid., p.13.

However, one of these elements (Ideology/organization/leadership) will acquire primary at different phases during all the movements.

The spread of all social movements is conditioned by either of two factors:

- a) When a society facing an external enemy, unifying all the socially diverse categories or
- b) Under the magnate spell of charismatic heroes who transcend primordial attachments and who can mobilise the people against a commonly perceived enemy.²⁸

A reform movement can be described as a mass movement that seeks to change only one specific aspect of a society. In other words, it is an attempt to modify some parts of society without completely changing the whole social system. Most of the reform movements are possible in democratic countries where people enjoy the right to express their opinions and criticize the existing social institutions, thereby bringing about some changes in them. The movements to abolish untouchability and the dowry system, and the movement to preserve wildlife are all examples of reform movements.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., p.34.

²⁹ Amites Mukhopadhyay, op.cit., p.11.

Reform efforts are most frequently aimed at some short-range objectives; on the other hand, long-range reform movements usually show an increase in technique and organized machinery. No social reform whatever its value will succeed without a well-established sense of individual responsibility existing among the persons concerned. Otherwise, the efforts will be largely in vain,³⁰

Modern religious movements have appeared in India since the effective introduction of Western influence. The renaissance of India, as of any nation, is above and before all things, a matter of spirit. The first fresh religious movement appeared in 1828. The intellectual awakening of India began to manifest itself distinctly about the same time. The antecedents of both religious and intellectual transformations go back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since the era of social reform that started from the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the enlightened people of India have been fighting for the equality of the sexes on one hand, and the equating of citizens on the other.³¹

It seems that the effective interpretation of India by the West began about 1800. The intellectual awakening of India began to manifest itself distinctly about the same time.³² Old social movements of India were largely

³⁰ M.C. Elmer, 'Social Change and Social Reforms', Vol.26. No.1, January 1951, Published by: Pi. Gamma MU, International Honour Society in Social Sciences, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41884087>, p.35.

³¹ B. Kuruppa Swami, op.cit., p.79.

³² J.N, Farquhar *Modern Religious Movements in India*, Delhi, 1967, pp. 1-2.

non-class movements, similarly, the sources of Western modernity and therefore discontents were absent in India. On the other hand, new social movements of India are responses to the discontents of India. Modernity, the major sources of which are planned economic development and the failure, factor to implement the constitutional promise of equality and social justice.³³

The uneven development of a colonial social environment and the persistence of indigenous forms of socio-religious dissent produced two different types of movement within the period of British rule: transitional and acculturative movements. Different types of movement within the period of British rule. They are transitional and acculturative movements.³⁴

Transitional movements had their origins in the pre-colonial world and arose from indigenous forms of Socio-religious dissent, with little or no influence from the colonial milieu, either because it did not get established or because it had failed to affect the individuals involved in a particular movement. In such movements we can see among its leaders the absence of individuals who took after the west, and a lack of concern in adhering to its concepts and programmes with the colonial world. Acculturative movement is the product of the colonial period led by individuals who were the products of

³³ T.K. Oommen, *Nation, Civil Society and Social Movements: Essays in Political Sociology*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 247.

³⁴ Kenneth, W. Jones, op.cit., p. 3.

cultural interaction. The basis and aims of such movements rested on the indigenous heritage of social and religious protest.³⁵

Impact of Colonialism on Indian Society

Revivalism emerged as a byproduct of the renaissance as an alternative to modernity. Though modernity produced equality and social justice as mentioned earlier, modernity failed to find a solution for a culture endangered by colonialism, revivalism emerged as a particularly powerful and influential alternative. Edward Said had remarked, “has often taken the form of what we call nativism used as a private refuge, to fight against the distortions inflicted on your identity in this way, it is a return to a pre-imperial period to locate a “pure native culture”.³⁶ The revivalism and fundamentalism in India, like in many other countries, had their roots in cultural defense, even if it drew greater sustenance in course of time from internal differences.³⁷

It can be said that the nineteenth century was the century of the Indian Renaissance. Bengal was the center of renaissance and the religious movements. There was a saying that if Bengal caught cold, India sneezed³⁸.

³⁵ Ibid., pp.3.4.

³⁶ K.N. Panikkar, 'Colonialism, Culture and Revivalism', in *Social Scientist* Vol.31. No.1/2(Jan-Feb 2003). pp.5. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3518287>. Accessed: 03.11.2015, 23.08 UTC.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Maruti T. Kamble, “Bengal in Karnataka’s Religious Reform Movement: A case study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission”, 1890-1947, In Gwilgn Beckerlegge (ed).

Calcutta was the chief city of British Empire in India. Hence, Bengal felt the western impact than any other region in India. The socio religious movements that started in Bengal in the 19th century gradually spread to the other parts of India and became national in character.³⁹

The Bengal Renaissance was influenced by two related features. The first was a capability to think, observe and create in a manner that entailed the melding of two traditions which were seemingly unconnected and even contradictory – one being the Indian cultural and philosophical past, the other the western creative and intellectual tradition.⁴⁰

The latter half of the 19th century witnessed political awakening in the country. It was passing through a significant phase, which brought movements of reforms in various fields. A new civilization that grew out of the intermingling of Hindu and Islamic cultures, laced with western influence, had also began to make its impact of elite Indian. This period witnessed the greatest impact in scientific development. Religion could not stand up to its superstitions and dogmas, which were crumbling away due to the severe blows of research and scientific inventions.⁴¹

'Colonialism Modernity and Religious Identities' –Religious Reform Movement in South Asia' –Delhi, 2008, p.125.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Subrata Dasgupta, *The Bengal Renaissance: Identity and creativity from Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore*, New Delhi, 2007, p. 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.143.

The tide of agnosticism and materialism created a conflict between faith and reason among the minds of people in the backdrop. In the backdrop of this scientific evolutionary environment, Swami Vivekananda stressed the use of establishing a universal religion and deeply pained to see sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism destroying human civilization and bringing much despair to nations. He foresaw a new world order in which science and religion could cooperate and mysticism and spiritual harmony would replace religious dissension.⁴² When such changes were taking place in western and other parts of India, Kerala was lagging, weighed down by its own inner contradictions.

Geographically, Kerala rests in the Southwest corner of Indian Sub-continent and is bounded by the Western Ghats in the East and the Arabian sea in the West. Kerala, God's own country had an independent socio geographical and political utility from very early days. Its unique geographical position and peculiar physical treatment have invested Kerala with a distinct identify.⁴³ The fertility of soil, availability of water resources, paved way for the increase in natural and food resources. These peculiar features have influenced the demographical distribution of population in Kerala.⁴⁴ The cultural affinities of Kerala with the West of South India are still deeper and more intimate. The

⁴² Ibid., p.146.

⁴³ C.A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteer*, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997. p.28.

⁴⁴ K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathinde Innelegal*, (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, p.12.

cosmopolitan outlook and character of the Keralite is the result of historical causes-the wide-ranging external contacts dating back to millenniums proceeding the Christian era. The population of Kerala might have been an assortment of different groups of Dravidian stock. The Aryans came later, and both the races intermingled as it happened in the other parts of India. The new social evolution brought about by the onslaught of the Aryan influence had three main distinguishing features private property on land, the caste system, and Aryan culture. The Aryan culture was initially confined to the Namboothiris. It then began to gradually embrace those non-Aryans who maintained close contacts with the Namboothiris in social life.⁴⁵ The non-Brahmin folk of Kerala entrusted the ownership of land entirely upon the Brahmins or Namboothiris, and the economic differences gradually led to the social stratifications. We can observe that the economic forces have always played a dominant role in creating history all over the world.

Gradually a social order came into being in which the caste groups were hierarchically placed as high and low according to the economic power and social states. The presence of the ethnic element in the caste system made the identification of certain occupations with a particular economic class more rigid than ordinarily found in social classes. Different castes groups were divided based on their occupation and social status which became identical with caste

⁴⁵ Personal Interview with M.G.S. Narayanan, Prominent Historian and Former Chairman, ICHR – New Delhi, Kozhikode, 24.4.2015, 11 am to 11.30 am

status.⁴⁶ This social order was also given religious legitimation by raising caste distinctions and caste hierarchy into a moral imperative. The principles of social freedom and equality was absent in the Hindu social organization. People were made to live in a society conditioned by inferior relations, recognizing their relative positions not as being degrading but as elevating.⁴⁷ The observance of traditional caste system with all its rigidity, vitality and social exclusiveness was for long a peculiarity of Kerala. As a result of the Aryanization, the classless and casteless society of Kerala got stratified into mutually excluding active opposite groups such as the higher castes (Savarnas) and the lower castes, (Avarnas). The adoption of chaturvarnya system brought the upper castes in the highest strata of social ladder and they began to exercise sovereignty over the lower castes of Kerala.⁴⁸ Kerala was predominantly a primitive agrarian economy at the beginning of the 19th century. Kerala society included a variety of castes like Brahmins, Nairs, Vellalars, Ezhavas, Pulayas, and Parayas. According to the census of 1875 the number of various castes found in Travancore is not less than 420, but many of these are merely subdivisions of other castes or large families separated from the parent stock through various causes.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ B. Sobhanan, *Rama Varma of Travancore: His Role in the Consolidation of British Power in South India*, New Delhi, 1983, p.2.

⁴⁷ Adrian C. Mayor, *Malabar: land and Society*, Bombay, 1952, p.25.

⁴⁸ M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972, p.8.

⁴⁹ Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, New Delhi, 1883, p.330

Caste system was an instrument to top up Brahmin supremacy in the society.⁵⁰ Brahmins enjoyed all privileges. Malayali Brahmins was known as Namboothiris. They were regarded as the traditional landlords of Parasuramas land and were held in great reverence.⁵¹ Brahmanical Hinduism with its ceremonies, beliefs, practices, traditions, mythology, language, and literature influenced the social structure of Kerala to a great extent.⁵²

Among the Brahmins several subdivisions existed like Pattar, Embranthiris, Agnihotris, and Bhattathiris.⁵³ Namboothiris or Malayalee Brahmins who were indigenous to the land, and foreign Brahmins migrated from other parts of India, especially from Canara, Maratha, Tulu and Tamil countries, but are settled in Kerala.⁵⁴ The Namboothiri's were sub divided into not less than ten subdivisions⁵⁵ Barbosa described about eighteen castes who lived in Malabar. The Pulayas and Parayas who accounted for the bulk of the lower polluting castes were agrestic serfs of the Namboothiris and the Nairs.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ T.K. Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vo.I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990. P-844.

⁵¹ Edgar Thurston and C. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. V, Delhi, 1909, p. 157.

⁵² Personal Interview with M.G.S. Narayanan, Mythri, Kozhikode, 17.04.2016, 5 pm to 7 pm.

⁵³ P. Bhaskaranunni, *Keralam Erupathamnoottandinte Aarambhathil* (Mal.) (Kerala in the 20th Century), Thrissur, 2005, pp.58.59.

⁵⁴ Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People with A Special Reference to Missionary Labour*, London, 1971, p.29.

⁵⁵ O.V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, Thiruvananthapuram, 1906, p. 247.

⁵⁶ P. Radhakrishnan. *Peasant Struggles: Land Reforms and Social Change*, New Delhi, 1989, p.35.

The low morality that struck Hindu society in Kerala had its roots in the Brahmin profligacy.⁵⁷ Customs like *Sambandham* alliance which granted the junior members of the Brahmin family to live together with any Sudra or Nair women existed in Kerala in those days.⁵⁸ This was a sort of Martial alliance without legal responsibilities on the part of the man. The custom that the eldest son of the parents should marry within the caste decided the fate of many Namboothiri girls to remain *Spinsters*.⁵⁹

Only the eldest son among the Namboothiris were allowed to marry within the community with alone was recognized as a genuine marriage, all other younger brothers followed *Sambandham* with the females of Kshatriya, Anthalars and high caste Nairs.⁶⁰ Customs like *Smarthavicharam* prevailed among the Namboothiri castes. They believed that this custom would maintain the purity of the caste and used this custom for checking the immorality of Namboothiri women.⁶¹ *Smarthavicharam* was the trial of a Namboothiri women and fellow male adulterers who were accused of illegitimate sexual

⁵⁷ T.K. Ravindran, *Vaikam Satyagraha and Gandhi*, Thiruvananthapuram., 1975, p.12.

⁵⁸ Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, op. cit., p.3.

⁵⁹ Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominances: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847 – 1905*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 12.

⁶⁰ M.S.A. Rao, *Social Change in Malabar*, Bombay, 1957, p.24.

⁶¹ Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam. 1970, p.199.

relations.⁶² It is to out caste the polluted Namboothiri lady from her caste and family on the name of adultery.⁶³

After the trial, the accused lady will be ostracized from her community. It is evident in 'Thatri Smarthavicharam'.⁶⁴ The Madras District Gazetteer (Prepared by C.A. Innes, I.C.S in 1908) mentions about this incident Thatri Smarthavicharam in detail, and it is a clear example of the deterioration of the position of Namboothiri women in Kerala Society.⁶⁵

The indigenous Namboothiri Brahmins enjoyed a high status in the society, land was controlled by the higher caste Hindus especially Namboothiri Brahmins. The low caste Hindus, the entire labour community who also attended to the essential services of the village were untouchables of different ranks and regarded as the polluting castes.⁶⁶ In Kerala Kshatriya caste was created by Brahmins during the day of their domination. The Kshatriyas were only a microscopic minority in Kerala.⁶⁷ The traditional functions of Kshatriyas

⁶² A.M.N, Chakiar, '*The last Smartha Vicharam*', Tripunithura, 1998, p. 12.

⁶³ Personal Interview with M.G.S. Narayan, 24.9.2015, (Time 11.30 am to 1.00 pm) Kozhikode.

⁶⁴ Biju Kyppan Plakkal, '*Kuriyedathu Thatree Vicharathinde Kanappurangal*' (Mal.) Kozhikode, 2015, pp. 16-20.

⁶⁵ Cherai Ramadas, 'Thatree Vichara Rekhakal', in *Malayalam Magazine* August, 2006, p. 236.

⁶⁶ Swapna H. Samel, *Dalit Movement in South India (1857-1950)*, New Delhi, 2004, p. 268.

⁶⁷ K.M. Panicker, *History of Kerala*, Annamalai Nagar, 1965, p.10.

were performed by some chieftains and Military organizations especially the Nairs.⁶⁸

The Nairs, were considered as more influenced class with their extraordinary martial skills, majority of land came under their control and this condition continued till the prohibition of slavery by the government. They owned slaves and holders of most of the Government offices. The military and police, the wealthy farmers, the merchants and skilled artisans of the country.⁶⁹ *Marumakkathayam*, polygamy and *Sambandham* alliance with Brahmins were the main characteristics of the Nair family organization.

Their titles differ according to places known as Panicker, Unnithan, Valiathan, Kaimal, Kurup, Kartha, Mannadiar and Menon, they exercised local political power based both on feudal holding of land and compulsory military service. Nairs were included under the category of caste Hindus. They are not a caste, but a community, not less than thirty sub-divisions existed among them.⁷⁰ Great feudal nobles in Kerala were from Nair Community. They were the protectors and supervisors of Villages and an additional share of the produce of the soil was reserved for them for their services.⁷¹ The Nairs acted

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ P.Bhaskaranunni, '*Pattombatham Noottandle Keralam*' (Mal.) (Kerala in the Nineteenth Century), Thrissur, 2015, p. 54.

⁷⁰ Fawcett, "*Nairs of Malabar*", Asian Educational Services, New Delhi (reprint) 1990, p.26.

⁷¹ M.S.A. Rao, op.cit., p-298

as an intermediary between the Brahmins, the landlords and the tenants. From the cultivating peasantry this intermediary group extracted heavy rent, a share of which given to the owners of land.⁷²

The position of Ezhavas in Kerala society was at the top of the non-caste Hindus. Basically, a cultivating class, traditionally, the Ezhava were associated with growing and tapping coconut trees.⁷³ Earlier Ezhava enjoyed a high status along with the Nairs, with the advent of the Brahmins, the Nairs began to support the supremacy of Brahmins whereas the Ezhavas were reluctant to support them, and marched closer to Buddhism. Gradually Buddhism lost its existence, and caste system became a social institution, the Ezhavas were suppressed and degraded into the strata of low caste and untouchable⁷⁴. Their social condition was much better than that of the other lower castes. Even then they had to keep the rules of untouchability and pollution distance. They were not allowed to use umbrella, to wear shoes or golden ornaments, to carry pots of water on the hip to build houses above one story, to milk cows, or even to use the ordinary language⁷⁵

⁷² Rajan Gurukkal, 'Proliferation and Consolidation of the Temple Centered Social Hierarchy in the Cheraperiod', in T.K. Ravindran (ed) *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol.VI. Part II and IV Trivandrum. 1979, p.334.

⁷³ P.M. Govinda Vaidyar 'Ezhavar' In *Vivekodayam Magazine* No. 11, Thiruvananthapuram, 1917, p.346.

⁷⁴ Robin Jeffery, op.cit., p.21.

⁷⁵ Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity, A Descriptive Account at Travancore and Its People*, op.cit., p. 41.

According to the instructions issued by the census commissioner for India, the Hindu castes which are treated as untouchables, irrespective of the degree of untouchability and unapproachability subsisting between them and the higher castes, are to be regarded as depressed classes and the criminal and the hill tribes and other communities which are backward in modern education as "backward classes."⁷⁶ Even among the high-caste Hindus there is a certain degree of untouchability and unapproachability between each caste. For example, a Brahmin should not take his food before having an immerse bath, after seeing a Nayar though both are high caste Hindus. Similarly, the different sections of the depressed classes themselves observe certain degrees of untouchability and unapproachability.⁷⁷

The Nadars are found in large numbers in Trivandrum and they are found scattered in the rest of the districts of Kerala. Most of them migrated from Tirunelveli, and Senkottai Taluks. Another group migrated from Sivakasi and Madurai districts of Kerala. They occupied a social status equal to Ezhavas. Later they occupied a social status between the Nairs and the outcastes. They were the highest divisions of the lowest classes.⁷⁸ At the beginning of the 20th century an elite class emerged from among the Nadars.

⁷⁶ Census of India 1931. Volume XXVIII Travancore. Part I – Report by Rao Sahib N. Kunjan Pillai, Census Commissioner, Travancore, State Archives, Trivandrum, 1932, p. 431.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ R.N. Yesudas, *A People's Revolt in Travancore: A Backward Class Movement for Social Freedom*, Trivandrum, 1975, p. 20.

The Nadars acquired education and a good number of them successfully came out as lawyers, civil servants, and business magnates.⁷⁹

The Pulayas and Parayas occupied a very low position in Kerala society and subjected to all kinds of social disabilities. They had no education and were forbidden to wear any clothing above their waist. The Brahmins, Nairs even Ezhavas and Shanars possessed Pulaya slaves. A Cheruma or Pulaya could not approach a Brahmin village or temple or tank, even while using the public road. If he happened to see his lord and master, he had to leave the ordinary way to avoid his displeasure by accidentally polluting him.⁸⁰

The Pulayas were prohibited from entering the markets and bazaars. In 1931 Poikayil Yohannan, an avarna member of the Sri. Mulam popular assembly of Travancore complained that "Men and Women belonging to the depressed classes had no convenient place in Trivandrum, the capital city, to sell their commodities in the shape of bundles of grass, straw, baskets, mats, etc. They spread them for sale on the borders of roads, necessarily subjecting themselves to the driven out by the police at any time. They had to run about the town and often failed to calculate the due price."⁸¹ Caste system in all its

⁷⁹ T. Pazhani, *Social Change Among the Vellalas of Nanchinad*, Kochi, 2003, p.106.

⁸⁰ Edgar Thurston, *op.cit.*, pp. 51-52.

⁸¹ File No.2083, Administration Department, Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, (SAT) 1932, State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

severity and rigidity, divided Hindu society into innumerable exclusive groups mutually hating and co-operating only to degrade the other.

Concealed traces of serfdom were visible in economic and social relationships of the different communities. The lower castes who formed most of the people were subjected to bad treatment and had to live in hovels and work for their upper caste masters. All kinds of personal freedom and safety were denied to them.⁸²

The Brahmins whether travelling or residing were supported at Government expenses. There were several *Oottupuras* or free feeding centres scattered all over the country. The public feasts were also served strictly based on caste order. Those not belonging to same caste were driven out of the hall.⁸³ It is relevant to quote P. K.V. Kaimal in this respect, “Social difference may be a universal Phenomenon, but nowhere is one's birth is the criterion to determine one's position in the society as in Travancore and elsewhere in India. However, low might be the social status of the family in which a man has been born in other countries he can by his own merit and ability to raise to even to the higher rank in the social ladder”.⁸⁴ Slavery was also prevailed in Kerala in its most primitive form. There were slaves, who were bought and sold like any other

⁸² Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, op.cit., p. 291.

⁸³ Cherukad *Jeevithapatha* (Journey of Life), Trichur, 1992, p. 72.

⁸⁴ P.K.K. Menon, *The History of Freedom Movement in Kerala Vol.II*, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 2006, p. 456.

property by the masters and landlords. The agrestic slaves attached to the land in Kerala included the Pulayas, Parayas and Kuruvas, etc. The slaves were employed in agricultural operations and paid in grains at a fixed rate. Slaves could be legally sold. The government owned many slaves whom it leased to private land holders.⁸⁵ In short, the slaves were not being treated as human being entitled to any rights or privileges. They were denied even the enjoyment of basic facilities of social intercourse.⁸⁶

The most severe and utmost defiled caste system polluted the Kerala society till the first half of 20th century. The evils of untouchability, unapproachability and were observed in the most irrational manner.⁸⁷ The migrated Namboothiris transformed the casteless society of Kerala into caste ridden society and manipulated several codes of laws to restrict the people belonging to other castes from interfering in their matters. Various castes and subcastes together gave an impetus process of degradation of the Hindu society in Kerala. Influence of caste and feudalism continued to exist in Travancore and Cochin and to a certain extent in Malabar too in the social and cultural fields even during the first quarter of the twentieth century. E.M.S. Namboothiripad had written a book entitled *Kerala Charithram Marxist*

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.456.

⁸⁶ Parur K. Gopala Pillai, *Sree Chattampi Swami Thiruvadikal*, Trichur 1939, p. 81.

⁸⁷ A. Sreedhara Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala – An Introduction*, Cochin, 1978, p. 48.

Veekshanathil wherein he mentions the bureaucracy prevalent among the high castes of Kerala including Namboothiris, Nairs, etc. and points out that even art forms like Chakyarkuthu, Kathakali, etc. could be watched and appreciated by high castes, on the other hand art forms like Poorakkali, Thacholi pattu and Pulluva pattu has not given much importance and appreciation like the other art forms of Kerala.⁸⁸ Not only Government but society with all its multifaceted designs of life were feudal in character Literature, art and infact the entire pattern of culture showed signs of feudalism.⁸⁹ The first Ministry of E.M.S. Namboothiripad played a dominant role in removing to a great extent the illusions about climbing the social ladder through some changes in the caste system.⁹⁰ The caste Hindus believed that not only the touch but even the sight of low-born people would cause pollution to them. According to E.M.S. Namboothiripad. "The characteristic pre-imperialist socio-economic structure was not the 'Asiatic mode of production' but a modified form of feudalism very probably unique in India.⁹¹ Logan in his *Malabar Manual* mentioned about the permitted distance at which the low castes were to keep a distance from the Brahmins or other upper classes. The 'Nayadis' were to keep 72 feet distance. The Pulayan (agricultural slaves) 64 feet. The Thiyya (toddy tapers) 36 feet

⁸⁸ E.M.S Namboothiripad, *'Kerala Charitram Marxist Veekshnathil'*. (Mal.) Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, p.33.

⁸⁹ Elamkulam Kunjanpilla, *Annathe Keralam* (Mal.), Kottayam, op.cit., pp. 140-53.

⁹⁰ A Sreedhara Menon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, opcit., p. 27.

⁹¹ E.M.S Namboothiripad *'Kerala Society and Politics: A Historical Survey*, New Delhi, 1984, p.25.

the Mukkuvan (Fisherman) 24 feet.⁹² A Nair may approach but not to touch a Namboothiri Brahmin. A syrian Christian may touch a Nayar but the latter may not eat with each other.⁹³ Francis Day, says that an Ezhava must keep 36 paces from a Brahmin and 12 from a Nair, while a 'Kaniyan' (Astrologer) pollutes Namboothiri Brahmin at 24 feet a Nair by touch.⁹⁴ C.A. Innes, in the Malabar Gazeteer of 1908, says that artisans must keep about 24 feet from a Brahmin, while a Nayadi must keep 74 feet away, Thus distance pollution gave a concrete form to the abstract ritual status. Pollution by approach or by touch of a low caste man could be washed out by complete immersion in water. Use of hot water was against the rule. Bathing by holding nose with fingers and dipping completely under the surface was practiced. Such a bath was needed before performing the routine chores. The bath was necessary before food can be taken, or a sacred place entered, or performing several other acts.”⁹⁵ The upper caste Hindus believed that it was their right to preserve superiority. Even a slight variation of the caste rules was not tolerated by the caste Hindus. It may be noticed that these two kinds of pollution by people, whose very approach within certain distances caused atmospheric pollution, and by people whose

⁹² William Logan *Malabar Manual*, Vo II Govt. Prices, Malabar 1951, pp.141-145.

⁹³ A.H. Hackworth, *Day Dawn in Travancore*, Kottayam, 1860, pp.89.

⁹⁴ Francis Day, *Land of Perumals*, Madras, 1963, pp. 322-323.

⁹⁵ P. Bhaskaranunni, '*Pathombatham Nootantile Keralam*' (Mal.), op.cit., p. 220.

very sight caused pollution to those of the higher caste, distinguished the Malayali system of caste pollution from the Indian system.⁹⁶

There were several restrictions regarding the language, dress, and ornaments of lower caste people. A low caste man must address a caste-Hindu male as Thampuran (my lord) and the female as Thampurati (My lady). He should not refer to himself as 'I' but only as Adiyar (your slave)⁹⁷ The downtrodden people were not allowed to use Sanskrit names as Rama, Krishna and Ganesa except in their crude form.⁹⁸

Thus, religious and social practices among the Hindus during the 19th century were deeply entrenched in superstition and obscurantism. It was under this cultural and ideological environment that the movement started by different social reformers had to compete with.

Social Change in Kerala

The nineteenth century witnessed enormous transformation in the religious, social, economic, political, and cultural spheres, throughout India. The British administration, impact of Western Education, and European Literature created the blossoming of fresh ideas which constituted a challenge

⁹⁶ William Logan. op.cit., pp. 141-145.

⁹⁷ T.K. Velu Pillai '*The Travancore State Manual*', Vol. I, Trivandrum, 1940, p. 844.

⁹⁸ Samuel Mateer, *Land of Charity*, op.cit., pp. 44-45.

to the new intellectuals.⁹⁹ This period was a great turning point in Kerala which witnessed the emergence of the society quite different. Kerala experienced an intellectual revolution or renaissance during this period which totally changed the outlook of the people. The economic, political, and ideological interventions of the colonial agent radically transformed the caste based social structure of Kerala from early 19th century onwards. In the urban spaces of colonial Kerala, where the Savarna castes were seldom active in trade and commerce, caste rules, in relation to distance pollution were frequently violated. But such practices concerning pollution had been widely prevalent among the marginal groups like tribals and fishing communities. Such practices may not have evolved out of Brahmanical influence, and these marginalized people are asserting consanguineal identities (lineage, clan, etc.) by separating themselves from 'others' through such symbolic gestures.¹⁰⁰

In the 19th century, Kerala was divided into three parts. British Malabar, Kochi, and Travancore. The decline of the Hindu upper castes, the development of the steam engine and ships and trains, the Sanyasi Community that stepped out for social service, the changes within literature arts and culture

⁹⁹ A.L.Basham, *The Illustrated Cultural History of India*, New Delhi, 2007, p.237.

¹⁰⁰ K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innalekal* (Mal.), op. cit., p. 188.

all these caused shifts in the existing social structure and were the peculiarities of the 19th century.¹⁰¹

However, M.G.S. Narayanan opines that the Renaissance in India was not the revival of the prior cultures that have been suppressed by the church. Instead, there was the continuation and the growth of the old. There was also the challenge of the new cultures that had come in from foreign shores. The weaknesses of the old social structure were revealed, the conflicts within the society became more sharpened, new thoughts and practices were accepted by the people, new classes developed, and a new society came into existence¹⁰². This transformation led to the birth of modern culture. However, this is not a revival, but rather, a new phase of growth. Modern European ideas and ancient Indian concepts came together. Sometimes, these ideologies clashed with each other. Sometimes they went together. The seeds of this interaction spouted, bloomed, and flourished only much later. The social movements, the national movements, and the literary art movements of the 20th and 21st centuries erupted into the communist movement that continues. In addition, the information revolution of ultra modernism, globalization and eco feminist concerns must also be juxtaposed into this Renaissance.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ M.G.S Narayanan, *Keralam Charithavazhiyile Velichangal* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2017, p. 43.

¹⁰² Personal Interview with M.G.S Narayanan, op.cit., 14.11.18, 6 pm to 6.45 pm.

¹⁰³ M.G.S Narayanan, *Keralathinde Charithra Vazhiyile Velichangal* (Mal.), op.cit., pp. 43-44.

Growth of Social Reform Movements in Kerala

Traditional Kerala Society based on caste hierarchy and feudal economic structure was shaken by a series of challenges both from within and outside during the 19th century, the socially depressed classes of Kerala, with the educationally progressing communities gradually came forward in the public sphere of the state, by breaking the manacle of ignorance and all omission.¹⁰⁴

Many factors are responsible for this social change. Intervention of colonial modernity was a major factor that led to the rise of social reformers.

Colonial Modernity

Modernity represents the beginning of a new epoch in world history, which is marked by the closing of medieval socio-economic and political orders in Europe. It is defined and understood differently, by scholars, some argued that it merged in Europe with mercantile capitals and colonial expeditions, or during the seventeenth century with the scientific revolution, some scholars believed the modern era started around French Revolution and Enlightenment in the second half of the eighteenth century or in the 19th century with the Industrial Revolution.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ P.F. Gopakumar, *Faces of Social Reform in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Sathesh Chandra Bose, Shiji Sam Vargheese (Ed) 'Kerala Modernity Ideas, Spaces, and Practices in Transition, New Delhi, 2015, p. 1.

Modernity in the European Scenario is understood to have affected a significant break with the premodern forms of life and practices, giving rise to entirely different forms and patterns of life.¹⁰⁶ Even though they may differ greatly, the very concept of colonial modernity suggests that non-European countries have gone through a similar cultural and social transition to that of European society.¹⁰⁷ It has been suggested that the great notions of the contemporary west – such as universality, reason, and progress – as well as modernism and enlightenment – are the lofty ideals of an all-conquering western mind.¹⁰⁸

The onslaught of colonialism completely changed the colonised societies. As Harish Trivedi writes “it may be useful to look at the whole phenomenon as a transaction... as an interactive, dialogic, two-way process rather than a simple active passive one; as a process involving complex negotiation and exchange”.¹⁰⁹

The colonial encounter itself accelerated the contact between previously discrete and autonomous cultures, imperialism, as Said argues, enforced a

¹⁰⁶ P. Sanal Mohan, *Modernity of Slavery; Struggles against Caste inequality in Colonial Kerala*, Delhi, 2015, p.8

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ M.P. Mujeeb Rahiman, *The other side of the Story: Tipu Sultan, Colonialism and Resistance in Malabar*, Kottayam, 2017, p. 192.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Leela Gandhi, *Post Colonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, New Delhi, 1998, pp.124-125.

necessary contiguity, or overlap between diverse and mutually antagonistic national histories.¹¹⁰

Ashis Nandy, in his 'Intimate Enemy' has analyzed colonialism as a moral and psychological sentiment rather than a political policy. A colonial system establishes itself by employing its own socio-economic, cultural, moral, and psychological values on the colonized and by influencing their mental capacity.¹¹¹ Colonial rule brought drastic changes in the socio-cultural field of Indian and their misrepresentation of the indigenous customs and practices forced the emergent middle class to embark upon a series of reforms.

Indian sociologists are of the opinion that modernity came to India in a totally different situation from that of the western world. In India it developed without the destruction of feudalism and along with colonialism.¹¹² Many of the peculiar social institutions like caste system, patriarchy, etc. got redefined and strengthened. Moreover, the boundaries of modernity in India were determined by Indian tradition. So, it is possible that even within the given group the familiarity with modernity may be in a contrasting manner. This is the real nature of 19th and 20th century 'modernity' in India, and it appears at best to be a forged one rather than a genuine one. The modernity which the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.126.

¹¹¹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Delhi, 1983, p.3

¹¹² Personal Interview with K. Gopalankutty, (Former Retired Head of the Department of a History, University of Calicut), 8.04.2019, 4.30 pm to 5.30 pm.

middle classes constructed in colonial India looked ahead as well as back. In India the concept of modernity built on the traditional and co-exist with it, dividing between the modern and the traditional the religious and the secular.¹¹³

The Indian middle class came forward to transform the age-old customs, where an individual is credited only by his birth, which was to be replaced by a new system where the merits of an individual would count for.

The introduction of colonial education and the new employment opportunities brought great changes among the educated, being deeply rooted in their tradition, struggle to choose between modernity and tradition, when drastic changes in several custom were demanded by the system.¹¹⁴

During this period, age-old traditions began to be questioned. People demanded changes in customs according to the changing needs. This demonstrates the development of the term 'public'.¹¹⁵ The acquisition of modern forms of knowledge from elementary education to higher level of learning that guaranteed participation in the colonial system and access to channels of social mobility became the main aim of the various social groups.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Personal Interview with M.G.S Narayanan, Kozhikode, 16.05.2017, 5 pm to 6 pm.

¹¹⁴ Personal Interview with K. Gopalankutty, op.cit.,12.02.2020. 2 pm to 3.30 pm.

¹¹⁵ Report in *Mithavadi*, Book 4. Lakkam 6. June (Report about Malabar District Conference), 1916, p. 45.

¹¹⁶ P. Sanal Mohan, *Modernity of Slavery*, op.cit., p.133.

The traditional elite class enjoyed an upper hand due to their privileged status, which they realized was vital for maintaining their dominant position. The social groups such as the Ezhavas, demanded access to modern resources. The protestant missionaries took special interest to spread literacy among the communities like pulayas and the parayas in the mid-19th century. Their poor situation and low social position, however, hindered their ability to learn, but over time, a significant number of pulayas and parayas started to learn.¹¹⁷

The educated middle class began to think that west was an ideal to be imitated, G. Sankaran Nair, before he became a prominent congress leader, wrote "as days pass on, I long more and more to visit England and other western countries, I consider a visit to the West is assuredly a part of a liberal education. Would God enable me to fulfill my desires?"¹¹⁸ Those who had the opportunity to be western - educated were impressed by the national and scientific progress achieved in the west and the national spirit which guided its people.

During the colonial rule, the society of Kerala underwent a social transformation. Several factors were at work for this social transformation and the growth of a new social order. Western education, capitalism, change in land ownership patterns, change in legal system all created drastic changes in the

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Diary of G.Sankaran Nair dated 10th November 1926, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (Quoted in Sreejith K;s Negotiating Tradition and Modernity in Colonial Malabar Source. Social Scientist. Vol.41, No.3-4 March – April 2013, p.36. VRL.<http://www.juster.org/stable/226104/23610470>).

outlook of people. The chief agents of the colonial modernity were the Christian missionaries. They started western education and it helped to bring out social mobility in Kerala.¹¹⁹

Missionaries by fighting against social evils, awakened the poor and downtrodden people to a sense of self-respect and better living. The conception of social freedom, justice, and equality for lower classes, was the original ideas conceived and carried out by the missionaries with commendable zeal during opposition. As Nagam Aiya has aptly remarked: “it is a glory reserved to this century of human progress - the epoch of the happy blending of the civilization of the west with that of the East”.¹²⁰

The most prominent Christian missionaries who worked in South Travancore was London Mission Society. The C.M.S. mission in Kottayam, and Basel Mission in Malabar also did remarkable contribution in the field of education in central and north Kerala and thereby awakened the people of Kerala from their slumber.¹²¹

In Travancore and Cochin, the traditional and indigenous system that had been meeting the educational needs of children from the upper strata since

¹¹⁹ P.F. Gopakumar, *op.cit.*, p.5.

¹²⁰ V.Nagam Aiya, *Report on the census of Travancore*, Taken by the command of His Highness on 26 January 1891, Vol. I, p. 472.

¹²¹ K.M.George, (ed). *The Malayalis*, The people, their History and Culture, Vol II, New Delhi, 2002, p. 532.

very early times was not disrupted until the end of the 19th century, when institutionalised education of the western type was given to a size that could supplement it.¹²² At the point of a gun, Portuguese missionaries converted thousands of fishermen. But the missionaries deployed diplomatic methods for conversion. They gave admission to all irrespective of caste or creed in their schools and tried to expose the injustice and rigidity of caste system in their propaganda literature. The colonial administration and missionaries brought a new elite class in Kerala.¹²³

The Basel Mission set up a network of educational institutions in North Malabar and was also responsible for setting up the first weaving and tile factories in Malabar.¹²⁴ Several missionaries were taken by the government to make primary education compulsory. By the end of the 19th century education was comparatively more widespread in Kerala because of the attempts made by various community organisations like S.N.D.P., N.S.S., Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sabha, Yogakshema Sabha, and various Christian organisations. Various Muslim Association like Travancore Muslim Mahajan Sabha, Malabar

¹²² P.R.Gopinathan Nair, 'Education and Socio-Economic Change in Kerala', Source *Social Scientist* Vol.4, No.8 (March 1976), Stable URL:<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3516378>, p. 30.

¹²³ Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar 1900-1948*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 64.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

Muslim Association and Kerala Muslim Association, stressed the importance of Western Education and Liberal Secular Education.¹²⁵

The Educational advancement of the Kerala during this period as per the Census Report of Travancore is given below:

Table

| States/Provinces | Persons | Male | Female |
|------------------|---------|------|--------|
| Kochi | 337 | 460 | 220 |
| Travancore | 289 | 408 | 168 |
| Malabar | 170 | 273 | 75 |
| Madras | 108 | 188 | 30 |

Hence, we can assume that these developments in Education affected all people irrespective of caste and community. While the percentage of literacy of Pulayas and Ezhavas were 0.09 and 1.5 of respectively in 1891, in 1941 it rose to 17 and 46. Respectively.¹²⁶

Many of the castes included in the Depressed classes and treated by the Travancore Government as backward classes for the grant of fee concession in schools. Some being backward in English and vernacular education and others in English Education only.¹²⁷ The aim of education is not only the spread of

¹²⁵ Personal Interview with Sreejith E, Assistant Professor, Govt. College, Koyilandy, Date 18.04.2020, Time 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm.

¹²⁶ Census of Travancore Report, State Archive, Thiruvananthapuram, 1941, p.162.

¹²⁷ Census of India 1931. Vol. XXVIII, Travancore Part I Report, Thiruvananthapuram, p. 432.

literacy and culture, but also enabling the students in various occupations by giving vocational training, the boys in primary schools are taught carpentry, weaving, tailing and other cottage industries, while girls are given training in needle work lacemaking and embroidery.¹²⁸

Education, however, changed the social scenario completely. The mode of living of the lower classes changed. The value of education has been brought and they are being prevailed upon to send their children to school. They gave up superstitious customs like animal sacrifice and began to cultivate the habits of frugality and cleanliness.

The rise of the middle class and urbanisation gradually led to the growth of the public sphere. The emergence of the public sphere in the colonial period allowed communities to transform inter-community matters into public battles.¹²⁹ The colonial period was a significant phase when communities gained a new meaning in the public sphere. The new educated middle class were against all types of caste-restrictions and Traditional beliefs. Several associations and clubs were formed during this period such as Malabar club in 1864, Cochin club in 1876, Kochi Hindu Sabha in 1878, Thalasseri Catholic Reading association in 1884, Palakkad leading club in 1869, and Sarva

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 438.

¹²⁹ G. Rajasekharan, Freedom Struggle in Kerala, In *Kerala Kranthi*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2007, p. 21.

Samajam Association in Trivandrum in 1880.¹³⁰ These clubs offered a space where people could come together and discuss matters of mutual interest.

Though, colonial modernity was introduced by the British administrators to legitimize the colonial rule in India, we cannot deny the fact that it also transformed the Indian society to a great extent. Kerala society witnessed drastic changes during this period. The spread of western ideas and values through education and technologies in Malabar paved way for the emergence of a new sect, the middle class. The opening of schools and factories led to social mobility. The means of communication and transport were developed. This era witnessed the development of 'print culture' also.¹³¹

Development of Print in Colonial Kerala

Christian missionaries imported printing machines from Europe, and by the mid nineteenth century printing process were certainly more established and active in different parts of Kerala. The first attempt was made by the Portuguese Catholic in the 16th century and later by the protestant German missionaries in the 19th century and later by the protestant German missionaries in the 19th century. It resulted in the publication of many books and periodicals in

¹³⁰ Sanal Mohan, *Dalit Movement in India*, In Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Sathyanarayana (ed.) *Dalit Studies*, Duke University Press, London, 2016, pp. 95-96.

¹³¹ Amritha K.A. 'Colonial Modernity and the Middle-Class Consciousness: The Introduction of Electricity in Malabar' In P. Sivadasan (ed) *Proceedings of 3rd International Conference of Kerala History*, (Fourth Session of KHC), Vol. I, Kottayam, 2017, p. 574.

Malayalam. The German missionaries in the 19th century. It resulted in the publication of many books and periodicals in Malayalam. The German Missionaries used new symbols printed new dictionaries, grammar books, calendars, and many other useful pieces of literature.¹³²

The new print culture created public opinion as an instrument of social change. Though missionaries printed primarily literature of a predominantly religious kind, many including Bhimji's press soon diversified and began publishing newspapers in Kerala¹³³. Which transferred the nature of print culture and public sphere in Kerala. There were scholars and writers like Herman Gundert who was a second Thunchath Ezhuthachan for Malayalam Language and literature.¹³⁴ The introduction of printing brought great changes in the life and thoughts of the people of Kerala.

C. Krishnan, popularly known as 'Mithavadi' had developed close contact with Dr. P. Palpu and established the *Kerala Sanchari* at Madras with himself as the chief editor of 'Mithavadi' which was started in 1908 from Tellichery under Moorkoth Kumaran was later shifted to Calicut in 1913 to be published as a magazine and later as a daily. Under C. Krishnan, it became a

¹³² M.G.S Narayanan *Colonial Modernization in Kerala in the 14th and early 20th Century*, op.cit., pp. 26-27.

¹³³ G. Arunima, *Imagining Communities – Differently: Print, Language and the 'Public Sphere' in Colonial Kerala*, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 43:63, DOI: 101177/001946-460504300103, New Delhi, 2006, p. 65.

¹³⁴ M.G.S Narayanan, *Colonial Modernization in Kerala in the 14th century and Early 20th century*, op.cit., p. 19.

newspaper which handled the social issues effectively.¹³⁵ *Mithavadi*, *Desabhimani*, *Kerala Kaumudi* and *Sahodaran* were the only papers that stood for the rights of the downtrodden, during the early decades of the 20th century.

Deepika started its publication from the St. Josephs' press at Mannam on 15th April 1886, its original goal was to start a common paper for all the different sects within Christianity. *Deepika* ultimately became a Catholic Trumpet.¹³⁶ Two years later in 1888, Kandathil Varghese Mappila started *Malayala Manorama* newspaper. It raised voice against the denial of educational rights to the lower caste people¹³⁷ *Mathrubhumi* was started as a nationalist daily in 1923. It soon became a vehicle of nationalist propaganda.¹³⁸

Al-Ameen started by Muhammed Abdul Rahiman was another newspaper with a strong nationalist spirit. The newspaper that shook the political authority and social taboos of Travancore was *Swadeshabhimani* founded by Ramakrishna Pillai.

¹³⁵ Rekha. P "Press an Social Reform Re-figuring the role of Mithavadi Krishnan", in P. F. Gopakumar (ed) *"Faces of Social Reform in Kerala"*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 82.

¹³⁶ *Deepika Goldern Jubilee Souvenir*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p. 42.

¹³⁷ Moorkoth Kunjappa, *Malayala Manorama Samskara Navodhanam* (Mal.) Kottayam, 1988, p. 47.

¹³⁸ Venu, *Janadhipathya Prasthanavum Madyamangalum* (Mal.) in *Madyamam Weekly*, Dec 31, 1993, p. 53.

The Congress Socialist party's newspaper *Prabhatham* was first published from Shoranur.¹³⁹

Vakkom Abdul Khadhar Moulavi occupied a permanent niche in the history of journalism in Kerala. He edited periodicals such as *The Muslim* and *Deepika*¹⁴⁰. Press created a new outlook among the people and served as an important means of mobilisation.¹⁴¹

Colonial modernity in literary field

By the last quarter of the 19th century a 'dialogic mode' became dominant in the literary production of the newly emergent male intelligent in Malabar. Especially the novel as a new literary form provided a form flexible enough to initiate public communication more powerfully than newspaper in the region¹⁴². In Malabar, novels played an important role in creating this deliberate sphere during this period, in sharp contrast to newspapers and magazines in

¹³⁹ E.M.S. Namboothiripad, 'How I Became a Communist'. quoted from Sreejith K, National Movement in Malabar; The Problem of Ideological Transformation (1934 to 1942). M.Phil. Dissertation, University of Calicut, 2005, p. 175.

¹⁴⁰ K. M. George (ed.). op.cit., p. 533.

¹⁴¹ Dr. K. Gopalankutty. 'Political Journalism' article in C. Balan (ed.) Reflection on Malabar, Kanhangad, 2000, p. 116.

¹⁴² Shiju Samvarghese, 'Colonial Intellectuals Public Sphere and the Promises of Modernity. Reading Parangodee Parinayam' in Satheesh Chandra Bose and Shijo Sam Varghees (ed) *Kerala Modernity, Ideas Spaces and Practices' in Transition* New Delhi, 2015, pp.41-42.

Cochin and Travancore, a key factor that indicates that the engagement with modernity was heterogeneous in its manifestation across Kerala.¹⁴³

Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) was the greatest poet of the time and a close disciple of Sree Narayana Guru. Asan had an extra ordinary talent for poetry and is regarded as the proponent of romanticism in Malayalam literature.¹⁴⁴ The relationship that existed between Asan and Guru was often compared that of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna. In the words T. K. Ravindran "The Social History of contemporary Kerala is actually the product of the work and activities of this Nara-Narayana partnership.¹⁴⁵ He utilised his poetic gift for a better and higher purpose. i.e., for the upliftment of the untouchables by creating new thinking among the educated people.¹⁴⁶

He attempted to educate the public and the government on the importance of resolving the grievances of the underprivileged on a variety of fronts, including political, social, educational, and economic ones. He edited a periodical called *Vivekodayam*.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁴⁴ Charles H. Heimsath 'The Functions of Hindu Social: Reformers, with special reference to Kerala'. 'University of Texas, published in the *Indian Economic and Social History*, Vol XV, 1978, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ T. K. Ravindran, *Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala: A Study of His Assembly Speeches*, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum, 1972, p. XXXII.

¹⁴⁶ M. L. Prema 'Kumaran Asan' the 'The Journalist and Legislator' in T. K Ravindran (ed.) *Journal of Kerala studies*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1983, p. 205.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

The first issue of *Vivekodayam* was published in April 1914. It was found by Kumaran Asan, a prominent poet of Malayalam literature, social reformer, disciple of Narayana Guru and found secretary of the SNDP Yogam, who was inspired by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. The name *Vivekodayam* was a tribute to Swami Vivekananda.¹⁴⁸ It was Asan who spearhead the renaissance movement of Malayalam Poetry.¹⁴⁹ The so-called modernity produced novels in Malayalam language. For example, Chandu Menon's first novel *Indulekha* and second novel *Sarada* influenced the educated middle class and their family structure. These novels portrait a clear picture of the Kerala Society and the impact of modern education.¹⁵⁰

Potheri Kunjambu, poet and novelist of the same period, highlighted the atrocities of the caste system towards the downtrodden in his novel *Saraswativijayam*. He highlights how education effectively aids many members of the disadvantaged group in overcoming the hardships the social system places upon them.¹⁵¹ V.T. Bhattathiripad's work *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku* (literally from kitchen to the stage) is the first social drama in Kerala written in 1929. The *Marakudakkullile Mahanarakam* (1932) by M.R. Bhattathiripad, sometimes known as 'the hell under the Cadjen umbrella', had

¹⁴⁸ K. M. George, *Kumaran Asan*, New Delhi, 1972, p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁵⁰ Shiju Samvarghese, *Reading Parangodi Parinayam*, op.cit., p.45.

¹⁵¹ George Iumbayam, *Malayala Novel Pathonpatham Noottandil* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p. 29.

a revolutionary impact on people's perceptions.¹⁵² Their primary goals were to emancipate Namboothiri women and promote English education.

The fundamental principles of a matrilineal family structure were put to the test by the new economic climate and the novel experiences learned in contemporary schools and universities.¹⁵³

Modernization is the most suitable name for the social change that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries in Kerala and paved the way for creating an awareness among the middle class about contemporary social issues. As previously stated, western education, missionary work, the opening of factories, the rise in migration, the rapid expansion of communication technologies, the development of the press, and the rise of the middle class all contributed to the era of social mobility and the amelioration of the negative aspects of traditional Kerala society.

The presence of social reform movements, which had already begun operating in other regions of India earlier, helped to establish an ideal environment for reflection during the process of modernization through the

¹⁵² M. R. Manmathan, *Recasting Images Essays on Social Reform in Modern Kerala*, 2017. Calicut, p. 17.

¹⁵³ Charls H. Hemsath, *The Functions of Hindu Social Reforms with Social Reference of Kerala*, op.cit., pp. 28-29.

British and the enormous transformation that followed. This has had a significant impact on the decision-makers in Kerala.¹⁵⁴

Politically, Kerala was composed of the British Malabar in the north, directly ruled by the British, which became part of the Madras Presidency in 1800, and the princely states of Cochin and Travancore ruled by native Maharajas under British at the beginning of the 19th century.¹⁵⁵ Important and progressive changes had taken place in the social, economic, religious and political fields of Kerala in the middle of the 19th century and the rulers passed certain progressive legislation which set the ball of reform rolling. The far-reaching changes that occurred in the social fabric of Bengal, Bombay and other parts of North India gradually began to appear in South India in general and Kerala in particular. It was the awakening of the masses, the lower orders in the Hindu society, against social injustice and evils existing for a longtime.¹⁵⁶

Though members of the middle class consciously or unconsciously stood for the interests of the colonial regime, they also acted as a catalyst to several social movements - reformative, reactionary, and radical. Their attitude gradually mellowed into one of sympathy and co-operation. This led to a social

¹⁵⁴ D. D. Namboodiri 'Caste and Social Reform Movements Colonial Kerala' in P. J. Cheriyan (ed.) *Perspectives on Kerala History*. (Vol II), TVM, 1999, p.427.

¹⁵⁵ P. S Velayudhan, 'Kerala', in T. K. Ravindran (ed.) *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Department of History, University of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1983, p. 203.

¹⁵⁶ L.Natarajan (ed), '*Kerala Through the Ages*'. Public Relation Department, Thiruvananthapuram, p. 111.

renaissance and the rise of social reform movements aiming at social emancipation.

Thus, attempts were made by members of different castes and communities to change the social scenario that existed in Kerala in the 19th century. Several social reform movements both originated in Kerala and organization working outside of Kerala created a profound, awakening in the caste-ridden traditional society of Kerala. Ramakrishna mission which was started in Bengal. made its way to Kerala and made an indelible mark here. This is detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION: ITS ORIGIN AND GROWTH

A major part of the 19th century was under the impact of English education, accompanied by Western thought and culture. These factors created an environment that roused the minds of Indian intellectuals.¹ The Indian reform movements were attempting to purify Indian religion which the colonialists regarded as negative encrustations and trying to find parallels with the Semitic model.² Unity in diversity has always been the distinguishing feature of Indian culture. The educated classes especially in Bengal felt the need for reform within the framework of Hindu philosophy.

A general awareness formed among the educated class that a group of teachers must be formed in India who should possess not only a critical knowledge of the western philosophy, but also have a spiritual insight. They wanted to create a platform for social intercourse between different communities which would help to bring a normal equilibrium throughout the country.³ The period of social reform right from the day of Ram Mohan Roy.

¹ S. Lal, *50 Magnificent Indians of the 20th century*, Mumbai, August 2008, p.142.

² Romila Thaper, *Interpreting Early India*, Delhi, 1992, p.218.

³ Swami Sharvananda and Swami Vipulananda, 'The fetters of Hinduism' in, *Vedanta Kesari* (Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Mission), Vol.XI, No.7 Mylapore, Madras, Nov. 1924, p.271.

Several leaders of Indian society have been concerned with the social evils and their eradication. They did not want to break the past, they wanted to reform the society from within.⁴

The educated people began to realise the consequences of superstitions on every aspect of life and how it hampers the progress. Many religious movements rose to bring about a rational outlook among all religious groups whether they were Hindus, Muslims or Christians. The social reformers of our country gave importance to continuity, order, preservation of ancient virtues and normal values, and harmonised social change by peaceful means.⁵

The awakening of the 19th century was thus directly attributed to the western influences on the Indian mind through colonial rule. This led to the beginning of an unprecedented literary activity throughout the sub-continent. It was in Bengal and Bombay, that the result of the colonial modernity became first seen. The Bengalese in the East and the Parsis and the Marathas in the west took very eagerly to English education, later Madras also followed and took advantage of the new situation.⁶

In India, the first national awakening expressed itself in the form of a series of religious reform movements. Some of these movements aimed at

⁴ P.Sanal Mohan, *Modernity of Slavery Struggles against caste inequality in colonial Kerala*, New Delhi, 2015, p. 20.

⁵ V.A.Naran, *Social History of Modern India*, Meerut, New Delhi, 1972, p.6.

⁶ J.W, Farguhar *Modern Religious Movements in India*, Delhi, 1967, p.21.

revising the traditional religion in the spirit of the principles of liberalism, others aimed at restoring it in the form in which it existed in ancient times.⁷ The social and religious reformers were all those who were advocates of alterations in social customs which would involve a break with traditionally accepted patterns. They were those who convinced themselves that altered ways of thinking and behaving were positive values sought to convince others to modify or entirely transform their ways of life.⁸ K.N. Panikkar has remarked that the cultural, and ideological struggle represented by the socio-religious movements was an integral part of the evolving national consciousness.⁹

The urgent need for social reforms like the emancipation of women, the abolition of untouchability and the liberalization of the laws of marriage and inheritance was realized by some enlightened Indian leaders as early as the beginning of the last century.¹⁰ The progressive reforms started by Brahma Samaj, the Parthana Samaj, the Rama Krishna Mission, the Sarvajanik Sabha and the Servants of India Society were directed towards these reforms. As a result of all these movements ideas of social reform had spread throughout India and began to make an impact on the life of the people¹¹ Brahma Samaj

⁷ A.R. Desai, *Social background of Indian nationalism*, Bombay, 1981, p. 287.

⁸ Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India: A Review of the Literature*, New Delhi. 1990, p.162.

⁹ K.N.Panikkar 'Socio-Religious Reforms and the National Awakening' in Bipin Chandra (ed). *India's struggle for independence*' New Delhi 1989, p.90.

¹⁰ S. Abid Hussain, *The National Culture of India*. New Delhi, 1978, p.205.

¹¹ Ibid.

started by Ram Mohan Roy, and Arya Samaj by Swami Dayananda Swaraswathi made significant impact on Indian society, but these reform movements were sectional and regional. In the last quarter of nineteenth century a new all India movement began to spread throughout India which awakened in the young men of the century a new faith in their own religion.¹² The central figure of this movement was Sri Ramakrishna. He was a saint in the traditional style of Hinduism.

In his search for self-realization, he met saints of other religions and stayed with them for some time.¹³ In order to understand the essence of other religions he practiced Islam and Christianity. The result was that he concluded that all religions were true that they were simply various paths, leading to the same goal.¹⁴

His disciple Vivekananda with the other followers founded the non-sectarian Ramakrishna Mission of service. This movement has been credited with championing the cultural revival or renaissance of modern India, and purifying Hindu monasticism.¹⁵

¹² K.M. Panikkar & A.C. Joshi, *Hinduism and the West: A Study in Challenge and Response*, Chandigarh, 1963, p.30.

¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru *The discovery of India'* New Delhi, 1994, p. 367.

¹⁴ J.N.Farquhar, *Modern religious Movements in India*, op.cit., p. 194.

¹⁵ George M. Williams, 'The Ramakrishna Movement: A study in Religious Change' Robert D. Baird (ed) *Religion in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 551.

Vivekananda's practical Vedanta, even though it was the result of western influence was conceived and designed strictly in terms of conventional Hindu thoughts.¹⁶

The Ramakrishna Mission's Movements main purpose is to protect India from the materialist influences of western civilization. It idealized Hinduism including its idolatry and polytheism.¹⁷ Thus Ramakrishna Mission, not only promotes non-sectarian neo-Hinduism but also a kind of religious universalisation.¹⁸ A social or religious movement may gradually become a formal organization. Consequently, if and when the organization becomes characterized by general societal acceptance of the goal sought, it reaches the stage of institutionalization.¹⁹ Whereas the Ramakrishna Mission has now spread its several units in India and abroad, it is still perhaps in the phase of a movement awaiting global acceptance of its ultimate goal – the goal of spiritualizing the entire human race.²⁰

¹⁶ Krishna Prakash Gupta, 'The Ramakrishna Mission', in T.N. Madan (ed) *India's Religions*, New Delhi, 2004, p. 286.

¹⁷ A.R.Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay (Reprint), 1981, p. 271.

¹⁸ Klaus Klostermaier, *A Short History of Hinduism*, England, 2000, p. 271.

¹⁹ Swami Prabhananda. *The early History of the Ramakrishna Movement*, Chennai, 2009, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Swami Vivekananda and the Birth of Ramakrishna Mission – A History

The Ramakrishna Mission a philanthropic, volunteer organization, was founded by Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple Swami Vivekananda in May 1897.²¹ Shortly after his return from the west for spreading the ideas of his master.

The first meeting was held in 1897 and an association formally formed with Swami Vivekananda as president and at the beginning Ramakrishna Mission had only three centres. They are Alam Bazar Math, Madras Math and New York Vedanta Society.²²

Swami Vivekananda wanted to start a Ramakrishna Ashrama in every village in India because he viewed it as a means for transforming Indian society, by the life – giving ideas of Neo-Vedanta, which would have to play an important role.²³ In the 1950's the Ramakrishna order also created its woman wing in the form of a twin organisation named Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission.²⁴

²¹ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, April 2017, Belur Math, West Bengal, p.2.

²² General Secretary, *Rama Krishna Math and Rama Krishna Mission, their History, Ideals and activities*, Belur Math, West Bengal, 2017, pp. 10-11.

²³ Swami Ganananda, *Ramakrishna Movement for all*, Mylapore, Madras 1990, p. 13.

²⁴ Swami Bhaskaranda, *Life in Indian Monasteries: Reminiscences about Monks of the Ramakrishna order*, Chennai, 2009, p.3.

Eminent Historian A.L. Basham wrote in 1954 that many authorities may doubt that Indian thought had any effect on that of the ancient west, but there can be no doubt of its direct and indirect influence on the thought of Europe and America in the last century and a half though this had come by way of organised neo-Hindu Missions. The last eighty years have witnessed the foundation of the theosophical society, of various Buddhist societies, and of societies in Europe and America looking for inspiration to the saintly nineteenth century Bengali Mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his equally saintly disciple, Swami Vivekananda.²⁵

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission are sister organizations that make up the nucleus of a worldwide spiritual movement known as the Ramakrishna Movement or the Vedanta Movement. This movement strives for religious harmony, Eastern and Western harmony, ancient and modern harmony, spiritual fulfilment, all-around human development, social equality, and peace for all people without regard to need, caste, race, or nationality.²⁶ It was to spread the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa that the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission were established. Both these organizations have an active presence in twenty centuries across six continents through one hundred and seventy-two

²⁵ A.L. Basham, *The wonder that was India'*, London, 1954, p. 486.

²⁶ The Annual Report, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission from April 2015 to March 2016 Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal April, 2017, p. 1.

centres including the Headquarters.²⁷ The Ramakrishna Math is a monastic order for men founded by Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), the great saint of Bengal, who is also considered as the prophet of the Modern Age. The Ramakrishna Mission is a registered society wherein the monks of the Ramakrishna Math and lay devotees cooperate in carrying out various types of social services.²⁸ It was founded by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who was also Sri Ramakrishna's chief disciple and religious leader and is regarded as “one of the main moulders of the modern World”²⁹ as stated earlier.

The Math and the Mission are twin institutions which give expression to the Ramakrishna ideal and form the hub of the Ramakrishna Movement which has a global presence and engages in the service of humanity.³⁰ The administrative work of the Mission is mostly overseen by the monks of the Ramakrishna Math, and both Headquarters are situated at the Belur Math in Bergal. The Math is formed as a Trust with well-defined rules and procedures, and the Mission is a registered society. Though both the organizations take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the Math gives more importance to

²⁷ Swami Prabhananda "An overview of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission In Swami Atmapriyananda (ed) *Foundation day commemoration volume*. West Bengal, 1 May 2010, p. 19.

²⁸ Personal Interview with Swami Suviranandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Belur Math, West Bengal Date 19.11.2018, Time 4 pm to 5 pm.

²⁹ Personal Interview with Swami Girishananda, Belur Math, Culcutta, Time 5 PM to 5.30 PM- 19.11.2018.

³⁰ Personal Interview with Swami Balabhandrananda, Assistant General Secretary, Saradhanandha Bhavan, Belur Math, Kolkatta, West Bengal, Date 20.11.2018, Time 5 pm to 6 pm.

religion and preaching, while the Mission focuses mainly on undertaking welfare activities with a spiritual outlook.³¹

The Ramakrishna Math was registered as a Trust in 1901 for the efficiency of the work of the organization and the Ramakrishna Mission was registered in 1909 under the Registration of Societies Act XXI of 1860.³² At present, the Ramakrishna Mission is a worldwide movement, a living organization having 147 centres of which 96 are in India. From the year of its inception, the mission has had a phenomenal growth. Its aims are listed out as follows:

- a) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;
- b) To promote and encourage arts and industries; and
- c) To introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.³³

³¹ Personal Interview with Swami Balabhadrananada, op.cit., 6 pm to 6.45 pm.

³² The general report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, 2017, April 2017, West Bengal, p.2.

³³ Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, Calcutta, 1957, p. 120.

- d) To establish, maintain carry on and assist schools, colleges, universities, research institutions, libraries, auditoriums, orphanages, workshops, laboratories, hospitals, dispensaries, houses for the aged the inform, the invalid and the afflicted, relief and rehabilitation works, and any other educational, medical, cultural, and social welfare service activities and training institutions and charitable works and institutive of a like nature.
- e) To take up development and general welfare activities for the benefit of the underprivileged, backward, tribal people of the society without any discrimination.
- f) To print and publish and to sell or distribute, gratuitously or otherwise, journals, periodicals, books, or leaflets, that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.
- g) To carry on any other work which may seem to the Association capable of being conveniently carried on in connection with, and calculated directly or indirectly to promote, any of the before mentioned objects.³⁴
- h) Its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and Foreign countries.

³⁴ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, 2017, op.cit., pp. 247-248.

- i) The aims and ideals of the mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.³⁵

As the time of its foundation, Swami Vivekananda had made it clear that the new Order of monks “shall have no connection with politics”. True to his ideal, the Movement refused to become politically involved even in such a relatively noble and worthy cause as that of Indian Independence. Christopher Isherwood in his Foreword to Swami Gambhirananda's *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* remarked that,

The Ramakrishna movement has to its enormous credit, always refused to become politically involved - even in such a relatively noble and worthy cause as that of the Indian Independence; and this even though nearly all its members must have had a strong sympathy for the nationalists.³⁶

Sources of Income and Expenditure

One of the greatest challenges faced by any movement for the selfless service to man has to face, is how to harmonize high idealism and financial realism.³⁷ There are two sources of finance: public charity and Government

³⁵ Swami Gambhirananda, op. cit., p.120.

³⁶ Christopher Isherwood in Forward to Swami Gambhirananda's book 'History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, op. cit., p. XI.

³⁷ Swami Budhananada, *The Ramakrishna Movement*, Kolkata, 2006, p.151.

Grants, Public charity is unpredictable, and the government grants are rarely guaranteed on permanent basis. Sometimes for running all activities smoothly the mission has to depend on impermanent and uncertain grants and donations.³⁸ The Math and the mission own separate funds and keep separate accounts of them. The accounts of both the Math and the mission are annually audited by qualified auditors.³⁹ Admirers and devotees are contributing by sending donations, for the various activities of the mission, Donations to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission are exempted from income tax under section, 80G of the IT Act, 1961.⁴⁰

The Ramakrishna Math; Belur Math (West Bengal) keeps independent auditor's report every year. The financial statements, including the income and expenditure of 75 branches and a summary of significant accounting policies and other notes to financial statements. It is their responsibility to maintain adequate accounting records for safeguarding the assets of the Math and for preventing and detecting frauds and other irregularities. The auditors of individual branches/centres/headquarters have to report that their audit was conducted in accordance with the standards on auditing generally accepted in India. Those standards require the auditors to comply with ethical requirements

³⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

³⁹ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, July 2021, Belur Math, West Bengal, p. 2.

⁴⁰ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, From April 2015 to March 2016, Belur Math, West Bengal, April 2017, p. 250.

and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free from mistakes in statement. Whether due to fraud or error in accounts and details regarding the funds and expenditure of the mission as recorded in the annual general reports.⁴¹ A sample table is attached in the appendices.

Prominent Social Reform Movements and Social Awakening in Kerala in the 19th Century

Politically, Kerala was composed of the British Malabar in the North, directly ruled by the British, which became part of the Madras presidency in 1800, and the princely states of Cochin and Travancore ruled by native rulers under British paramountcy⁴². In the beginning of the 19th century, important and progressive changes had taken place in the social, economic, religious, and political fields of Kerala, and the rulers passed certain progressive legislation that set the ball rolling for reform. The far-reaching changes that occurred in the social fabric of Bengal, Bombay, and other parts of north India gradually began to appear in South India in general and Kerala in particular.

Though members of the middle class consciously or unconsciously stood for the interest of the colonial regime, they also acted as a catalyst to

⁴¹ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, from April 2016 to March 2017, Belur Math, West Bengal, April 2018, p. 226.

⁴² P.S. Velayudhan, 'Kerala' in T.K. Ravindran (ed.), *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1983, p. 213.

several social movements, reformative, reactionary and radical. Their attitude gradually mellowed into one of sympathy and co-operation. This led to a social renaissance and the rise of rise of social reform movements aiming at social emancipation⁴³.

The social reformers like Vaikunda Swamikal who hailed from among the Nadars tried to educate and enlighten the masses and thereby empower them to bargain for their legitimate rights.⁴⁴ He founded a society called 'Samatwa Samajam' to create equality among the people belonging to different caste and creed and to safeguard the interests and rights of the under privileged.⁴⁵ He is regarded as the initiator of socio- religious reform movement of Travancore. He raised his voice against the priests, idol worship and against animal sacrifice. He soon got many followers.

The later half of the 19th century produced two social reformers who aspired to remove all inequities based on birth from Kerala society. They are Sree Narayana Guru, and Chattambi Swamikal. Sree Narayana Guru, the spiritual leader of the Ezhavas fought against the caste ridden feudal society of Kerala and tried to transform the traditional institutions of temples into vehicles

⁴³ D.D Namboodiri 'Caste and Social Reform Movement in Kerala' in P.J. Cheriyan (ed) perspectives of *Kerala History*, Vol. II, Part II Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 426.

⁴⁴ P. Johson, Vaikunda Swamikal, Harbinger of Social change in Kerala' in P.E. Gopakumar (ed.) *Faces of Social Reform in Kerala* Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 9.

⁴⁵ R.N. Yesudas, *Peoples Revolt in Travancore: A Backward Class Movement for Social Freedom*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1975, p. 135.

of social change. He proclaimed the doctrine, "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man" He struck the first blow against caste by installing a Sivalinga at Aruvipuram in Thiruvananthapuram district.⁴⁶ He extended his support to the Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924. Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) is a society founded in 1903 by Dr. Palpu under the guidance of the Guru for spreading his ideas among the masses and for the upliftment of the low caste people of Kerala.⁴⁷ Great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Ravindra Nath Tagore met Guru and were impressed by his personality.⁴⁸

Another social reformer who worked for social equality was Chattambi Swamikal, His early association with Sree Narayana Guru made him aware of the social evils prevalent in Kerala Society.⁴⁹ Sahodharan Ayyappan was an anti-caste activist who stood for social justice to all. He considered Sree Narayana Guru as his own Guru and teacher yet in his intellectual life he was closer to Ambedkar.⁵⁰ He went beyond Sree Narayana Guru in his rationalist radicalism. His slogan was 'no religion, no caste, no God for human kind'. He was one of the first among Ezhava community to organise inter-dining with the untouchable pulayas of Kerala.⁵¹ He founded the 'Sahodara Sangham' or

⁴⁶ L. Natarajan (ed), op.cit., p. 99.

⁴⁷ File No.8338/1903, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

⁴⁸ S. Achutha Varier, *Kerala Samskaram* (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 2003, p. 210.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Lope, *A Social History of modern Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1988, p.113.

⁵⁰ Ajay Sekher, *Sahodaran Ayyappan. Towards a Democratic Future, Life and Select Works*, Calicut, 2012, p. 15.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Association of Brotherhood in 1917 and the Journal *Sahodaran* to spread the ideas based on universal brotherhood.⁵²

The name of Ayyankali the first great social reformer of Kerala who organized the first labour strike in Kerala also deserves special mention. He was also considered as the first social reformer of Kerala demanding agricultural land for untouchables.⁵³

Even before the coming of these great personalities some personalities like Velayudha Panikkar (1825-1874) sowed the seeds for social change in Thiruvithamkoor. He struck great blow against caste by consecrating a shiva temple in 1854 at Edakkad. He founded a group for the traditional art form of Kerala Kathakali known as 'Kathakaliyogam'. He encouraged the artists belonging to Ezhava Community to perform this art form which was the monopoly of Brahmins and Nairs.⁵⁴

Arattupuzha Velayudha Panikkar, differs from other social reformers of Kerala in the sense that he had to sacrifice his life for the sake of his conviction and had become a martyr of the cause of social and cultural freedom especially

⁵² M.Sahadevan, *"From Brahmanism to Liberalism: Ideologies, Attitudinal changes and Modernity in Kerala*, Palakkad, 2008, p.292.

⁵³ P.F. Gopakumar 'Ayyankali and the Radical Intervention in the Process of Social Reform' P.F. Gopakumar (ed)., *Faces of Social Reform in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 63.

⁵⁴ P. Sankaran Kutty Nair, 'Charithram Padithakkalude Drishtiyil' (Mal.) in A.M. Unnikrishnan (ed) *Chattambi Swami Padanangal* (Vol.3) Kottayam, 2021, pp. 22-37.

of the unprivileged.⁵⁵ He was the pioneer, who started the depressed class movement in Travancore and oriented the people to fight for self-respect and liberation from oppression.⁵⁶

Reform movements also influenced upper castes. Members of the upper castes became aware of the injustices which prevailed among them. V.T. Bhattathiripad's drama *Adukkalayil Ninnun Arangathekku* gave a call for women upliftment.⁵⁷ The activities of Arya Pallam who was a member of the Malabar district Board, and Parvathy Ayyappan, a social activist for the emancipation of Namboothiri workers is also praiseworthy, despite the strong opposition raised by the conservative Namboothiris who regarded these new trends as sin and against the will of God.⁵⁸

The striking event during this period was the first remarriage of a widow in the history of Namboothiri Community which took place on 13th September 1934, when Uma Antharjanam (V.T. Bhattathiripad's Sister-in-law) married M.R.Bhattathiripad at V.T's house in Tritala.⁵⁹ Several dignitaries including

⁵⁵ Rekha, P., 'Arcottupuzha Velayudha Panikkar Precursor of Sree Narayana Guru' in P.G.Gopakumar (ed). *Faces of Social Reform in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p.35.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.39.

⁵⁷ K.K.N. Kurup 'Tradition Versus Modernity' A study of social reforms among the Namboothiris of Kerala' In *Proceedings of the Indian history congress*, Calcutta (December, 28-30) 1995, p.765.

⁵⁸ V. Krishan Namboothiri, 'Namboothiri Sthreekal' in *Mathrubhomi Weekly* (Mal.), Thiruvalla, 1938, July 25, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.25.

left theoreticians from all over Kerala participated in this event. Thus, it can be seen that many reform attempts were made by members of different castes and communities during the second half of the 19th century and early quarter of the 20th century which had its effect in the period of many reform movements from outside the state also. Ramakrishna Mission, which had its beginnings in Bengal, eventually travelled to Kerala and left its mark there as a result.

Growth and Development of Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala

During Vivekananda's travel throughout India as a 'Parivrajaka' or a wandering monk, Swami Vivekananda met people from all walks of life. He interacted with rulers, officials, social reformers, and scholars belong to the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities.⁶⁰ After visiting different cities in north India he reached South India and at Mysore he was taken in as a guest by the Mysore Maharaja, Chamaraja Wodeyar. He was quite impressed by his knowledge of the scriptures and spiritual insight⁶¹. Dr. Palpu, the municipal medical officer at Bangalore and one of the pioneers of the social Renaissance of Modern Kerala, met Vivekananda there. The doctor during his long talk with

⁶⁰ Geethalayam Geethakrishnan, *Swami Vivekananda: Bharathathinde Navodana Nayakan* (Mal.), Kochi, 2019, pp. 46-48.

⁶¹ Rakesh Tripathi, *Swami Vivekananda: The Journey of a Spiritual Entrepreneur*, New Delhi, 2019, p. 33.

swami, told him about the caste tyranny that was pervading in Kerala and the oppression faced by the people rigidity of caste system.⁶²

The biography of Dr. Palpu in *Deshabhimani* daily by T. K. Madhavan states thus: The meeting with Swami Vivekananda imparted inner peace to the doctor. He listed out one by one and shared his griefs. He explained the rigidity of caste system and the ill-treatment faced by the lower castes at the hands of the upper castes, pointing out instances from his own life and from the experiences of P. Velayudhan, his elder brother."⁶³

After listening to all these Swami Vivekananda declared "Find a good Sanyasi from your own community and with him as the center, gather together the lower classes to fight against caste by uplifting them socially and in other fields. The revolt against *Ayitham* must be strengthened."⁶⁴

It was after this briefing that Swami Vivekananda came to Kerala, in 1892 December which was then made up of the princely states of Cochin and Travancore, and British Malabar.⁶⁵ He travelled from Palakkad to Kanyakumari

⁶² Rajeev Irinjalakuda, *Vivekandanum Keralavum*, (Mal.), Thiruvananthapuram, 2012, p.4.

⁶³ Swami Maitrananda, Sree Rama Krishna Movement in Kerala In *Gana Madhuri Souvenir*, Sree Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram, Kalady. 1970, p. 85.

⁶⁴ M.P. Veerendra Kumar, *Vivekanandan, Sanyasiyum, Manushyanum* (Mal.), Kozhikode, 2019, p. 243.

⁶⁵ S.N. Dhar, *A comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda – Part I*, Madras 1987, pp. 362-369.

the southernmost tip of India. During his travel, he personally witnessed the caste rigidity and inhuman practices by man on man.⁶⁶

The SNDP Yogam had started a magazine titled *Vivekodayam* which aimed at raising the cultural level of the ordinary man by a process of selective modernization.⁶⁷ Chattambi Swamikal and Sree Narayana Guru were greatly influenced by Vivekananda's philosophy, and both shared an unseen bond with Vivekananda, which later manifested itself through the work of Swami Nirmalananda who brought the teachings of his master to Kerala.⁶⁸

Vivekananda's Philosophic exhortations to the people and his action of describing Kerala as a 'Lunatic asylum'⁶⁹ prompted the succeeding generations to wake up and hear the clarion call made by him, and to act vigorously to bring the necessary reforms to put an end to the deplorable social conditions in Kerala. These remarks of Swami Vivekananda about the inhuman caste system prevailed in Kerala society opened the eyes of social reformers and began to feel that caste system was in fact manmade and high time to put an end it

⁶⁶ Geethalayam Geethakrishnan, op.cit., pp. 46-51.

⁶⁷ K.G.Poulose, 'Bharatham Vivekanandane Munbum Pinbum', (Mal.) In *Prabuddha Keralam*, Octber 2018, Trichur, p.475.

⁶⁸ E.Kumar, 'Peoples participation and Evaluation of Legislations in Travancore, (1888-1948) A Historical Study unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kerala, Tiruvananthapuram, 2010, P.155. See T.K.Velu Pillai Article 'Aa Smaranayude munbil' in Sree Chattambi Swami Sadabdha Smaraka Grandham, 5.9.1953 Sree Ramavilasam Press, Kollam, p. 266.

⁶⁹ The untouchability and unapproachability that was prevent in Kerala in those days might have prompted Swami to make such a remark, See. Vivekananda Sahithya Sarvwasam, Vol.3. Part II Sreerama Krishna Madam, Puranattukara, p.186.

urgently.⁷⁰ The anti-caste caste agitations, the Vaikom Satyagraha of 1924, Suchindram Temple agitation in 1926 and Guruvayur Satyagraha in 1931 and civil right Satyagraha in Kalpathy owed their original inspiration from the ideas and inspiration of both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Narayana Guru.⁷¹

Formation of Vedanta Societies and the Origin of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala

It was the visit of Swami Vivekananda which set the background for the origin of the Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala. A lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Babu Kalipada Ghose who was then in Trivandrum for some business purpose invited Swami Ramakrishnanda a direct disciple of Sri Rama Krishna Paramahansa⁷² Swami Ramakrishnanda visited Trivandrum in 1904 and stayed for few months. His lecture on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna inspired many.⁷³ He was instrumental in the formation of associations by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahmsa in Thiruvananthapuram.⁷⁴ In several parts of Kerala, such associations by the

⁷⁰ S. Radha Krishnan, *Swami Vivekananda and Kerala*, Chennai, 2012, p. 126.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.130.

⁷² N.Lekshmikutty, *Swami Vivekananda on Indian Reconstruction*, Vadakara, Kozhikode, 2009, p.186.

⁷³ Personal Interview with V.S. Sharma, Retired Professor and Head of the Dept. of Malayalam, University of Kerala, 26.12.2018, Time: 2.pm to 3.30.

⁷⁴ Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) was noted for his organisation of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement in South India with its base at Madras. He started Madras Math in 1897 and Mylapore became the centre of its activities.

devotees of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa were formed. The main purpose of these associations was to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Vivekananda, and were known by the name Vedanta Societies.⁷⁵ The vedanta Associations conducted meetings in different parts of Kerala like Kollam, Paravoor and took special care to feed the poor people of the locality. In 1911, the Association invited Swami Ramakrishnananda to participate in the sixth day celebration of Sri Ramakrishna at Haripad. Padmanabhan Thambi the president of the Association was already acquainted with Swami Ramakrishna at Madras.⁷⁶ Swami Ramakrishnananda deputed Swami Nirmalananda his co-disciple, for this and Swami Nirmalananda reached Haripad in 1911.⁷⁷ Swami Nirmalananda according to Sri Ramakrishnananda would be the ideal person to grace the function at Harippad. Around 2500 people participated in these celebrations, without any religious barriers and caste discriminations. This was widely acclaimed as a great social feast.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ News Report in Prabhuddha Keralam, 1917, December, Kollam, p.62.

⁷⁶ Swami Nandalmajananda, 'Sree Ramakrishna Prasthanavum Keralavum' (Mal.) In *Salsanga Sukretham*, Journal Ramakrishna Math, Mavelikkara, July, 2021, p.90.

⁷⁷ M.G.S. Narayanan 'Vedandaganga Pravahathile Thulasikkadir' Report on *Malayala Manorama*, February, 2011 (13.02.2011), p. 10.

⁷⁸ Sawmi Sidhinathananda, 'Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala', In *Aradhana*, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir. Sree Ramakrishna Math, Trichur 1985, pp.14-15.

The Ramakrishna movement began to develop in Kerala after the establishment of 16 Ashramas by Swami Nirmalananda, The selfless service done by Swami Nirmalananda and other monks had a powerful influence in Kerala Society. This is detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

SWAMI NIRMALANANDA AND OTHER PROMINENT MONKS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION IN KERALA

Swami Nirmalananda, the initiator of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala, was born in Calcutta on the 23rd of December 1863 in the 'Dutt' family of the 'Kayastha' Community.¹ His parents were Debnath Dutt and Takamani Devi. He was named Tulasi Charan by his parents. Even as a young boy he possessed a good natured, yet masterful personality.² When he was a student of Calcutta University in 1881, he had the opportunity to meet Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa for the first time. He went to Dakshineswar a few times where he could be at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and talk to him. Subsequently Sri Ramakrishna was gracious enough to be Tulasi's Guru, blessing him, and leading him into spiritual initiation by accepting him as his disciple. For the next four years Tulasi used to visit frequently Dakshineswar to listen to Sri Ramakrishna and served him till his *Mahasamadhi* in 1886.³

¹ Tulaseeterthan, *Swami Nirmalandaji Maharaj and Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrma*, Ottapalam, 2008, p. 1.

² Tulasee Theerthan, *Swami Nirmalanda His Life and Mission*, Kayamkulam, 1997, pp. 6-7.

³ Tulasee Theerthan, *op.cit.*, p.2.

Coming under the influence of Swami Vivekananda, Tulasi joined the Baranagore Math, Tulasi took Sanyasa from Swami Vivekananda who named him 'Nirmala' on account of his rare purity of character.⁴

Thus, Swami Nirmalananda, one of the seventeen direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna⁵, was regarded as a powerful and worthy personality through whom the message of Ramakrishna – Vivekananda would reach the Southernmost part of India.

Swami Nirmalananda moved to the Himalayas to practise intense 'tapasya' to charge his "spiritual battery".⁶ From 1889 to 1902 he was on the Himalayan Heights except when he visited the monastery for short periods. His abilities as an organizer and teacher of Vedanta impressed Vivekananda so much, so, that in 1901 in his presence, Nirmalananda was unanimously elected as the Assistant secretary of the Belur Math. From 1903 to 1906 the scene of his missionary activity was New York in America where he did wonderful

⁴ Nirmalananda himself had admitted in a letter to Swami Madhavanandaji of Ramakrishna order that Swami Vivekananda was responsible for his joining in the Ramakrishna order of Monks, Letter quoted from Tulaseetherthan's book, Swami Nirmalanda, His Life and Mission, op.cit., p. 14.

⁵ Brahma Gopal Dutta, *Swami Nirmalanda Tulasi Maharaj; A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, A focus of facts and facets*, Calcutta, 1991, p. X.

⁶ Tulasee Theerthan, *Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaja and Ramakrishna Nirangana Ashram*, op.cit., p. 2.

work. However, he was called back to India for “the regeneration of the mother motherland.”⁷

Swami Vivekananda discussed with his followers his plan 'to create a new order of monks in India' whose motto was to be self-realisation in harmony with the welfare of the world. He was trying to mould his new revolutionary religion of humanity and love. It was indeed difficult for all the brother disciples to comprehend this new concept of religion or the equally novel Monastic ideal. Nirmalananda was one of those who readily accepted the change from the orthodox to the experimental.⁸ Vivekananda's works and deeds had burnt their way into his heart. It was two lessons from Swamiji's religion that both humanized and divinized that Nirmalananda freely practiced more than a decade later in the South notably in Kerala.

Swami Nirmalananda took charge of the Bangalore Ashram in 1909. With his base at Bangalore, he carried on extensive missionary work in the South like a true successor of Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, for about three decades.⁹ It was with the coming of Swami Nirmalananda that the Sri Ramakrishna movement gained momentum. It was to the Swamiji's inspiring leadership and guidance that the people looked forward to the spread of the

⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸ Personal Interview with P. Achuthan, (Rtd.) Professor, Govt. Victoria College, Dept. of English, Palakkad, 28.08.2014, 11 am to 12 am.

⁹ N.Lekshmikutty, *Swami Vivekananda on Indian Reconstruction*, Vatakara, Kozhikode, 2009, p. 189.

neo-vedantic message of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, the history of the Ramakrishna Movement at least in Kerala for over a quarter of a century from 1911 to 1938 was synonymous with the life and activities of the Swamiji during this eventful period. He established eighteen Ashramas in the South, of these Ashrams, Sixteen were in Kerala. From Bangalore, Nirmalananda travelled extensively transmitting the spiritual content from his master to the needy souls, and radiating the light of his teachings all over India and Burma, Kerala was his special field of work.¹⁰ It was Swami Nirmalananda who spiritually awakened South India, and Kerala in particular, with the life-giving message of Neo-Vedanta.¹¹ The land between Kashmir at the Northern end and Kerala at the Southern end was taken as the land by Swami Nirmalananda for spreading the message and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. He remarked once “My soul is in Kerala; my place of action lies there.”¹² He was not a Keralite and he did not know the language of Kerala. Yet he loved selflessly Kerala and its

¹⁰ Report of the Swami Nirmalanda Temple at Sree Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrrama, Ottapalam, (Issued by Swami Vishadananda, The Secretary of the Swami Nirmalananda Temple, committee, on the day of Installation, 25th December 1939, p. 5.

¹¹ Personal Interview with M.G.S. Narayanan, Date: 5.11.2015. Time : 12 to 2 pm. He explained the meaning of Neo-vedantism as a reestablishment and reinterpretation of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharya with modern arguments, in modern language, suited to modern man, adjusting it with all the modern challenge.

¹² Thulseeetherthan, *Sree Nirmalanda Swamikal, Smarananjali* (Mal.), Puthur, Palakkad, 1964, December 18, p. 90.

people, and worked tirelessly for well above fifteen years (1911-1938) to uplift Kerala¹³

On April 26, 1938, he died at the Ottapalam Ashram at the age of 75¹⁴.

A memorial was built there to honour him.

The list of Ashrams founded by him are:-

1. Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Haripad 1913.
2. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Tiruvalla, 1913.
3. Sri Rama Krishna Ashrama, Koyilandi, 1915,
4. Sri Ramakrishna Brahmananda Ashrama Trivandrum 1924.
5. Sri Rama Yogananda Ashrama Alappuzha, 1924.
6. Sri Ramakrishna Premananda Ashrama, Muttom, 1925.
7. Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama Ottapalam, 1926.
8. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Kayamkukulam 1930.
9. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Kulathoor 1930.
10. Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Pala 1930.
11. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Aroor, 1930-35.
12. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Adoor 1930-35.
13. Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Neyyor 1930-35.

¹³ Personal Interview with V.S. Sharma, Thiruvananthapuram, 28.09.2019, 11.30 am to 1.30 pm.

¹⁴ Ibid.

14. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Moovattupuzha 1930-35
15. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Palakkad (1930-35)
16. Sri Ramakrishna Seva Ashrama, Calicut, 1937¹⁵

The above list of Ashrams founded by Nirmalananda is indicative of his great organizational ability and the result of sustained and arduous labour which he undertook in the face of great challenges and difficulties of various dimensions. Swami Nirmalananda established sixteen Ashrams in Kerala including the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Nettayam in Thiruvananthapuram. He also guided thirty-two people to take up the Sanyasi life. For this he was described as “Yatishardhulan” (The tiger of Sanyasis) by the great poet Kumaran Asan.¹⁶

There are now four other Ashrams in Kerala in addition to those established by Swami Nirmalananda : 1. Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Vilangal. Thrissur (Established by Swami Tyagisananda) : 2. Sri Ramakrishna Ashram Kaladi, (Established by Swami Agamananda) Sri Sharada Ashram, Sri Ramakrishna Nagar Ottapalam (Established by Swami Vishadananda): 4. Sri.

¹⁵ Tulaseetherthan, Sree Nirmalananda Swamikal, Smarananjali) op.cit., pp. 34-35.

¹⁶ Rajeev Iringalakuda, 'Yatishardhulan, Swami Nirmalananda', In *Janmabhoomi* (Mal.), 26 April 2017.

Ramakrishna Nirmalananda Ashram. Vytilla, Ernakulam. (Established By Swami Purnajnananada)¹⁷.

Challenges faced by Swami Nirmalananda in Kerala:-

Most of the Ashrams founded by Swami Nirmalananda were in inaccessible and in remote areas. He was unfamiliar with the language of the people, their customs and manners. He had to suffer all sorts of personal discomforts and inconveniences. Often he had to travel by carts and country boats and sometimes even on foot in order to reach out to the people in obscure areas. But what was more challenging was the bitter criticism launched against him by the local conservatives for his attempt to introduce an egalitarian culture in the Ashrams. Nirmalananda started his missionary activities in Kerala at a time when the state was steeped in superstition, orthodoxy and casteism. But he lived and moved in utter disregard of the prevalent orthodoxy and casteism.¹⁸

Many respectable people offered contrary opinions when the Palappuram Ashram was planned to be built at Ottapalam. *“If the ashram is built there, no fine person will come”*, they said, Immediately Swami replied, *‘fine people do not require an ashram’*. This ashram is meant for the lowly for

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Swami Sampurnananda, Former President, Nettayam Sree Ramakrishna Ashram, Thiruvananthapuram, 18.02.2020 1 P.M to 1.30 PM.

¹⁸ N. Lekshmikutty, op.cit., p. 194.

those who sleep on stone steps. The fine ones are able to look after themselves. Therefore, let the ashram be built here itself.”¹⁹

Many devotees from the Travancore – Malabar regions gathered together for the inaugural ceremony of the first Sri Ramakrishna Ashram established in Kerala. Harippad was a strong hold of Brahmin Supremacy and Caste-Madness. However, Swami Nirmalananda was determined that these practices would not be allowed within the ashram and allowed people from all castes to worship and offer their prayers.

Tulasi Theerthan in his book *Nirmalananda Swamikalum Kerlathile Ramakrishna Prasthanavum* records the opposition faced by Swami Nirmalananda from the Savarnas, (upper castes) and his response to it. To the threat that most of them would boycott the ashram if permission was granted for the ‘Avarnas’ (lower castes) to pray inside the ashram, he gave a befitting reply “Even if all of you forsake me, I cannot lower my ideals, if you leave me starving, I am sure that Sri Guru will bring food for me”.²⁰

The inter-mingling of various castes, particularly the equal treatment which the so-called lower caste people received there, provoked the Savarnas of the place. For treating the lower caste people as touchables, some of the

¹⁹ Tulasee Theerthan, *Sri Nirmalananda Swamikal, Smarananjali* (Mal.), op.cit., p. 45.

²⁰ Tulasi Theerthan, “*Nirmalananda Swamikalum Kerlathile Ramakrishna Prasthanavum*” (Mal.) Singapore, 2011, p.187.

inmates of Haripad Ashram were stoned and manhandled.²¹ However the members of the Haripad Ashram decided to stand firm in the face of this social persecution, and on the occasion of the next celebration, a large gathering without any distinction of caste, met together and participated in the *misrabhojana* or Inter-dining.²² Thus the first ever public Inter dining on the history of Kerala took place under the leadership of Swami Nirmalananda. This incident which occurred in 1913, May 4 at Haripad Ashram can be considered as a silent revolution initiated by a monk against the untouchability that was prevalent in Kerala in those days²³ ignoring the resistance from the conservative ritualists, he arranged the *prasada* (food offerings) for all people, at the same table.²⁴ His purpose was to instill self-confidence within the lowest and the downtrodden, and to create in them the inner urge to become self-respecting humans.

In the following words, Swami Siddhinathananda records how this incident marked the first fatal blow to the citable of caste in Kerala.

"After the first batch had finished, the leaves were to be removed but the servants engaged for it refused to work because all kinds

²¹ Swami Maitrananda "Sree Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala" in Gana Madhuri Souvenir Sri Ramakrishna Advita Ashram, Kalady. 1974, p.125.

²² Swami Vishadananda "Swami Nirmalananda Athulyanaya Ramakrishna Shishyan, (Mal.) Ottapalam (Tr.), 2011, p. 93.

²³ Thathwamayananda Swami "Sree Ramakrishna Vivekananda Prasthanam Keralathil" In *Prabuddha Keralam* April 1997. Vol.82, p. 462.

²⁴ Tulasee Theerthan, Sree Nirmalananda Swamikal, op.cit., pp. 36-37.

of low caste people had eaten there. There was a sense of suspense. Swami Nirmalananda saw the incident with keen eyes, and he responded appropriately. He said: "They are all devotees of Bhagavan. I am their servant. I have no caste. But you should maintain yours". By saying this, he started removing the leaves himself. No sooner had he removed a leaf or two than there was a rush by one and all to do the work. This was a master stroke and had its impact on the age-old custom.²⁵

The significance of this incident in the social history of Kerala is that Swami Nirmalananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a co-disciple of Swami Vivekananda, was the first to strike a fatal blow to the caste system, which in due course crumbled under further blows from all quarters. With his action and example, he showed how casteism could be destroyed.²⁶

At the inauguration of the Cosmopolitan Club in Thiruvananthapuram, Swami Nirmalananda remarked that a true cosmopolitan was one who could consider another person as a man and as a brother without taking into account the numerous differences such as region and tradition.²⁷ He said that social transformation meant elevating the low to equalise with the high rather than

²⁵ Swami Siddhinathananda, *Quest and Bequest*, Calicut, 1990, p. 29.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Vishadananda Swami, *Nirmalananda Charitham*, Ottapalam, Palakkad, 1963, p. 125.

bringing the high down to equalise with the low. Additionally, it does not only result from dining together. Through the dissemination of culture and education, the low should be elevated and brought up to the level of the high.

Nirmalananda's successful experiments in the Ashrams in Kerala—where *brahmacharins* and *sanyasins* being drawn from all castes, even the Pulayas, was a prequel to the historic Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936.²⁸

He obtained many devotees in Kerala. Prominent among them were Dr. Raman Thambi, Munsiff M.R. Narayana Pillai, Subrahmanyam Namboothirippad of Adoor, Pandit Gopalan Nair of Kollangode, Retired Sub Judge of Ottapalam T.V Krishnan Nair, Munsiff Shankaravelan Parameshwarapilla, and his disciple Swami Agamananda.²⁹

In an interview given at Alleppey on 31 October 1933, Swami Nirmalananda expressed his ideas about the rigid practices that existed in Kerala in those days:

“I had an occasion to visit a temple which was under the control of Narayana Guruswamy. With a Tiyya friend, I went there at the time of *Arati*. After the ceremony was over, the priest began to distribute *prasada*. Offering

²⁸ Personal Interview with V.S.Sharma, op.cit., 25.12.2018. Time 1.30 pm to 2.30.

²⁹ Tulasee Theerthan, *Sree Nirmalananda Swamika*, op.cit., p. 64.

it was given into the hands of some who appeared to be the leaders of society. For others it was thrown on the stone pavement” [SIC].³⁰

He remarked that the Pulayas and other lower classes were not admitted into the temple but were made to stand outside. It was all a true copy of the procedure of the Brahmin-ridden temples in Kerala.³¹ Swami Nirmalananda said,

“In the old days, no caste was considered degraded. No doubt, the lower classes worked for the higher ones. But this untouchability and unapproachability were unknown. The lower classes served the higher ones as cooks. But now, caste is primarily in the kitchen. The Dalit Movement may do some good. It will sweep away stubborn prejudices and pave the way for the progress of all classes and castes”.³²

Swami Nirmalananda waged a silent but effective crusade against caste prejudice and orthodoxy. However, this was not a negative or reformist programme aimed at one particular community. It was an instance of the

³⁰ News Report, *Prabhuddha Keralam*, Volume XIV, Thrissur. 1933, p. 31.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Swami quietly putting into practice in his ashramas the Vedantic principle of the inherence of God in every human being regardless of class or caste.³³

Travancore was the most caste-ridden and orthodox region in Kerala. It was here, that Swami Nirmalananda served for quarter of a century. The result of his labours, as assessed by the Government of State and published in the report on the Census of India 1931, is worth noting. Referring to the inception and growth of the movement since 1911, the report proceeds to say: “Though the movement is entirely spiritual, it is having indirect social effects also.”³⁴

Swami Nirmalananda acted on the principle that all those who went to the ashrama belonged to one caste- the devotees of God. All of them sat together in the ashrama to partake of Bhagavan’s prasad and all of them were free to go right up to the shrine and bow down before God this side of the threshold. This was practiced so frequently and accepted so naturally in the ashrama that caste prejudice came to be wiped out from the minds of the Swami's devotees.³⁵ It was felt that even to entertain the idea of caste distinction anywhere, under any condition, was unworthy of a devotee of the Swami. This was the practice followed under his leadership in all the Sri Ramakrishna Ashramas from the very beginning decades, much before the Harijan

³³ Tulaseetherthan, *Swami Nirmalananda, His Life and Mission*, op. cit., p.124.

³⁴ Census of India, 1931 Travancore, State Archive. Thiruvananthapuram, pp. 356-357

³⁵ Tulaseetherthan, '*Swami Nirmalananda, His life and mission*', op. cit., p. 125.

Movement of Mahatma Gandhi and the Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagrahas.³⁶

His ideals were also able to rattle the castle of caste in Kerala much before the Harijan Movement of Mahatma Gandhi

The Prabhuddha Keralam

Another contribution of Nirmalananda was the founding of the *Prabhuddha Keralam* the monthly organ of the Mission in Malayalam on the Vijayadashami day in 1915, on the lines of the *Prabhuddha Bharata*, the English journal of the Ramakrishna Mission. The monthly journal became the vehicle through which the revolutionary ideas on religion, society, culture and even on politics emerging from the discussions and parallel talks³⁷ initiated by Swami at various mission centres, reached a wide circle of readers.

Under the guidance of Swami Nirmalananda, many prominent writers and scholars of that time began to write articles in the *Prabhuddha Keralam* Magazine, Different kinds of articles such as Book Reviews, and Travelogues were included in the magazine. Writers such as S Guptan Nair, Uroob, Sugathakumari, Sukumar Azhikode, poet Kunjunni, Fr. Pynadath, and K.P.A Rahim regularly wrote articles in the *Prabhuddha Keralam*.³⁸ From 1968 onwards, the magazine was published from Puranattukara in Thrissur. Much

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Swami Sadbhavananda, 'Akshara Punyathinte Vayassu 95', Malayala Manorama Daily, 18th July, 2009.

³⁸ News Report, *Prabhuddha Keralam*, Vol XIV, 1933, p. 31.

before this, *Prabuddha Keralam* became a spiritual magazine that was actively discussed in Kerala. In addition to *Prabuddha Keralam*, the Malayalam magazine *Sri Ramakrishna Thulasi Sughandham*, founded by Swami Vishadananda in 1947, was published at the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Ottapalam.³⁹

The attempts of social reformation and the spiritual awakening that spread through the ashrams that were established throughout the length and breadth of Kerala under the leadership of Swami Nirmalananda, the “*Prabuddha Keralam*” magazine, and the devotee-groups played a pivotal role in transforming the Kerala that was once called as a ‘lunatic asylum’ into a ‘pilgrim sanctuary’.⁴⁰

The nature of Swami Nirmalananda’s work differed in the North and in the South. The North had already become familiar with the names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and the Mission; the Swami's work in that region was therefore limited to the fostering of the spirit already generated and to the enlightening of special individuals.⁹⁴ He had to establish a setting in the South where it would be possible to establish and sustain centres, train people, and agitate the populace. At the same time that he had to maintain his hands on

³⁹ Tulaseetheerthan Nirmalananda Swamikal: op.cit., pp. 35-36.

⁴⁰ Swami Nandathmajananda ‘Ramakrishna Prasthanathinde Keralathile Vikasa Parinamangal’ (Mal.) In *Shathapushpam Commemoration Magazine*, Koyilandy 2015, p.34.

the numerous keys of his intricate and sensitive apparatus, he had to keep his eyes on the entire field.⁴¹

The Narendra Mission

Swami Nirmalananda decided to form the “Narendra Mission” in memory of Swami Vivekananda, for devotees who were heads of families for service in *Shivabhava*. In 1937, he established the Narendra Mission in Thiruvananthapuram with senior devotees including Thambi and M.R. Narayana Pillai.⁴² One of the earliest activities carried out by the mission was the setting up of a simple medical dispensary at Sasthamangalam by Doctor Thambi. It later came to be of excellent service in the health sector, and still continues to be in operation. After his visit to Kozhikode, in the same year, the Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram Hospital, with the patronage of the Zamorin, began functioning to cater to the activities in the Malabar region. Under the supervision of his disciple Swami Sekarananda, the Vedanta group began to conduct Pujas, Bhajans, Meditations, and Classes on the Bhagvad Gita, etc. As per the request of the members, Swami Nirmalananda turned this centre into an ashram in 1937. It is this last ashram established by Swami Nirmalananda that

⁴¹ Swami Vishadananda “Swami Nirmalananda, *The unique Apostle of Sri Ramakrishna*, Singapore 2011, p.154.

⁴² Tulaseetheerthan, ‘*Nirmalananda Swamikalum Keralathile Ramakrishna Prasthanavum*’ (Mal.) op. cit., p.109.

is now showcasing outstanding performance as the Sri Ramakrishna Sevashram at Kozhikkode.⁴³

The Silver Jubilee Report of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Thiruvalla indicates that Swami Nirmalananda had visited the Sivagiri Ashram of Sree Narayana Guru while travelling from Thiruvananthapuram to Harippad.⁴⁴ It was Kumaran Asan who received Swami Nirmalananda and took him to Sivagiri and requested him to preside over a meeting that was arranged in advance. Asan also presented a Malayalam paper written in poetic form in Sanskrit. Swami Nirmalananda delivered a fiery speech praising the SNDP *Yogam* for its tireless attempt at social upliftment and Sree Narayana Guru's ever-mindful movement to instill moral conscience in them. At the end of the speech, there was also a question-answer session. It must also be stated that it was here that Kumaran Asan requested, and was granted permission by Swami Nirmalananda, to translate Swami Vivekananda's interpretations of *Raja Yoga* into Malayalam.⁴⁵

The secular and equalitarian stand of Swami Nirmalananda becomes evident when C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer planned to convert some well-born Muslim and Christian families to Hinduisim. C.P.'s dictatorial ways were

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

⁴⁴ Swami Shankarananda, (ed), Sree Ramakrishna, Rajatha Jubili Pathippu, Tiruvalla, 1955, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

opposed by all sections of the people in Travancore. In order to divide the society and create enmity among the groups, certain prominent persons approached Swami Nirmalananda and sought his permission to become a part of C.P.'s conversion movement. Swami Nirmalananda stated the words of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa that all religions were different paths towards the realization of God. His reply was, “a Muslim should live as a more pious and a good Muslim, so also a Christian.” C.P. retaliated by sending an order to the Swami to submit the accounts of all the Ramakrishna Ashrams. This notice, when sent to the Ashram, was promptly ordered to be torn into pieces and thrown into the *homakundum* by Swami Nirmalananda.⁴⁶

The attempts of social reformation and the spiritual awakening that spread through the ashrams that were established throughout the length and breadth of Kerala under the leadership of Swami Nirmalananda, the “*Prabuddha Keralam*” magazine, and the devotee-groups, played a pivotal role in transforming the Kerala that was once called as a “lunatic asylum” into a “pilgrim sanctuary”. The fact that many talented young men followed the vision of sacrifice and became *sanyasins* was a major reason for the spread of the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna in the region. In those days, after Bengal, it was in

⁴⁶ Personal Interview with P. Achuthan op.cit.,05.05.2017, 11 am to 12.30 pm

Kerala that the Ramakrishna Movement took on a strong and deep-rooted form.⁴⁷

Swami Nirmalananda was indeed the expert physician sent by Swami Vivekananda to the “lunatic asylum” of Kerala,⁴⁸ as stated earlier. He was primarily a spiritual leader. He was grounded in spiritualism and Vedanta. But he made it the base of the social change which came about in an unobtrusive manner.⁴⁹

Between 1911 and 1936, while establishing ashrams in Kerala which was then divided into three regions of Travancore, Kochi and Malabar, Swami Nirmalananda also ensured the setting up of hospitals where Dalits and people of other backward castes and communities could get care and service.⁵⁰ His act of sending monks for service throughout the length and breadth of Kerala also aided in the formation of united Kerala State. In addition, the financial help offered by Swami Nirmalananda for the relief effort during the 1924 floods also deserves special mention.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Swami Nandhathmajananda, *Ramakrishna Prasthanathinde Keralathile vikasa Parinamangal*. op.cit., p.34.

⁴⁸ Personal Interview with Swami Dheerananda, Sree Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram, Ottapalam 25 .12.2018. Time 3 pm to 4 pm.

⁴⁹ Personal Interview with Swami Kyvalyananda, President, Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram, Ottapalam, 26.12.2018. 11 am to 12 am.

⁵⁰ Personal Interview with V.S.Sharma, op.cit., 21.02.2020. 4 pm to 4.30 pm.

⁵¹ Flood Relief Committee Report, *Prabhuddha Keralam*, 1925 December, p. 68.

Seeing the perpetual poverty of the ordinary farmers lack of funding agencies and rack renting by greedy moneylenders, Swami Nirmalananda asked his followers to set up a financial institution to help the farmers. As a result, the Sri Ramakrishna Bank was established at Palappuram near Ottapalam town in Palakkad District.⁵²

Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram, founded by Nirmalananda at Ottapalam. On 10th December 1926 was an offshoot of Ramakrishna Mission in the Malabar region. Their initial movement starts with providing an asylum to certain Namboothiri families who were ostracised due to *Smarthavicharam*⁵³ a cruel custom that existed among them in those days, which was more tyrannical than the caste system or untouchability.⁵⁴

The Ashrama started by Nirmalananda regardless of the opposition from others, extended a helping hand to these *brasht* Namboothiris and bring them into the mainstream of the Namboothiri Society. The ostracized families took shelter in the Ashrama with the support of the them president of the Niranjana

⁵² Personal Interview with S. Rajasekharan Nair (Retired professor VTB College, Sreekrishnapuram Palakkad) 4.05.2020, 2.30 pm to 3.30 pm.

⁵³ A.M.N. Chakiar, *The Last Smartha Vicharam*, Tripunithura, 1998, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁴ Smartha Vicharam was a unique institution of an inquiry which was conducted by the Brahmins called Namboothiris. It was a trial for sexual offences committed by the Namboothiri women. The trial was formally conducted by the Namboothiri who was known by the name 'Smartham' those found guilty were ostracised and excommunicated and banned from entering the temples in which the Namboodiris Brahmins were the custodians. A.M.N. Chakiar 'The Last Smatha Vicharam' Tripunithura, 1998, pp. 19-20.

Ashrama Swami Nirmalananda.⁵⁵ Swami Nirmalananda by his revolutionary activities played a great role in eliminating such outdated customs in the society. E.M.S. Namboothiripad declared his allegiance to Swami Nirmalananda and once said, “If you worship that religion, then I worship Swamiji's revolutionary actions”.⁵⁶

Census report of 1931, Velupillai's *Travancore State Manual*, etc. recorded certain bold steps taken by the Niranjana Ashram, Ottapalam during the time of Swami Nirmalananda.⁵⁷ Valiya Veetil Krishna Pillai who donated the land for the Vatiyoor Kavu Conference (Travancore State Congress Conference). Which infuriated the Diwan, C.P. Rama Swamy Iyer, who subsequently ordered his arrest, imprisonment, and government confiscation of his property. Krishna Pillai along with his family took refuge in the Ashrama for a period of 6 months. The ideology of Swami Nirmalananda for taking such revolutionary steps was his intention to introduce an *Ashrama Samskara* (following the concept that all are equal before God) rather *Ambala Samskara* (following the rigid caste hierarchy of the age).⁵⁸ Swami Nirmalananda was a modern intellectual who advocated free thinking and rationalism. Long before

⁵⁵ Biju Kaippanplakkal. *Kuriyedathu Thatri Vicharathinte Kanappurangal* (Mal.) Kozhikode, 2015, p. 88.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ T.K. Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, (Vol.1). Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p. 641.

⁵⁸ Personal Interview with Sailendra Varma, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Kozhikode. Date 06.06.2022. Time 10 am to 11 am.

Kerala became a district political entity, Swamiji played a crucial role in bringing about a spiritual link among the people of Kerala. For integrating Kerala into a single political unit, Swamiji sent his messengers from Koyilandy in the North to Kanyakumari in the South. Thus, he had formed a united spiritual Kerala, as stated above, long before the political leaders began to dream an Aikya Kerala as geographical and political entity.⁵⁹ The results of the activities of Swami Nirmalananda and achievements will appear from the following few lines quoted from the census Report of the Govt of India:

“Ramakrishna Movement was started here in 1911 under the guidance of Swami Nirmalananda a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The first Ashrama was opened at Haripad in 1912. Immediately followed by another at Tiruvalla, the third and the most important one was established at Trivandrum in 1924, and since then eight more have been added at other centres. No distinctions of caste are observed in the Ashrams. At all important functions in these people of all castes up to the lowest Pulayas, Parayas, etc., take their food together and as the food is served is invariably *prasada*. Philanthropical work is also

⁵⁹ N. Lekshmikutty, op.cit., p.193.

undertaken whenever necessary in a spirit of pure service, the poor and the needy being treated in a spirit of worship.”⁶⁰

The relevance of his activism is that he had the subjective cognition of the ills of the society and he tried to discover the original meanings of Hindu religion as an ideology to counterblast the ideology of the hegemonic Brahmin class. He was looking for an indigenously developed ideology capable of understanding the values of the new hegemonic class and preparing the society to reconcile with the new situation for a healthy and positive growth rather than any caste orthodoxy when the society was exposed to a civilization founded on values alien to the land and conducive to moral and material progress. His ideals of liberty, equality, free thinking, rationalism, gender equality, secularism and the like became the rallying points of the genesis of rationalist movement in Malabar and undoubtedly, we can assume that all these revolutionary ideas were instrumental in enlightening the lowest ranks of the society especially in Malabar. Not only that, but these progressive ideas also provided fertile ground for the growth of the leftist movement in Malabar.

⁶⁰ Census Report, Govt. of India, 1931, Vol. XXVIII Travancore, Part 1 Chapter XI, Section 43, page. 335, Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

Other Visionaries of the Kerala Renaissance from the Ramakrishna Tradition

The Ramakrishna Movement took root in the fertile soil of Kerala and many ventures were established in different parts because of the leadership qualities and personality of Swami Nirmalananda. But while discussing about the origin and growth Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala it is essential to explain the activities done by the other important torch bearers of the movement who declared an uncompromising war on casteism and superstitions of all types. These monks of the Ramakrishna order spread the message of Ramakrishna Vivekananda throughout Kerala. Of these, Swami Agamananda, a direct disciple of Swami Nirmalananda who founded an Ashrama in Kalady in 1936, Swami Tyagishananda, Swami Raganathanda, Swami Visadananda and Thapasyananda Swamikal deserve special mention.

Swami Agamanda was a great scholar in Sanskrit and philosophy and had admiration for Adi Sankaracharya the great saint and Philosopher of the 8th century and his philosophy of advaita Vedanta.⁶¹ Kerala witnesses two types of social reformers who undertook the project of social regeneration in Kerala. The first group challenged the superstitions notions of society exclusively existed in the traditional society and they followed a symbolic resistance by

⁶¹ M.N.K. Nair, 'Ashrama in Retrospect' in *Samarpan*, Kalady Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1975, p.33.

making use of the ritualistic emblems.⁶² The leaders like Aiya Vaikunda Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal, Brahmananda Sivayogi, Vagbhadananda belonged to this category. Their aim was to prepare the ground for a silent social revolution.

The second group of leaders represented the institutionalized phase of the social renaissance movements.⁶³ Swami Agamananda belonged to the group of reformers rooted in spiritual traditions. During the twentieth century, he played a key role in the social reform campaigns already started by leaders like Sree Narayana Guru and Chattambi Swamikal.

Swami Agamananda was born in August 27, 1896 at Puthumana Illam in Kollam district. His original name was Krishnan Nampoothiri. Like his father he had practiced priestly duties in temples during his boyhood. Great physician of that time Evur N. Velu Pillai gave guidance in learning Sanskrit.⁶⁴

He was greatly influenced by Sri Sankara and Vivekananda, interested in asceticism and during his school days at Mavelikkara. In 1914-15, he

⁶² Jayesh P.S. 'Swami Agamananda, The prophet of Justice, Equality and Liberty'. in P.F.Gopakumar (ed) *'Faces of Social Reform in Kerala'* Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, p. 223.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 224.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

organised a student council 'The Sanathana Vidyarthi Sangh' and arranged religious discourses and Gita classes.⁶⁵

From 1910 onwards, Swami Nirmalananda started the work of spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He frequently conversed spiritually with Krishnan Nambyathiri, who eventually heeded the pious counsel of Swami Nirmalananda and adopted the name Swami Agamananda.⁶⁶ The tradition of philosophical thought in Kerala has marked its presence in the Indian vision as well as global thought. These spiritual leaders played a vital role in giving the direction for the renaissance to take place in Kerala, thus rejuvenating the social and cultural fabric of the state. The visionary force that provided the impetus for the reformations stemmed from the spiritual liberty created through the efforts of people like Chattambi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, and Swami Agamananda.⁶⁷

Swami Ganananda, in *Prabuddha Keralam*, notes that Swami Agamananda in his younger days, used to invite the Harijan youth to his Illam, and provide them with oil to bathe, clothes and food, and then teach them the Bagavad Gita, the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and also train them to chant

⁶⁵ Swami Mridananda, "Sree Agamananda Swamikal" in *Veeravani* Vol.I Swami Gananands (ed) Advaitha Ashram Kalady. 1991, p. XXIV.

⁶⁶ Srimath Swaprabhananda Swami, 'Swami Agamanandha', in *Smridhi Madhuri* (Mal.) Kaladi, 1961, p.9.

⁶⁷ Lekshmi Shankar, 'Arsha Jnana Parambaryam Keralathile Acharyanmariloode' (Mal.) In *Prabuddha Keralam*, October 2021, Trichur, p. 282.

the name of Rama.⁶⁸ After receiving the title of a Sanyasi from Swami Nirmalananda in 1928, he was actively involved in the construction of the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Puthukad. During its inauguration, he took a bold step against the evil of untouchability by arranging for the Dalit to enter the temple associated with the ashram, and by providing them with a communal feast.⁶⁹

The role played by Swami Agamananda in the Vaikom Satyagraha was praised by Mahatma Gandhi. The conservatives in that region had taken up a text attributed to Sree Sankaracharya to establish the reason why untouchability was an inherent part of Hinduism and why the entry of the Dalits into the temple premises had to be blocked. Swami Agamananda logically proved how this text was actually written by a person called Sankaracharya who hailed from Chengannur, and not by Sree Sankaracharya, and denied the claims within the text. This incident caught the attention of Mahatma Gandhi and Madan Mohan Malviya and energized them.⁷⁰

Swami Agamananda had recorded his views on Temple Entry in the issue of *Yuva Bharath* in the year 1932. He noted that “the eternally pure, limitless and utmost humble God can never be defiled, and that there is no difference of caste among the believers, and that the scriptures permit that

⁶⁸ Gananda Swami "Adhyadmika Navodhanavum Agamananda Swamikalum" In *Prabuddha Keralam*, 1996, November Vol.81, p. 430.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.431.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

everyone may enter the temple to worship and see the image of god, and that if any text can be found which goes against these principals, following it which goes against the principals of the Vedas and rationality is nothing but illogical”.⁷¹

The common people too, were inspired and attracted by the speeches of Swami Agamananda at Vaikom and Guruvayur during the days of the satyagraha.⁷² At this time, religious conferences or religious talks in public were unheard off in Kerala. It was Swami Agamananda who first organized conferences on Hinduism and religious speeches linked to the temple festivals in Kerala. He also ensured that each talk was printed as articles and distributed among the public. These articles have been collected into two volumes titled *Veeravani*.⁷³

In the speech that he delivered on 17 January 1947 at Guruvayur, he said, “the philosophies of all the religions are contained within Hinduism. It is only the rituals that differ”. When asked what the lower castes benefited monetarily from the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation, he responded that they got a glimpse of what authentic Hinduism was like. He also said that Hindus must study their own religion in thoroughly. The metamorphosis that

⁷¹ Ganananda Swamikal, (ed) 'Sri Agamananda Swamikalude Prasanga Samaharam' in *Veeravani* (II part), Kaladi, 1991, p. 319.

⁷² Personal Interview with V.S.Sharma, op.cit., Interview, 20.05.19, Time 1 pm to 2 pm.

⁷³ V.S. Sharma, *Srimath Agamananda Swamikal*, op. cit., p. XIV.

Ezhuthachan brought about by translating the Puranas into Malayalam, he said, was analogous to this. He claimed that the only requirement for entering the temple was dedication to god and that being an Avarna (someone who belongs to a social class outside of the Savarna system) is determined by one's conduct and deeds rather than by birth. He emphasised that even Sree Sankara had acknowledged his error and had kneeled before a Paraya.⁷⁴

Swami Agamananda also stressed the brotherhood of all religions in his address. He stated, "The Hindus must forget their inequalities and unite. The Hindu and the Muslim and the Christian and all other communities must come together and live as a unified society, like brothers."⁷⁵

Parayath Govinda Menon from Kalady, who heard the speech of Swami Agamananda, was filled with respect and honour for him, and gifted his land to the Swami. In April 1936, a Sri Krishna Dwaitha Ashram was started there by Swami Agamananda.⁷⁶ Later, a Sanskrit school, and a school for the Dalits was also established there. Children from all communities and backgrounds lived together there, and ate together, like one big family. Not one person who lived there was conscious about untouchability or the *Savarna-Avarna* divide.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Mathrubhumi Daily*, 1947, January 25.

⁷⁵ *Veeramani*, Vol.II, Kaladi, 1957, p. 323

⁷⁶ Swaprabhananda Swamikal, '*Agamananda Swamikal*', op.cit., p. 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

Prabuddha Keralam, published in May 1953 mentions the celebrations conducted by the Kalady Ashram. A detailed description of the birthday celebrations of Sree Sankaracharya, Ayurvedic Conferences, conferences for Dalits educational meets, woman's conferences and all religious conferences were given in detail. Along with these functions *Ottamthullal*, *Pdakam*, *Harikatha*, *Pattukacheri*, *Nadaswarakacheri* and *Kathakali* arts were performed.⁷⁸

From this, it is evident that the Dalits, people from other communities, and women were not sidelined or marginalised but rather given importance at the Kalady Sri Ramakrishna Ashram. In addition to this, the ashram gave priority and encouragement to various art forms and performances.

Under the aegis of the Ashram, special importance was given to serving the Dalits. With the responsibility of handling the rituals of the nearby Brahma Temple falling into Swami Agamananda's hands, he began to perform the ceremonies by allowing entry to hundreds of Harijans and the Avarnas. It must also be noted and appreciated that this brave act was performed much before the Temple Entry Proclamation was declared.

After a few years, a Hostel and a School for the Dalits were also established by the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram.⁷⁹ The Brahmanandodayam

⁷⁸ News Report, *Prabuddha Keralam*, Kaladi, May 1953, p. 21.

⁷⁹ V.S. Sharma, *Srimath Agamananda Swamikal*, op. cit., p. 15.

Sanskrit High School later began Sanskrit classes at the Upper Primary level too. At present, the Brahmanandodayam School has classes at the Lower Primary, Upper Primary and High School levels. In addition to these, Swami Agamananda also established the Sree Saradha Ayurveda Hospital under the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram.⁸⁰

Other Social Activities of Swami Agamananda

It was none other than Swami Agamananda who took the initiative to construct the Thannipuzha bridge that would link the village of Kaladi with the rest of the regions, thus ensuring its uplifting. Many famous personalities such as Dr. Rajendra Prasad, have been recorded as having visited the ashram. Swami Agamananda's desire to establish an institute of higher education in the birthplace of Sree Sankaracharya resulted in the formation of the Sree Sankara College. Later, the management of the college was entrusted to the Sringeri Math. The Sree Sankara Sanskrit University of Kalady, can also be traced to the efforts of Swami Agamananda.⁸¹

The May 1953 Issue of the *Prabuddha Keralam* records that a meeting was held on the afternoon of April 19 at the hall of the Brahmanandayogam Sanskrit School to discuss the establishing of a college named after Sree

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. XVI.

⁸¹ Personal Interview with Choorai Chandran, (Leftist Leader and Writer), Thalasseri, 20.04.2021, Time 4 pm to 5 pm.

Sankaracharya. Swami Agamananda was elected as the president of the college committee, with K.P. Krishna Menon, the Deputy Speaker of the Thiru - Kochi legislative assembly as the Secretary.⁸²

Swami Agamanada, while being a spiritual leader, was also a visionary who established an institute of education which catered to the needs of students from the lower Primary level right up to college.⁸³

The *Keralajanatha*, a daily wrote on the day of his demise (17 April 1961) that Swami Agamananda would be remembered by the people of Kerala not as a person who established ashrams or schools or colleges, but for his courageous role in taking a firm step in the reformation of the Kerala society.⁸⁴ In an editorial, published in *Malayala Manorama* on 18th April, the role of Swami Agamananda in nurturing a spiritual revolution in Kerala was highlighted.⁸⁵ He had been held in deepest respect by many famous and powerful personalities. The fact that even the President of India had visited him is proof of the respect that he commanded.

Swami Agamananda who had supported the Vaikom Satyagraha also provided impetus to the Temple Entry movement started in Kerala through his

⁸² Report, *Prabhuddha Keralam*, Vol.38, Alappuzha, May 1953, p. 38.

⁸³ Chembil N.B.Panikkar, *Srimath Swami Agamananda, Smaraka Prabhashanam 1998*, Kaladi April, 1998, p.13.

⁸⁴ *Kerala Janatha Daily*, Thiruvananthapuram, April 18, 1961.

⁸⁵ *Malayala Manorama Daily*, April 18, 1961.

speeches. He had also closely worked with Gandhi in the frontlines in the Satyagraha movement.⁸⁶

While he was at Ottapalam, as per the request of Swami Sekharananda who oversaw the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Koylandi, he gave numerous speeches in the regions of North-Malabar, especially in Kannur, Thalassery, Vada-kara, and Nadapuram. Acceding to the wishes of the people of Dharmadham in Thalassery, he instructed that a Ramakrishna Ashram be built there.⁸⁷

Works of Swami Agamananda

Swami Agamananda, who was fluent in Malayalam, English and Sanskrit, was a writer as well. He wrote plenty of articles in newspapers and in magazines. In 1924, he published the *Bharatanidhi* magazine.⁸⁸ In 1930, he published the *Purana Sancika*.⁸⁹ Under his leadership, the *Amrithavani* and later, the *Prabuddha Keralam* was also brought out. In addition to this, he published numerous books in Sanskrit and in Malayalam. *Swami Sree Narayana Guru, Veeramani, Dharma* (in Sanskrit), *Brahma Nandiyam,*

⁸⁶ Chembil N.B. Panikker, op.cit., p. 18.

⁸⁷ News Report in *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 1956, 23.12.56, p.168.

⁸⁸ Swami Mridananda "Sree Agamananda Swamikal in Swami Ganananda (ed) *Veeravani* Vol.I Kalady. 1991, p. XVII.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. XXVIII.

Aparaka Sanubhuti, and *Aparam Kananabhooti Vyakhyanam* are some of the notable works among them.

The Indian perspective and outlook regarding the Renaissance was that it was a Spiritual Renaissance. The true concept of the Renaissance meant liberty from suffering, for all.

He provided the training and sanction for the *Avarnas* in conducting pujas. He built schools and hostels to provide education for all. Thus, he led the way in the fight against casteism. Vavakuttan Master was one such person who became the pujari at a temple after being trained in the rituals by Swami Agamananda, though he was an Avarna. The fundamentalists and religious conservationists waved boards declaring “No Entry for Avarna and Agamananda”, and even tried to physically assault Swami Agamananda.⁹⁰

As a spiritual leader and guide, and as an outstanding activist in the fields of social service, education, and culture, he tried to instruct the social service organizations, the political parties, and spiritual movements on the things they needed to carry out to serve the people. The sad reality was that modern Kerala not only ignored or undervalued his efforts or warnings but attempted to silence and invalidate his comments.⁹¹

⁹⁰ M.V.Nadeshan, 'Agamananda Swamikal Kerala Navodhanathinde Margadharsi', In *Sathsanga Sukrudham*, (Mal.) Mavelikkara, 2021 July, p.77.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.77.

Modern Interpreters of Traditional Wisdom

a) Swami Ranganathananda

After Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ranganathananda stands at the forefront of those who had propagated the teachings of the Vedanta across the world and had persuaded scholars and men of learning to acknowledge its contemporary relevance by logically and scientifically interpreting and narrating the Vedanta. His original name was Sankaran, and was born on 15 December 1908 at Trikkur village near Palakkad in Kerala. In 1926, at the age of 18, he abandoned his formal education and joined the Ramakrishna Ashram in Mysore as an inmate.⁹²

For Swami Ranganathananda, fought tooth and nail against the caste system and Brahmin ascendancy in Mysore. When these Brahmins entered the Ashram, they would ask the inmates there to leave, saying that they were Parayas. This is recollected by D. Vijayamohan in his biography of the Swami under the title *Swami Ranganathananda*.⁹³

The responsibility of publishing and circulating the *Vedanta Kesari*, the magazine of the Ramakrishna Mission, was handed over to Swami Ranganathananda. In September 1998, in Calcutta, he was elected as the

⁹² Personal Interview with Pravajika Radha Prana Mathaji, President, Sree Saradha Math, Kozhikode, Date 16.03.2020, 5 pm to 6.30 pm.

⁹³ Vijaya Mohan, *Swami Ranganandhananda*, Kozhikode, 2016, p.37.

president of the association of all the Ramakrishna Missions and Ashrams. Outstanding men of science from the branches of Physics and Biology like EC George Sudarshan listened to his speeches and talks. His philosophy of Advaita (non-dualism) attracted many listeners. One of the few Sanyasis that the followers of material philosophy and communist philosophers actively interacted, discussed, and admired was Swami Ranganathananda.⁹⁴

Swami Ranganathananda, was the president of the Ramakrishna Math when he died in Kolkata at the age of 97. He is remembered in his home state as one of the foremost modern exponents of the Vedanta.⁹⁵

In the post-Vivekananda era, he took Advaita Vedanta to great heights. The Swami had no formal Education, but he became the greatest scholar of our time. He was India's foremost cultural ambassador. Through his writings and lectures, the West came to know about the spirit of ancient Indian saints. The Malayalam critic Sukumar Azhikode once stated that, "His exposition of the Upanishads has no parallel".⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Personal Interview with M.G.S Narayanan, Date: 23.12.2018, op. cit.

⁹⁵ *The Hindu News Paper*, 26.04.2005.

⁹⁶ *Deshabhimani News Paper*, 26.05.2005.

He travelled far and wide from 1946 to 1972. He was a great orator. He had refused many awards in his personal name saying "I am a Sanyasin. My work is my life, no award or reward for me".⁹⁷

Swami Ranganathananda described his international travels in detail in the *Prabuddha Keralam*. It was customary for him to travel abroad each year and deliver speeches and talks on spiritual life and the Vedanta.⁹⁸ He also regularly attended seminars and conferences and other similar events, giving talks at places such as Berlin, Belgium, and Australia. The *Prabuddha Keralam*, in 1983, also highlighted reports that he had delivered two talks at the Humboldt University of Berlin, which was under Communist occupation at the time, following their request.⁹⁹

In the *Prabuddha Keralam*, Swami Ranganathananda wrote about the activities of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, and the universal approach of the organization. He stated,

Never does the Ramakrishna Mission promote religious conversion. This is not the appropriate organisation for such a task. It solely strives for a logical and rational viewpoint based

⁹⁷ New Report, *Prabuddha Keralam*, Trichur, Vol.8, 1983, p. 360.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

on Vedanta philosophy. As a result, it is dedicated to improving the lives of Muslims, Christians, and Hindus alike.¹⁰⁰

Swami Ranganathananda also holds the distinction of being the only Malayali to hold the post of the president of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

He was a born orator. His talks on prophet Mohamed and Jesus Christ, if read once, would help us to abolish the deterioration of values, the conflicts between religions and castes, the loss of peace and war of sword or word.¹⁰¹ His books are an eternal asset to humanity. He was awarded many a recognition, but he refused all. Towards the end of his life, he very hesitatingly accepted the Indira Priyadarshini Award and the Gandhi Peace Award and the Birla Award in the name of Mission. He was India's spiritual ambassador, its modern Vivekananda, and Kerala's noble gift to the spiritual world. He realized that there is no contradiction between science and spirituality.¹⁰² He lived for what he preached. His relationship with the working force of India and trade union movement, his synthesis of science and spirituality, his idea of *Manavaseva Madhavaseva*, his commitment to the upliftment of millions of downtrodden will always be remembered if the human race exists. He was so

¹⁰⁰ Sri Ranganatha Swamikal, 'Ramakrishna Mission', In *Prabhuddha Keralam Lakkam* 5, Volume 82, Trichur, 1997, May, p.187.

¹⁰¹ A Tribute by Ravi Anthikad (Joint Secretary, Ragananthanatha Centre, Trichur, Published in the Evening daily '*General*', Trichur, 2005.

¹⁰² *Malayala Manorama Daily*, 26.04.2005.

possessed with the problems of India like Swami Vivekananda. He was not only a *Karmayogi* but a *Purnayogi*.

With his blessings, a charitable organization, the Swami Ranganathananda Spiritual, Cultural, Educational, and Social Centre Regd. No. R. 658/03 has started to function in Trichur. It is destined to establish a universal *Veda Padasala*, collection of the Swami's Literature and writing, a spiritual library, and a research center to honour both the great father Trikkur Neelakanda Sastrigal and his great son Swami Ranganathananda.¹⁰³

The first Malayalee president of Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Ranganathananda, expired on 25th April 2005, 3.51 PM in a private hospital at Calcutta.¹⁰⁴ The then President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in the condolence message said, "with simplicity as watchword, he spread the vedic message all over the world. He is a great spiritual leader". The Vice President of India, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat told "Swamiji's contribution in every field of human activity and for the upliftment of the downtrodden and poor, for protection environment, spiritual progress, etc., will be ever remembered".¹⁰⁵ In the message to the Lok Sabha, the Speaker Somnath

¹⁰³ Ravi Anthikkade, op.cit.

¹⁰⁴ *Mathrubhumi Daily*, 26.04.2005.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Chatterji praised Swamiji, referring to his service said "for the hopeless, illiterate, poor of the millions living in abject poverty".¹⁰⁶

Swami Satyalokananda, who was involved in the Left Movement in Japan before he became a sanyasi, was astonished at the perspective of Swami Ranganathananda. "We need the basic principles of Communism and Socialism, otherwise how will there be development in the poorer nations? How will there be equality? How will there be progress?", Swami Ranganathananda used to ask.¹⁰⁷ In the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Ranganathananda is regarded as the guru who displayed the foremost progressive thinking.

Swami Tyagishananda

Swami Tyagishananda was also a prominent figure and a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, who founded a centre of Ramakrishna Mission at Trichur.¹⁰⁸ Swami Tyagishananda's intention was to give a practical meaning to Swami Vivekananda's plan of uplifting the Dalits. During the time of the Great Flood of 1924, the Ramakrishna Mission Centre at Trichur came forward to help the victims.¹⁰⁹ Swami Tyagishananda was the then Headmaster of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Vijaya Mohan, *Swami Ranganadhananda*, op.cit., p.146.

¹⁰⁸ N. Lakshmikutty, op.cit., p. 198.

¹⁰⁹ A Short Report 1996-97 and 1997-98 Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math Puranattukara, Trichur, p. 2.

Vivekodayam High school Trichur, associated himself with the work of the Mission. He worked for the upliftment of Dalits; he started living with the Harijan girls and boys. They were fed, clothed, maintained, and educated by the Swami. The Purnattukara Ashram, maintained a hostel for the Dalit boys. It was affiliated to the Belur Math in 1929. Now it has developed great educational complex.¹¹⁰ The activities and the service of Swami Tyagishananda in Kerala is noteworthy.

Swami Vishadananda (1905-1985) was one of the foremost monastic disciples of Swami Nirmalananda. He was the President of the Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama Ottapalam for nearly half a century from 1942 to 1985. He was the Secretary of the Swami Nirmalananda Temple Committee, he was mainly instrumental in building the beautiful temple consecrated to the worship of Swami Nirmalananda who awakened Kerala with the message of his great master, Sri Ramakrishna.¹¹¹ He published the book *Swami Nirmalananda. His Life and Teachings* He was the founder chief editor of *Tulasee Sugandham*, the monthly journal in Malayalam.¹¹² In 1943-44, the whole of Valluvanad Taluk of South Malabar was affected by the epidemic cholera. Swami Vishadhananda and his followers came to the forefront to help

¹¹⁰ Personal Interview with *Swami Dheerananda*, op. cit.

¹¹¹ Thulasee Theerthan, *He lived in Sri Ramakrishna: A Short Life of Swami Vishadananda*, op. cit., 2001, p. 27.

¹¹² Ibid.

the victims of the epidemic. Each day, it was said Swami Vishadananda and the other inmates of Ramakrishna Ashrama, supplied bottles of medicine and bags of rice and prepared food for the patients and the attendant.¹¹³

They travelled on foot across the fields and along the narrow lanes in villages. So, the progress was slow, but they would return to the Ashrama only when the entire lot of medicine carried each day was given to the patients.¹¹⁴ Hundreds of patients were thus saved from death and the people viewed these band of sannyasis as messengers of God.¹¹⁵

Under his initiative an Ashrama for women, Sri Sarada Ashrama was also constructed at Ottapalam. It was a novel and revolutionary step. So naturally it had both opponents and supporters. He got support from people living in the locality. Among the staunch supporters were Sri. P. Seshadri Iyer and Sri. K. Narayanan Namboothiri who were held in high esteem by the devotees, in general.¹¹⁶ It is of some historical importance to note here that the Saradha Ashrama started by Swami Vishadananda in 1953 was the first Ashrama for

¹¹³ Personal Interview with Swami Dheerananda, op.cit.

¹¹⁴ Personal Interview with C.Sreekumar, Former Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, Kozhikode, 24.12.2018 11 am to 11.30 am.

¹¹⁵ Personal Interview with Swami Swaprabhananda, Belur Math, Calcutta, 21.11.2018. 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm.

¹¹⁶ Personal Interview with Swami Kyvalyananda, Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama, Ottapalam, 25.12.2017, time 2 pm to 3 pm.

women established in the name of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. He published many books in English and Malayalam.

Swami Vishadananda after completing the work of the temple at Ottapalam went to the mission centre at Trivandrum and took initiative to build up the Ayurvedic and Allopathic dispensaries as an important service activity of the Ashrama. Today, the old Narendra Mission allopathic dispensary has grown into a prestigious modern Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, well-staffed and well-equipped to serve many patients.¹¹⁷

Swami Nirmalalanda established Sanadanapatasala for girls and Niranjana Padasala for boys as schools for the neighborhood's underprivileged and illiterate children.¹¹⁸ There were free schools in the sense that the students had to pay no fee and the teachers volunteered to teach the children free. It was free service offered as worship to God. But according to the rules of the State Government, schools without making proper payment to its teachers are not allowed to function. The alternative was to file false papers before the Government for getting the grant-in-aid. Swami Vishalananda refused to compromise with government order even when it meant closing down the school started by Swami Nirmalananda.¹¹⁹ His life perhaps had a Gandhian

¹¹⁷ Personal Interview with Swami Sampornanda, Thiruvananthapuram, op.cit., 20.02.2020, 11 Am to 12 pm.

¹¹⁸ Personal Interview with P. Achuthan, op.cit., 26.12.2014.

¹¹⁹ Personal Interview with Somanath Datta, Great grandson of Swami Nirmalananda, Howrah, West Bengal, 22.11.2018.9 am to 9.30 am.

beginning marked by limited wants, hard work, honest dealings and self-reliance - virtues which stood him in good stead as a sanyasi in later years.¹²⁰ He worked for a social cause by the volunteer captain in the Vaikom Satyagraha, the leader of the epidemic relief work. The builder of the Swami Nirmalananda Temple, the publisher of Swami Nirmalananda's Life and Teachings and was the spiritual guide to large number of seekers and had blessed them with *mantra deeksha* as well as *sanyasa deeksha*.

Monks like Thapasyananda Swamikal and Eshwarandna Swamikal also occupies a prominent place in spreading the ideas of Ramakrishna Paramahansa in Kerala. Swami Thapasyananda became the President of Thiruvananthapuram Ashram in 1938, earlier it was a small dispensary. Under his guidance it became a well-equipped hospital which contributes a lot to the health of the locality.

Due to Swami Eshwarananda's influence a lot of young people joined in the Ramakrishna Mission and did philanthropic works as initiated by their Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.¹²¹

As cited earlier, Swami Nirmalananda and others not only redefined Hindu religion but also carried out social reforms the rejuvenation of the

¹²⁰ Tulasee Theerthan, *He lived in Sree Ramakrishna*, op.cit., p. 90.

¹²¹ Thathwamayanandha Swami "Sree Ramakrishna Vivekananda Prasthanam Keralathil" Article in *Prabuddha Keralam 1997*, December, pp. 466-467.

society. Their activities were not aimed at advancing any particular caste group or community. Motivated by a rarified humanism, they propagated their views and principles, based on the understanding of *Manavaseva* as *Madhavaseva* (You serve God when God serve humanity). The institutions that they started were designed to further their reform agenda.

CHAPTER 4

ACTIVITIES OF THE RAMA KRISHNA MISSION IN KERALA

One example of a contemporary religious movement is the Ramakrishna movement, which originated in India in the 19th century and is still represented by numerous schools, hospitals, publishing houses, and the Mission today. Sri Ramakrishna's personality, the relationship towards his disciples, service orientation, made this movement unique in every sense. When the Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897, his aim was to train the monks for the twin ideals of self-realization and service to the world.¹ S. Radhakrishnan, the philosopher statesman, wrote “under the inspiration of this great teacher (Sri Ramakrishna) there has been a powerful revival of social compassion. Education and Medical work are done throughout the country. He has helped to raise from the dust, the fallen standard of Hinduism, not in words, but in works also”.² No doubt it had silently brought about a revolution in Indian society. Federico Major, Director General of UNESCO remarked in October, 1993, "I am indeed struck by the similarity of the constitution of the

¹ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (From April 2015 to March 2016, April 2017, Belur Math, West Bengal, p. 2.

² Haridas Bhattacharya, *Introduction to the Cultural Heritage of India*, Vo.I, Calcutta. 1975, p. XXXVI.

Ramakrishna Mission which Vivekananda established in 1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1946".³

Ramakrishna Mission serves people irrespective of their religion, political affiliation, language, gender etc. The concern for the poor and the destitute is noteworthy to make them self-reliant and to eliminate discrimination among different sections of society, as stated above.⁴ When men are under stress brought on by natural disasters or human follies, they now generally respond positively across barriers of religious membership and political conviction.

The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission published in July 2021 gives a detailed account of new centre and sub centres.⁵ At present they have nearly 200 centres all over the world and it gives importance to the development of all human beings irrespective of caste and creed. During his travel throughout India, Swami Vivekananda delivered from Madras "To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They went to reform only a little bit. I want root and branch reform. I do not believe in reform. I believe in growth"⁶.

³ *Prabhuddha Bharatha*, Journal, Belur Math, Calcutta, 1994, p. 21.

⁴ Personal Interview with Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belurmath, West Bengal 24.11.2018 Time 11 am to 1 pm.

⁵ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission from April 2019 to March 2020, Belur Math, West Bengal, July 2021, p.30.

⁶ Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, Calcutta, 1957, p. 115.

With the growth and the expansion of the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, they had to face both challenges and opportunities. Through the adherence of its members to the ideal, the organisation overcame these obstacles and attempted to take advantage of these opportunities.⁷

The major activities of the Math and Mission in India are mentioned in a nutshell in the following table.

Summary of the Activities of the Math and Mission in India

The major activities of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission are indicated in a nutshell in the following table:

| Nature of Activities | Number of Institutions/Types of Services | | Number of Beneficiaries | | Amount spent in Rs.(crore) |
|---|--|-----|-------------------------|---------|----------------------------|
| | | | | | |
| Educational work in Rural and urban Areas | Schools, Colleges, Hostels, etc, | 437 | Students | 3,0,831 | 308.03 |
| | Non-formal education centres, Night schools, Coaching classes, etc | 763 | Students | 85.790 | |
| Rural Development Activities | Agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy, soil testing, improved sanitation programmes, solar energy promotion | | About 88.09 lakh | | 60.65 |

⁷ Swami Prabhananda, 'An overview of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission' in Swami Atma Priyananda (ed). *Ramakrishna Mission Foundation Day, Commemoration Vol.1*, Belur Math, West Bengal, May 2010, p. 27.

| Nature of Activities | Number of Institutions/Types of Services | | Number of Beneficiaries | | Amount spent in Rs.(crore) |
|---|--|-----|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| | programmes, various training programmes, afforestation, cultural activities, seminars, workshops, etc. | | | | |
| Medical Services in Rural and Urban Areas | Hospitals | 14 | Inpatients | 1,32,156 | 214.85 |
| | | | Outpatients | 33,49,664 | |
| | Dispensaries | 116 | Outpatients | 43,03,569 | |
| | Mobile Medical Units | 57 | Outpatients | 12,02,616 | |
| | Medical Camps | 887 | Outpatients | 2,13,657 | |
| | Nurse Training Centres | 7 | Trainees | 763 | |
| | | 2 | Students | 187 | |
| | Medical Research Institutes | 2 | Students | 197 | |
| | Paramedical Training Institutes | 3 | Inmates | 88 | |
| | Old Age Homes | | | | |
| Relief and Rehabilitation | ----- | | About 7.28 lakh | | 36.78 |
| Welfare Activities | Scholarships, stipends, medical aid and pecuniary help to poor and needy students and others | | About 49.27 lakh | | 21.76 |
| Publication | 169 new titles and 1,904 reprints of books were brought out; | | | 23.37 ⁸ | |

⁸ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Mission from April 2015 to March 2016. Belur Math West Bengal, April 2017, pp. 24-25.

| Nature of Activities | Number of Institutions/Types of Services | Number of Beneficiaries | Amount spent in Rs.(crore) |
|---|---|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| | 25 journals in 14 languages had 4.29 lakh subscribers | | |
| Other Activities | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27,608 lectures/classes/retreats/meetings conducted for spreading moral, cultural and spiritual thoughts were attended by 34.26 lakh people. • 790 films on values education screened by 14 Audio-visual units in 543 villages and 290 schools/colleges, were watched by 1.75 lakh people • 1.184 Values Education Programmes were organized in which 1.38 lakh people participated. • 967 Cultural Camps like Personality Development Camps, Children camps etc. organized during the year were attended by 1.53 lakh people. • The number of Cultural Centres (Balak Sangha etc.) was 264; 31,001 people participated in various programmes conducted by them. • 379 Workhops, Symposiums and Seminars on various subjects in medical, educational and other general fields were organized; 78, 740 delegates participated. • There were 241 libraries containing 29,42,914 books and 12,831 newspapers and periodicals. The number of readers was 18.52 lakh. ⁹ | | | |

Activities of Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala

As mentioned in the second chapter it was the visit of Swami Vivekananda to Kerala in 1892 and his comment on caste ridden Kerala as a lunatic asylum¹⁰ which roused widespread interest within the state in the activities of Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Nirmalananda, one of the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who arrived in Kerala on 15th February 1911

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Swami Vivekananda, Lectures from Colombo to Almora, Calcutta, 1992, p. 224.

at Haripad impressed the audience through his eloquent addresses, gave to the members of the Association, valuable advice and direction regarding their programme of activities for the future.¹¹ The Ramakrishna Ashramas started by Swami Nirmalananda, and the other Ashramas established after him played a significant role in transforming the Kerala society and inspired many educated youth to come forward and devote their life to the service of mankind.¹² Activities of the Ramakrishna Mission includes, educational, activities, medical services, youth welfare programmes, relief works, women welfare programmes rural welfare programmes rural development programs etc.¹³

Educational Activities

One of the fundamental characteristics of the Ramakrishna Mission institutions is imparting education which infact forms the very back bone of these institutions. The activities of the mission in Kerala are noted for the emphasis it put on the promotion of indigenious culture through the propagation of Sanskrit and on the education of the tribals.¹⁴

¹¹ Tulasee Theerthan, Swami Nirmalananda, His life and Mission. Sree Ramakrishna Ashram, Kayamkulam, 1997, p. 49.

¹² Rajeev Iringalakuda, *Sreeramakrishna Prasthanam Keralathil* (Mal.), Calicut, 2004, p.15.

¹³ Personal Interview with Swami Sampoorananda former secretary, Ramakrishna Ashram, Sastha Mangalam, Thiruvananthapuram, Date 27.02.2020, Time 10 am to 11 am.

¹⁴ Personal Interview with Swami Swaprabhanandha, Belur Math, Calcutta, on 22.11.2018, 10 am to 11.30 am.

Almost all centres throughout the country are giving great concern for educational activities by providing free school dress, books, copy books, school bags, sheet educational kits etc. to the beginners up to class IV stand. Educational institutions started by Ramakrishna Mission emphasises on basic education, educational tour and excursion, health care, and taking doctors' advice and providing daily nutritious tiffin.¹⁵

Ramakrishna Mission and the Growth of Sanskrit Education

Swami Vivekananda's aim in educating the masses was to bring the great spiritual. Ideas, the gems stored in our ancient books, within the reach of the ordinary person including the fisherman, the Pariah, and the Chandala. To him "These conceptions of the Vendanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the 'pulpit' and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fisherman who are catching fish and with the students that are studying".¹⁶

However, during his wandering days, it was in Kerala, that Swami Vivekananda found to his great surprise, women conversing fluently in Sanskrit¹⁷. The missions work in the spread of Sanskrit education has been very scanty, compared to its work in other educational spheres, language and

¹⁵ Information and activity report 2017-2018. Ramakrishna Math, Barangar, Kolkata, p.30.

¹⁶ Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.3, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama 1963, p. 245.

¹⁷ Swami Atmapriyananda, 'Ramakrishna Mission in the Field of Education' in Swami Atmapriyananda (ed) Foundation Day Commemoration Vol.1. op.cit., p. 295.

communication skills are areas to which enough attention has not been paid in a systematic way.¹⁸ The growth of hi-tech tech devices like computers, the internet, and so on might have had an impact on the educational field also. However, some work in imparting Sanskrit education is being done in Pala and Kalady both in Kerala. No better place could be imagined for this work than Kerala, the birthplace of the great Bhashyakara, Sri Shakaracharya.¹⁹

Swami Nirmalananda had started a free primary school called "Sree Niranjana Padasala for the spread of Education among the poor children of Ottapalam. Even now the administrators of Niranjana Ashram Ottapalam are maintaining it. They are getting financial aid from the devotees and some rich persons of the locality for running his school.²⁰

In this context it must be mentioned that retired Professors and other Eminent teachers are providing free Sanskrit classes to the children living near the Niranjana Ashram Ottappalam.²¹ Niranjana Ashram also supplies study materials and books to poor children.²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Annual Report issued by Vishadananda, The Secretary of the Swami Nirmalananda Temple, Sree Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama, Ottapalam, Palakkad, 25th December 1939, p.33.

²¹ Personal Interview with Swami Dheerananda, President, Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama, Ottapalam. Date 24.12.2018. Time: 11 am to 12.30.

²² 10th General Report of the Ramakrishna Mission, Niranjana Ashramam, Ottapalam, December 1938-1939, p.14.

The Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama which is located in Kozhikode district runs a higher secondary school, a high school and a Lower primary school. The centre also runs a students hostel, and this hostel is meant for students studying from V to XII in their school and college students studying in different colleges. Ashrama supported 40 destitute boys in the hostel, morning and evening prayers and Gita classes are conducted for their moral and spiritual development, outdoor games also are provided for them.²³

Important Schools Established by Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala

1. S.R.K. Ashrama Pulaya school Haripad, under Swami Chitsokhananda of the Haripad Ashrama began to take keen interest in the education of the depressed classes of the locality and as the pulayas were not give admission in those days in all Government schools, a primary school was opened under the auspices of the Ashrama and it gained Government recognition very soon. The children were given lessons from the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha and also lesson from the life of Hindu culture.²⁴
2. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, U.P. School Pulinkunnu: - The school was started by the Vaisya Samajam and in 1934 was handed over to the

²³ Annual Report April 2008 to March 2009, Ramakrishna Mission, Sevashram, Kozhikode, p. 6.

²⁴ Report of the Sree Ramakrishna Movement in South India, Prabadha Keralam Office, Trivandrum, 1939, p.45

Ashrama authorities. This school was rapidly growing in strength and serving a very useful purpose in that locality.²⁵

3. Vidhyapitham at Vaipur, Kulathur:- In 1932, a Harijan school was started by the Ashrama for the benefit of the depressed class students of Vaipur and the adjacent villages on a beautiful site gifted by Krishna Panikkar, a local land owner. The high-class Hindus were very sympathetic and as a result, a spacious building 80 feet long and 20 feet broad was soon constructed. The government gave recognition and grant.
4. A weaving school was started at Kulathur in March 1935. At present the poor people of the locality are making good use of the institution.
5. High school at Kulathur is being run for the Benefit of the old and illiterate Dalit Students.
6. Library and Reading room at Kulathur which started in 1932 rendered valuable service to the people living in that locality. It became so popular that people from all communities and all walks of life started frequenting it.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

7. The mission also started Sunday religious classes at Kulathur, Vaipur, Murani, Ezhumatoor and Pirayur.²⁷
8. The school for Dalit at Nettayam was another important initiative taken by the Ramakrishna Mission in the field of Education. At Nettayam a free day school has been going on for the poor, Dalit children in the locality.²⁸
9. Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kozhikode: The mission runs a Higher Secondary School, a high school and a lower primary school. The student hostel is meant for students staying from class V to XII. In this school and college students study in different colleges. For repair and renovation works etc., they are getting duration from devotees, well-wishers, banks especially state bank of India etc.²⁹

Koyilandy Sri Ramakrishna Math:- Conducts summer classes, camps for poor students of the neighbouring areas. The authorities also organises study tours for the students and provides study materials, dress and other essential things like soap, brush, paste freely.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁹ Annual Report, April 2008 to March 2009, Kozhikode op.cit., p. 33.

³⁰ Rahul Raj, A Student of Sree Ramakrishna Ashram, School Koyilandy has written a Report on the Swami Sadbhavananda (ed), Foundation Day Commemoration Magazine *Sadapushpam* Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy, 2015, p. 56.

10. Sanskrit School at Kalady was started by Swami Agamananda in 1936. His main intention was to admit more student from the downtrodden communities.³¹ Swami Agamananda started a Gurukula at Kalady in the same year and in 1940 started a hostel for Dalith students considering the lack of facilities to the lower-class students.³²

Agamanandas' intention was to raise the students from the lower strata of society to obtain high position in government service and in other spheres. By the encouragement of Agamananda a poor Dalit student *Kuttappan* became Kuttappan IAS. He is the first civil service holder among the (Dalit Student) downtrodden in Kerala.³³ All these activities and services are considered as the best example for the importance given to education by the mission and the followers of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Another initiative taken by Swami Agamananda in the field of education was the starting of Sree Sankara College, later the college was undertaken by the Sringeri Ashram in 1960.³⁴

³¹ C.A. Anas and S. Jayesh, Kaladi Vinjaneyam in *Periyar*, Sree Sankaracharya University Magazine 2003, p.70.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jayesh P.S, 'Swami' Agananda, The prophet of Justice Equality and Liberty' in Dr. Gopakumar (Edited) *Faces of Social Reform in Kerala* Thiruvananthapuram. 2015, p. 229.

The industrial section at Kalady, closed in 1953, was revived in 1956 to impart craft instruction to the school students.³⁵

The general report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (May 2015) issued by Belur Math, Calcutta, gives details of the outstanding performance of students of Kalady schools. Kalady centre in Kerala. Out of 162 students 95% students secured 75% and above marks.³⁶

Some centres for example, Kalady centre started a hostel for tribal students which is running on the Gurukula style, with emphasis on character development, religious instruction, national unity and integration has been in the direction of assimilating the tribal youth into the main stream of national life.³⁷ At present the Kalady Ashrama has grown into a very huge institution having many departments under its control like, a publication division, schools, hostels, Sri Ramakrishna Viswakshetra and a social education library with a large collection of books. Now it has been turned to be the centre of Sanskrit University.³⁸ The Kalady Ashram runs higher secondary school with 493 boys and 344 girls. A Sanskrit upper primary school with 244 boys and 149 girls. A Junior basic school with 137 boys and 96 girls.³⁹ The one important feature

³⁵ Swami Gambhirananda, History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, op.cit., pp. 421-422.

³⁶ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (May 2015) Kelur Math, West Bengal, p.18.

³⁷ Personal Interview with Swami Swaprabhananda Belur Math, Calcutta, 25.11.2018 3 pm to 4pm.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Rama Krishna Mission (May 2015) Belur Math, West Bengal, p. 18.

of the school is that it has a substantial percentage of non-Hindu students both boys and girls who willingly opted to study Sanskrit.⁴⁰ The students there follow a very rigorous discipline and are given training in agriculture and farm management. The Ashrama started a new hostel for the scheduled tribe and caste boys. Government of India came forward with the required grant-in-aid for the hostel, playground, and other facilities.⁴¹

The services rendered by the Kalady Ashrama and its monastic members were duly appreciated and encouraged by the public at large and also by the state government.⁴²

The Ramakrishna Mission Sevasrama, Kozhikode

Its educational activities include, as per the General Report published by Belur Math for the year 2015;

1. A higher secondary school with 1526 boys and 1415 girls.
2. A primary school with 388 boys and 379 girls. The students were also trained in the basic of computer operations.
3. A library with 2300 books and 2 periodicals and newspapers.

⁴⁰ Sri M.N. Nair, 'Ashrama in Retrospect' in '*Samarpanam*' Sri Ramakrishna Advita Ashrama, Kalady, 1976, p. 35.

⁴¹ Personal Interview with Swami Nandalmtananda, 12.02.2022, President, Ramakrishna Ashram, Pranattukara, Trichur, 11.30 am to 12.30pm.

⁴² M.N.Nair, op.cit., p. 35.

4. Moral and cultural classes with 100 children on Sundays.⁴³

The Ramakrishna Math Cochin (Kerala) organises a free coaching centre with 15 poor students. It also conducts regular workshops, weekly religious classes, and occasional lectures.⁴⁴

The Ramakrishna Math, Palai runs a Sanskrit college with a good library with 4252 books and organises Sanskrit Classes with 53 students are held on every weekend, and it started a student's home also.⁴⁵

The Ramakrishna Math Quilandy which was started in 1915 has a very good library with 300 books. The Math organises personality development camps, youth camps and study circles doing welfare work by providing textbooks, scholarships etc., to the poor students and pecuniary and to the needy.⁴⁶

The Ramakrishna Ashrama Thiruvananthapuram, this was started at Nettayam in 1916. The focus of activity was shifted to Sasthamangalam. The centre has a residential school of nursing for general nursing cum midwifery

⁴³ The General Report 2015, Belur Math West Bengal, 2015, p.91.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.108.

⁴⁶ Personal Interview with Swami Sundaranada, Secretary, Ramakrishna Math, Koyilandy, Kozhikode, Date: 10.05.2019. Time 10 am to 11.30 am.

training. This centre also provides schools uniforms, textbooks, for the poor children of the locality.⁴⁷

Sarada school of nursing conducted youth value education programmes during the year 2015-2017. Classes on National integration, personality development, religious tolerance and enlightened citizenship were among the subjects dealt with monthly classes for youth is conducted in Sasthamangalam under Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence and National integration.⁴⁸ Regular classes were conducted three times a week at the Keezharoor, Vavod, Poovachal. Cheriakonni, Oonnampara and Nettayam centres. The children were from very low-income group families and were given light refreshments and relevant books. Besides several cultural programmes were also conducted for the children.⁴⁹

Ramakrishna Math, Trichur is situated in Puranattukara, about 8 km from the Trichur railway station. In 1924 when Kerala was seriously affected by flood, the Ramakrishna Mission came forward offering relief to the victims,⁵⁰ The late Swami Tyagishananda the then headmaster of the

⁴⁷ Personal Interview with Swami Sampoorndha, Former Secretary, Ramakrishna Ashram, Sastha Mangalam, Thiruvananthapuram, 26.02.2020, 2 pm to 3 pm.

⁴⁸ Annual Report 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Charitable hospital, Sasthamangalam, Tiruvananthapuram, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Personal Interview with Swami Yogavrathanantha, Nettayam Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram, 27.02.2020. 2 pm to 3 pm.

⁵⁰ Swami Sidhinananda 'A Brief History of the Ramakrishna Math, Trichur', in Aradhana', Diamond Jubilee Souvenir-1, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Trichur, 1985, p.18.

Vivekodayam High school Trichur, associated himself with this work of the Mission. He was greatly inspired by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi⁵¹ continued to work for the upliftment of local Dalits. A small Ashram together with a hostel for Dalit boys and girls was formed on 30th May 1927. It was affiliated to the Belur Math in 1929.⁵² The Math is running a higher secondary school. A primary school, a library attached to the school contains 12,550 books. Hostel includes a child welfare centre, a publication department, and a press.⁵³ The centre publishes *Prabhuddha Keralam* a Malayalam monthly with more than 800 subscribers. The centre also provides scholarships and other educational help to orphans and poor students.⁵⁴ Trichur centre launched a mobile book stall in the year 2011-12.⁵⁵

Agamananda Swamy established a unit of Ramakrishna Mission at Chirakuni in Dharmadam, Thalasseri in 1927. A basic school was started under the auspices of the Ashrama.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Personal Interview with Swami Bhuvanadmananda, Sree Ramakrishna Math, Koilandy, Kozhikode, 18.04.2015, 10 am to 11 am.

⁵⁴ Personal Interview with Veethasprihananda Swamikal, Nettayam Ramakrishna Ashram, Thiruvananthapuram, 28.09.2019. 10.30 to 11.45.

⁵⁵ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, West Bengal, May 2015, p. 196.

⁵⁶ Aneesh M.C, Thirichu Varumo Dharmadathe aa Vivekananda Sanghan (Mal.) in *Jnanaprabha Smaranika*, Thalassery, May 2018, p. 75.

Project for the Holistic Development of Under Privileged Children

The Ramakrishna Mission launched Gadadhar Abhyadaya Prakalpa's (GAP) in Oct, 2012 main the aim is the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual development of the under privileged children from urban slums and rural areas, selected through door-to-door surveys. Through 174 GAP units, more than 17,400 poor boys and girls were benefitted irrespective of their caste, need, colour, religion, language etc. A large section of children in the present-day Indian society remains caught in the vicious circle of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, superstition, unhygienic living, narrow-mindedness and the like. They are unable to break through the entry barriers to get the benefits of modernisation.⁵⁷

India's vast number of children belonging to slum and rural areas are deprived of the basic necessities of life like food, clothing, medical care and education when such children grew up, they are quite often found to be a liability to society.⁵⁸ In response to this pathetic social condition Ramakrishna Mission launched the GAP.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Personal Interview with Lokotharanatha Swami, President, Kamal Pukkur, Ramakrishna Ashrama, West Bengal, on 22.11.2018. Time: 11 am to 12 pm.

⁵⁸ Booklet, A Brochure-Cum Appeal, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, West Bengal, 5th September, 2015. pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

GAP Programme in Kerala

The GAP is a composite programme for the physical, mental intellectual and spiritual development of poor children (aged 5-12 years). It is run daily for about 3 hours in the morning or evening (about 25 days in a month).⁶⁰

- a. To serve nutritious food supplements to the targeted children.
- b. To instil moral and cultural values in them.
- c. To introduce them to a spiritual culture
- d. To provide them with coaching in their school subjects.
- c. To prepare them to be good citizens of India.
- f. To inculcate a sense of cleanliness and hygiene in them.⁶¹

In Kerala a programme was conducted in the year 2016-2017 and students up to class seven were given tonics and nutritional supplements under the guidance of pediatrician.⁶²

A special programme for poor, and deprived classes was organised by the Mission centre during the year 2016-2017 in 3 units for serving adivasis (SC) children living in the remote hilly regions of Thiruvananthapuram and Tamil Nadu border.⁶³ Thiruvananthapuram Ashram conducted youth value

⁶⁰ Annual Report, Ramakrishna Ashram, Sasthamangalam, Thiruvananthapuram, 2016-2017, p. 29.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁶³ Ibid.

education programmes during the year 2015-2017. Every year the Ashram is taking such measures for the upliftment of construction masses. Classes on national Integration, personality development, religious tolerance and enlightened citizenship were among the subjects dealt with monthly classes for youth is conducted in Sasthamangalam under Vivekananda institute of Human Excellence and National integration.⁶⁴

Kerala centres are conducting regular classes for the poor students three times a week. The children should be from very low-income group families and educational help was given to poor students by way of tuition fees, text books and school uniforms.⁶⁵ The Koyilandy Ashram Kerala provides Nitrous food supplements to the poor students of the surroundings.⁶⁶

The Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram Ottapalam also conducts periodic distribution of school bags. School uniforms study materials, e.g., textbooks, value education books, notebooks, pencils, eraser, etc.⁶⁷ The Puranattukara

⁶⁴ Personal Interview with Swami Adhishwarananda, Ramakrishna Ashram, Sastha Mangalam, Tiruvananthapuram, 23.02.2020. Time 3 pm to 4 pm.

⁶⁵ Personal Interview with Swami Yoga Vrathanantha, Ramakrishna Ashram, Sasthamangalam. Thiruvananthapuram, 27.02.2020, 2 pm to 3 pm.

⁶⁶ Personal Interview with Swami Virabhadrananda, Ramakrishna Math Koyilandy, Kozhikode, 06.05.2018, 10 am to 11.30 am.

⁶⁷ Personal Interview with Prof. S. Rajasekaran, Rtd. Professor V.T.B. College, Dept. of History, Sree Krishnapuram. 15.01.2020. 3 pm to 5 pm.

Ashram, Thrissur centre gives special academic care for drop-outs by enabling them to come to the main stream, by getting them admitted in schools.⁶⁸

The Impact of GAP

The feed backs from the parents and the guardians of the participating children point to definite positive impact not only on the children directly, but also on their families and neighbourhood. The children have become polite, punctual, obedient, accustomed to and receptive to good thought. Their health is improved due to better personal hygiene and a nutritious diet. They have understood the importance of study and have developed a studious attitude.

The overall acceptance of the project by the society has been quite encouraging and positive.⁶⁹ The GAP units for continuing their activities expecting financial assistance of service, from Liberal minded individuals and philanthropic organisations and from charitable institutions to continue this venture, and to fulfil the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission *Atmano Mokshartham Jaged hitayacha* (For one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world)⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Personal Interview with Swami Satbhavananda, Ramakrishna Ashram, Puranattukara, Trichur. 26.12.2019. 11.30 am to 12.30 pm.

⁶⁹ Personal Interview with Swami Gologananda Ramakrishna Ashram, Nettayam, Thiruvananthapuram, 26.12.2019, 11 am to 11.45 am.

⁷⁰ Booklet, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal, 2018 November, p. 5.

The works of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission which was put on a firm foundation by Swami Vivekananda have steadily grown over the years and the number of centres has multiplied. It is dedicated to Philanthropic cultural and spiritual services. The twin organization have also been ever vigilant and intensely active in rendering relief to the victims of earthquakes, during floods famines, epidemics, cyclonic riots, and such other calamities.⁷¹

Relief and Rehabilitation work

Right from 1890, when Ramakrishna Mission was founded, it has conducted extensive relief operations for the victims of natural disasters such as cyclone, flood, earthquake, and fire almost every year and man-made calamities such as riots.⁷² Various relief operations were conducted by the mission throughout the country whenever calamities occurred. Relief services are generally undertaken by the mission whenever there is any calamity of significant dimensions.

The mode of operation, undertaken by the mission so far is obvious from the words of Swami Sampurnanatha, former secretary, Ramakrishna Ashrama, Sasthamangalam, Trivandrum, During such occasions, the Mission immediately sends a team to the affected people, in consultation with

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Personal Interview with Swami Suviranadaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math. (Sharadha Bhavan), Date. 19.11.2018. 6 pm to 6.45 pm

government administration if it is found that it is necessary to start the relief work, a detailed survey is conducted and identity cards are issued to the selected beneficiaries as far as possible.

Relief materials are immediately procured and transported to the site. The relief materials are then distributed in a systematic manner with proper documentation. Usually, local volunteers are engaged for smooth and sage completion of the work.⁷³

Stages of Relief Works by the Ramakrishna Mission

(a) Primary Relief:- Ramakrishna Mission's primary relief generally starts with distribution of food materials. Dry as well as cooked, depending upon the situation. The survey is conducted for distribution of clothes, blankets, utensils and other necessities of domestic use.

Sometimes seeds and fertilizers are given as agricultural aids. Drinking water is supplied in case of draught relief and fodder is given to drought-stricken cattle; medical relief is also conducted after a calamity when there is a significant number of patients.⁷⁴ Milk and biscuits are given to children as well as expectant and lactating mothers. It should be mentioned here that non-

⁷³ Personal Interview with Swami Narasimhananda, Sasthamangalam, Thiruvananthapuram, 25.12.2019, 3 pm to 4 pm.

⁷⁴ Personal Interview with Swami Balabhadrananda, Ramkrishna Mission, Belur Math, West Bengal 20.11.2018, 3 pm to 4 pm.

monastic volunteers very often help Ramakrishna Mission Monks and novices in conducting relief operations.⁷⁵

(b) Rehabilitation: Primary relief works and rehabilitation have to depend on the availability of funds and monastic man power. Plans for the new houses are prepared by professional engineers considering local conditions. The work is conducted usually with the help of labour contractors under monastic supervision. During this time the monks and novices usually stay at a private or public building given for their use by the local people.⁷⁶ The work usually lasts for several months, sometimes it may continue for two or three years.

To involve the beneficiaries more and more in building their own houses, a 'build your own house scheme' has been adopted by the mission during the last two decades. According to this scheme the beneficiaries are required to construct their own houses as per a given design. Suited to their environment, building materials as well as the cost of unskilled labour are supplied to the beneficiaries by stages.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Personal Interview with Swami Suhithanandaji Maharaj, Belur Math, West Bengal, 21.11.2018, 2 pm to 2.30 pm.

⁷⁶ Personal Interview with Swami Prabhanandhaji Maharaj, Belur Math, West Bengal, 21.11.2018, 4.30 pm to 5.30 pm.

⁷⁷ Foundation Day Commemoration Volume 1 May 2010, Ramakrishna Mission, op.cit., p. 210.

Occasionally post-housing follow-up programmes are also taken up with the aim of integrated development of one or more selected villages. The dimensions and scope of this work too depend on the availability of time and money for such projects.⁷⁸

The noteworthy and outstanding relief works at Ramakrishna Mission are during the time of Bengal Riots in 1946 and the Refugee problem after 1947, Bangladesh problem 1971, Gujarat earthquake in 2001. The mission also contributed to the Prime Minister's National Defense Fund for helping the Kargil war victims. It also favourably considered the sons of the war martyrs for admission into its schools for time education. Yearly winter relief is also taken up by the mission when warm garments are distributed among the poor and needy in the different parts of India.⁷⁹

Major Relief and Rehabilitations Operations in Kerala

The centres of Ramakrishna Mission, throughout Kerala were engaged in relief activities during the time of flood which occurred in the year 1924. The flood was a great calamity for South India and particularly for central Travancore. When the floods set in with tragic suddenness and thousands became destitute and homeless, the inmates of Trivandrum Ashrama rendered

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 211.

⁷⁹ Personal Interview with Swami Chandrakantananda, Belur Math, Kolkatta, West Bengal, 23.11.2018, 10 am to 11 am.

a helping hand. During the six months of the work about 2,00,000 was distributed (including Rs.14,000 entrusted by the central flood relief committee, Trivandrum). Food items, building materials and financial help were provided among the affected people of Cherthala, Ambalapuzha, Karthikapalli, Changanasseri, Tiruvalla, and Pathanamthitta. The contribution made by Ramakrishna Mission is also reported in the reports of the central flood relief committee.⁸⁰

When an extraordinary south-west monsoon in August 2018 lashed parts of Karnataka and Kerala with unceasing heavy rains resulting in flooding of all the major rivers and landslides which led to loss of hundreds of lives, livestock, and property. In response to this disaster, the following centres conducted relief services, in this context it is essential to mention the services rendered by the Coimbatore Math, which distributed food items and cloths to the flood affected families in Palakkad and Malappuram districts of Kerala in the year 2019.⁸¹

During this occasion, Harippad centre distributed rice, blankets, medicines, and other requirements to the flood affected families in Harippad during August, 2019.⁸²

⁸⁰ Report of the Sree Ramakrishna Movement in South India, published from Prabuddha Keralam Office, Thiruvananthapuram, 1938, pp. 46-47.

⁸¹ News Reports: *Prabuddha Bharatha* (Awakened India) January 2019 Vol.124. (No.1) Kolkata, p. 288.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 290.

Kalady centre provided shelter and food about 1,800 people at the relief camp in the centre school for 7 days from August. The centre also supplied milk to child and rendered medical aid to patients at the camp. It distributes bed sheets, towels, mosquito coils among the flood affected families in Ernakulam. It also supplied notebooks, drawing books among students.⁸³

Kayamkulam centre and the Kochi centre of the mission helped the flood affected families on their localities with food items, medicines, clothes, and study materials.⁸⁴

Koyilandi and Kozhikode centres are also reported to have helped the flood victims with necessary items, in Kannur, Kozhikode and Wayanad districts. It is evident from the annual reports that almost all the centres of Ramakrishna mission in Kerala did an outstanding contribution during the time of flood and other natural calamities.⁸⁵

Malaria Relief Work

Malaria, an epidemic ravaged the Neyyattinkara taluk in 1935. In full coordination with the Government, more than six sanyasis worked on relief

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 290-291.

⁸⁵ A Brief Report about flood relief services in Kerala issued by the relief section Belur Math Hourah West Bengal gives the relief measures undertaken by the Kalady, Koyilandi Thiruvalla and Kozhikode centres, by supplying food items, blankets, sanitary items, cloths etc. to the victims of the national disaster, flood relief services in Kerala, A Brief Report Ramakrishna Mission, (Relief Section) Belur Math, West Bengal October 2018 pp. 1-5.

efforts for more than three months in the relief centres of Maranallur, Perumkadavila, Chempur, Kalikkad, Kottakkal, Ottassekharamangalam, and Kunnathukal when thousands perished and hundreds of children became orphans. The workers were vigilantly moving while carrying rice and medicine, visiting 7,000 homes once every ten days. They entered even the very impassable alpine regions..⁸⁶

In this connection the Durbar physician the Deputy of Government for the control of the diseases, has made appreciative reference about the great unstinted and selfless services rendered by the Ramakrishna Brothers for the relief of the suffering poor.⁸⁷

The mission rushed into relief services to its fullest capacity whenever and whenever it was warranted. The trend continues. Recently the mission stopped into a massive relief and rehabilitation programme. During the time of Tsunami, which occurred on 26 December 2004, within a few hours of the disaster, the monks of the mission, along with the volunteers swiftly moved relief items to the victims of the worst hit areas, The mission organized this relief mainly through its centres in Madras, port Blair and Colombo. Cooked food, dry food packets, baby food, clothing, utensils, and medical aid were distributed among the needy as primary relief. Around 90,000 people were the

⁸⁶ *Prabhuddha Keralam*, Journal, 1938, op.cit., p. 47.

⁸⁷ News Report in *Prabhuddha Keralam*, Vol. XXI, 1935, p. 157.

beneficiaries of the primary relief conducted by the Madras and Port Blair centres.⁸⁸

Madras and Kalady centres have distributed durable fibre glass boats catamarans, fishing nets etc., to the fisher-folk, the worst sufferers in this disaster.⁸⁹

The relief service of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission from their very humble beginning in the last century gradually assumed massive dimensions over the past few decades. It should be borne in mind that these relief services are not merely acts of charity, but a specific method of spiritual practice as initiated by Sri. Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. It is the worship of God in the form of sufferings beings without any distinction whatsoever, since it provides a wonderful opportunity to exercise one's power of benevolence over other fellow beings and thus become blessed, more and more people should actively participate in the relief activities with a view to transforming this world of ours into better place.

The relief works done by the mission branches during 1924 is well mentioned in the annual reports and Swami Gambhirananda's work. "History of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission". Relief work in British

⁸⁸ Foundation Day Commemoration Volume, Belur Math, op.cit., p.223.

⁸⁹ Personal Interview with Swami Satswarupananda, Belur Math, Culcutta, West Bengal, 23.11.2018, 3 pm to 3.45 pm.

Malabar, Cochin, Coimbatore, Salem, Tanjore, Travancore and Tiruchirappalli in the year 1924 is significant in the context.⁹⁰ Ramakrishna Mission played an active role in the relief works during the time of national calamities and relief work even during the time of epidemics and riots.⁹¹

Medical Services

At the beginning, a group of Monks in the Ramakrishna Mission organized themselves into an association for serving the poor, the needy, the destitute, and the sick they named it as Home of Relief.⁹²

Their dedication and unremitting labour attracted the attention of the prominent citizens of Calcutta, the hospital and outpatient relief work increased, and it was renamed as poor man's Relief Association.⁹³ They received help from various quarters. A plot of land was purchased in 1903 and the first building of two blocks, designed by Swami Vijnananda was constructed on it.

The Sevashrama was shifted to its new premises in 1905. The next phase in the development of medical services of the Ramakrishna mission was

⁹⁰ Swami Ghanbeerananda, op.cit., p. 442.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Personal Interview with Deepak Gupta, Retired Professor of Economics, Vidya Nagar College, Calcutta 20.11.2018, 4 pm to 5.30 (He is the Great grandson of Mahendranath Gupta disciple of Sree Ramakrishna)

⁹³ Ibid.

marked by the starting of regular medical institutions, hospitals, or out-patient dispensaries for the relief of medical problems in the community. Apart from the centres engaged solely in medical service, various Math and Mission centres started charitable out-patient dispensaries which in the course of time, developed into well-equipped dispensaries providing allopathic and or homeopathic treatment.⁹⁴ Some have their unique features. Eg., Ayurvedic treatment, physiotherapy, acupuncture, etc. The 275-bed hospital at Thiruvananthapuram has physiotherapy section⁹⁵

One of the special features of mission institutions is their achievement of the best possible results and a high standard of service, both technical and humanitarian, with the least possible expenditure. This is partly due to the honorary services offered by local medical practitioners.

“In many of the hospitals monks act not only as administrators but also doing the duty of nurses, compounders and doctors and because of the presence of these monks who consider their duty as a service to God and attend personally to the details and bestow sympathy to all irrespective of the caste,

⁹⁴ Souvenir, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, op.cit., p. 263.

⁹⁵ Personal Interview with Swami Mokshapradanandha, President, Sasthamagalam, Rama Krishna Ashram, Tvm, 27,02.2020, 5 pm to 6 pm.

creed and social status of the patient, the patients feel quite at home in these institutions”.⁹⁶

Major Medical Activities in Kerala

Ramakrishna Ashramas throughout Kerala conducted special medical programmes and camps, and health care and awareness programmes benefitting several people, under National Leprosy Elimination Programme. Programme on control of Tuberculosis through community based directly observed treatment with short course–Therapy (DOTS) under revised national Tuberculosis control programme (RNTCP) was organised. Nutritious diet was provided to children belonging to rural areas under child nutrition programme.⁹⁷

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kozhikode has a dispensary with allopathy and ayurvedic sections which treated 9545 cases according to the Annual report of 2018 published by Belur Math. The report also explains about the medical camps conducted by the Kozhikode Ashram in which 139 patients were treated.⁹⁸ The charitable Dispensary run by the Kozhikode Ashrama is meant for the poor people of the locality. Doctors in ortho, skin, dental,

⁹⁶ Personal Interview with Vishwaroopananda Swami, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal, 19.11.2018, Time 5 pm to 6.45 pm.

⁹⁷ Personal Interview with Swami Sampooranadha, Former Secretary, Nettayam, Ramakrishna Ashram, Thiruvananthapuram, 18.02.2020. Time: 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm

⁹⁸ The General Report, Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal, 2018 April, p. 109.

gynecology etc. gave free service. A Homeopathy doctor also serves in the Dispensary.⁹⁹

The Archival sources furnish the following particulars in respect of the Ramakrishna Mission charitable dispensary Kallai, for the year 1952. Sri Ramakrishna mission charitable dispensary situated in ward 32 at the distance of about 6km miles from Calicut on the Kallai-Feroke road was started in 1931.¹⁰⁰ It is maintained by the contributions by the public and the local funds. According to the letter send by the secretary at Ramakrishna Mission to the president Malabar District Board. During the year 1953, the staff employed in the dispensary are Dr. U. Trivikraman, M.B.B.S, Retd. Medical practitioner, Dr. E.Sumathy, and Dr. C.P. G.Menon as consulting medical officers all are honorary workers. All the other work is carried out by experienced monastic members.¹⁰¹ Drugs and medicines are received from well-established firm and there are proper arrangements for their safe custody in and distribution from the dispensing room. It is mentioned by the public subscriptions and donations and aid given by local funds, there is an other sources of income. The cost of medicines is met by the income receiver through the above sources. The letter above mentioned also is clear proof of the fact that on 12th February 1980 the

⁹⁹ Annual Report, Ramakrishna Ashram, Kozhikode, op.cit., p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to the president, Malabar District Board, Kozhikode, Date 13th August by Swami Vishadananda, 1953 Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Sevasram, Kallai, Malabar.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

inspecting medical officer Madras inspected the dispensary and have his appreciation.¹⁰²

Ottapalam Dispensary

There was no proper medical aid for the suffering humanity of the locality and suburbs. It was decided to open a centre for this purpose by the devotees and the authorities of this Ashrama in memory of Swami Vivekananda. Thus, Sri Nirmalananda free Ayurvedic dispensary was opened on 7th June 1930, under the auspices of the Ramakrishna Mission Ottapalam.¹⁰³

In this Dispensary all patients are attended to and treated free without any distinction of caste or creed. The report of the Ashramam, mentions the name of well-known Ayurvedic physicians, E, Chenan Vaidyar of Ottapalam, regularly attended the dispensary free of charges distributed best and pure medicines strictly according to the prescriptions of Ayurveda by voluntary workers, several patients from distant places used to visit the dispensary and all these treatments have been found successful.¹⁰⁴

The mission has a glorious record of a century at medical service under difficult conditions. In this 21st century it will have to face these new

¹⁰² Government Order N.591, District Services for Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, 1953.

¹⁰³ Report of the Swami Nirmalananda Temple, 25th December, 1939. Kamalalaya Press, Ottapalam, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

challenges of providing cost affective remedies and bringing the most modern medical scientists and technological advances to the poorest in the remotest corners of India. At the same time, it will have to maintain the high standard of dedicated service and motivate even the self-seeking medical practitioners to provide what little selfless service they can. The mission has done this in the past and has the potential to do it for many centuries to come.

Ramakrishna Mission's Pioneering work among the Dalits and Tribal People

The caste system, with its social stratification, hierarchy and the concept of 'purity' enabled the higher castes to exploit the lower castes socially and economically, without any repercussions. The adherence to the traditional caste system with all its rigidity, rigor, and social exclusiveness, was indeed a peculiarity of Kerala for long. The Malayalam poet Kumaranasan summed up this situation in these lines: *Thorrukoodathavar, Theendikoodathavar, Drishtiyil Pettalum Kottamullor* ("Those who cannot touch, those who cannot handle, those who are at fault even if seen").¹⁰⁵

Swami Nirmalananda the initiator of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala remarked that social reform does not come about solely from eating together, nor did it mean that social reform meant the high should be brought down to be

¹⁰⁵ K.M. George, *Kumaran Asan*, New Delhi, 1972, p. 7.

equal to the low, but the low should be lifted p to the high. The low should be raised up and promoted to the level of the high by the imparting of education and culture.¹⁰⁶

It was this exhortation that inspired Swami Tyagishananda and Swami Nirsihananda (1892-1991) made attempts for the all-round upliftment of the lower castes and the Dalits.¹⁰⁷ Swami Nirshidananda was a disciple of Swami Nirmalananda, served as and he was the president of the Nettayam Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Thiruvananthapuram during the year 1932.¹⁰⁸ He began his work with a group of just four boys belonging to a Dalit family living in abject poverty. Along with literacy, he gave them vocational training so that they could earn their living and on their own feet. In two villages Nooranad and Adur, he carried on his work among the Dalits for nearly 45 years.¹⁰⁹ Behind Nettayam Ashram Thiruvananthapuram, he took initiative for constructing a big hall which was named 'Ghadhadara Vilasam' mainly for the education of Dalit students of the locality. The Ashram under his initiative have

¹⁰⁶ Thulaseetherthan, *Sree Nirmalanda Swamikal Smarananjali*, (Mal.) December 1964. Palakkad, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰⁷ Personal Interview with Veethasprihananda Swamikal, Ramakrishna Ashram, Nettayam, Thiruvananthapuram, 17.04.2018 Time, 10 am to 11 am.

¹⁰⁸ Rajeev Iringalakuda, *Sree Ramakrishna Sanghan Sanhyasimar Keralathil* (Mal.), 2013. Kozhikode, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

given asylum to a couple who had shown courage for inter-caste marriage in those days of caste rigidity.¹¹⁰

Swami Tyagishananda established the Vivekodyam School in Thrissur in 1915. In 1927, the school was shifted to a rural area called Puranattukara, about 7 k.m from Thrissur, mainly with the idea of serving the Dalith children of the place. It was affiliated to Belur Math in 1929¹¹¹. It may also be mentioned here that in 1948 a new hostel and a school for girls were started in a nearby campus, which was later affiliated to Sri Sarada Math Dakshniswar¹¹² Nirmalananda's successful experiments in the Ashrams of Kerala where Branhmacharrians and Sanyasins (nus and monks) being drawn from all castes irrespective of caste and creed.¹¹³ The work done by Sri Vivekananda Sevashramam, Edanad Palai is also remarkable in this context. With the co-operation of several people the Ashrama obtained a plot of land in 1934 and constructed a building there for creating a place of worship for people belonging to the lower caste and arrangements were made for worship.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Rajeev Irinjalakuda, *Sri Ramakrishna Sangha Sanyasimar Keralathil*, op.cit., p. 46.

¹¹¹ Swami Sidhinathananda, 'A Brief History of the Ramakrishna Math, Trichur', in Swami Sankarananda (ed) *'Aradhana' Diamond Jubilee Souvenir-1*, Puranattukara, Trichur, 1985, p. 18.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Annual Report, Ramakrishna Ashram, Trivandrum, op.cit., p. 48.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Since 1927, Ramakrishna Mission, centre at Thrissur and Kalady are doing valuable service for the upliftment of scheduled castes and tribes.¹¹⁵ Swami Ramakrishnanda (1891-1981) established a school for the Dalith students of Pala in Kottayam.¹¹⁶ In the year 1934 under his leadership an organization called Vivekananda Smaraka Harijana Sangham was formed for the upliftment of Dalits of the locality.¹¹⁷

Nithyananda Swamikal (1932-1964) who was an important monk in the Thrissur Ramakrishna Ashram came from a Dalit Community, His early name was Kunjan.¹¹⁸

The Kallai centre at Kozhikode started a hostel for Dalit Students. The letter send by the Assistant secretary, Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode to N.R. Kothunda Raman, Assistant Secretary to Government, Madras dated 30th April 1956, shows, the Mission's attempts to start a student's dormitory for the Dalit Students.¹¹⁹ It is reported that the students home started in 1949, for housing a few orphans and Dalit Students who were the victims of the cholera epidemic of Malabar in 1943, the students home grew into one of

¹¹⁵ Personal Interview with Swami Sampurnanda, op.cit., 27.02.2020. 11.00 am to 11.45.

¹¹⁶ Rajeev Iringalakkuda, *Sree Ramakrishna Sangham Sanyasimar Keralathil*, (Mal.) op.cit., p. 104.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 157.

¹¹⁹ Letter from the Assistant Secretary. Sree Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai Kozhikode dated 27.04.56 To the Director of Harijan Welfare, Madras. 30.04.1956.

the important residential homes in Malabar.¹²⁰ The Mission started their own High school in 1953, after its opening the demand for students home increased and with the support of the government a new dormitory was opened to give facilities to more students of the Backward communities.¹²¹

The letter dated 26.06.2019 send by the president, Mokshavratana Swami to the general secretary, Ramakrishna Math, and mission Belur Math, West Bengal throws light on the activities and special programmes for the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe by the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trivandrum. The Ashrama conducts special programme for the benefit of depressed and backward classes of the Chakapara and Karikuzhi in Trivandrum district.¹²² Besides these activities all the centres of the Mission, big or small, has undertaken youth development programmes, women welfare programmes. some centres are conducting leprosy eradication and rehabilitation programmes, conducting training institutes for agriculture, old age homes for rural poor. Home for mentally restarted and handicapped.¹²³

¹²⁰ Letter dated 18.04.56 from Sri Vipathmananda, Secretary, Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode, to the collector of Malabar, Kozhikode.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Letter dated 26.06.2019 from Moksha Prathananda, president, Ramakrishna Ashram, Tvm. to General Secretary Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal.

¹²³ The Vendanta Kesari, Volum 16, March 1989. Mylapore, Madras, p. 4.

Women Welfare Programmes

Apart from these activities, a Sanskrit co-educational school is functioning in Kalady centre. Nurses Training Institute is attached to the mission hospital in Trivandrum. the centre organises several programme for enhancing women empowerment by forming self-help groups, imparting vocational training and the women self-reliant.¹²⁴ Craft and Cottage industry Training self-help programmes, adult education and literacy programmes, pre and post-natal programme etc., all aims to improve the position of women.¹²⁵

Ramakrishna Mission and the Math have permanent programmes for service to women.

1. Care for pregnant and lactating women through the maternity departments for their hospitals in Kolkotta (Seva Parishad), Vrindaban. Thiruvananthapuram, Sasthamangalam hospitals also included in this category.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Personal Interview with Pravrajika Avyaya Prana Mathaji, Sarada Ashramam, Ravipuram, Vyttila, M.G. Road, Cochin-16, 07.02.2016, 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm.

¹²⁵ Ramakrishna Mission Foundation Day Commemoration Volume-1, op.cit., p. 315.

¹²⁶ Personal Interview with Swami Nandalmajananda, Trichur, op.cit., 16.02.2022 4.30 pm to 5.30 pm.

An old age home for women is functioning at Vyttila in Ernanakulam district.¹²⁷ The inmates of the Ashram are doing stitching clothes and other handicraft works and getting an income for their day-to-day expenses.

Youth Welfare Programme

The Ramakrishna Mission and Math centres have separate recreational and cultural centres called Balak Sanghas (for children) and Yuvak Sanghas (for youth) in several places. In these centres, children are provided with supplementary nutrition and guidance in the practices of social-moral and spiritual values and are also taught the basics of scriptures chanting devotion music etc.¹²⁸ Youth programme of the mission involves.

1. Youth rally, conventions, youth-day observation etc.
2. Youth leadership training
3. Vocational and self-help training
4. Character-building camps
5. Service programme especially for the masses, rural people etc.¹²⁹

The various activities of Math and Mission are spread over both in rural and urban areas. The participation of lakhs of people in the annual festivals

¹²⁷ Personal Interview with Sumetha Prana Mathaji. Sarada Asramam, Ravipuram, Vyttila, Cochin-16, Time 12.30 pm-2pm.

¹²⁸ The General Report Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission April 2017. Belur Math, West Bengal, pp. 21-22.

¹²⁹ Foundation Day of commemorates Volume, 1 May 2010. op.cit., p. 315.

and celebrations is a clear example of the steady growth in the spreading of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda message among the people.¹³⁰

Both the Math and Mission centres lay emphasises on the dissemination of the spiritual and cultural ideas of India. The various centres of the Ramakrishna Mission, tries to bring harmony among the people through many libraries. lectures, seminars, symposiums youth camps, Balak Sanghas, regular classes, public celebrations, occasional exhibitions, screening films on religious and cultural values.¹³¹

In Kerala the various mission centres runs libraries, which includes books on religion, philosophy including Ramakrishna Vivekananda literature.¹³² The *Prabuddha Keralam* is a monthly organ of the Mission in Malayalam which was started in 1915 and this magazine is considered as the only religious monthly magazine in Kerala which continues its publication even to this present day, as stated elsewhere.¹³³

The leading writers of Kerala contributed their articles to this magazine along with book reviews and travelogues. S. Guptan Nair, Sugatha Kumari,

¹³⁰ The General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Belur Math April, 2017. p.22.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Anual Report Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, Kozhikode, op.cit., p. 6.

¹³³ N. Lekshmikutty, op.cit. p. 93.

Sukumar Azhikode, poets like Ottur, Kujunni Fr. Pynadath, K.P.A Rahim etc were regular contributors to the magazine.¹³⁴

Veeravani started by Swami Agamananda, deals with variety of subjects like social issues, the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the importance of Sanskrit and about religious harmony.¹³⁵

Samarpan is a souvenir published by the Kalady centre. The book contain articles of lasting value on the lives and messages of Sree Sankara, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and also about the different philosophies and culture.¹³⁶ The Ottapalam Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama published a journal known as *Tulasee Sugandham* in 1947 under the initiative taken by Swami Vishadanandha.

Apart from this the branches of the Ramakrishna Mission all over the world publishes various periodicals and Annual publications, monthly Journals in different languages. All these branches contributes in spreading spiritualism and social values through its publications. Now to sum-up, the various centres of the Mission throughout Kerala cater to the physical educational, medical, mental, moral religious and spiritual well-being of society in a silent, yet

¹³⁴ Malayala Manorama daily 18.07.2009.

¹³⁵ Jayesh P.S. 'Swami Agarmananda, the prophet of Justice, equality and liberty in P,F,Gopakumar (ed) *Faces of social reform in Kerala, 2015*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2015, pp. 232-233.

¹³⁶ Swami Ganananda, (ed) *Samarpan, Magazine, Kalady, op.cit., p. 15.*

positive way. The philosophy behind the various activities of the Mission is the service of God in fellow beings. So, their aim is more for quality rather than for quantity. Thus, the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala is a silent but potent influence for the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of in their entity.

CONCLUSION

The social space and civil society in Kerala were determined by caste. Modern civil society in Kerala is the result of persistent struggles waged against caste domination and oppression by significant movements and social reformers. A thorough analysis of the mid-nineteenth century developments in various regions of Kerala shows that inspite of the regional differences there were certain obvious trends that sanctioned a colonial transformation. The impact of colonialism and the ideas of Christian Missionaries like perception of salvation had a tremendous impact on the Kerala society. The missionary activities became quite widespread in Kerala in the beginning of the 19th century by the initiatives taken by London Missionary Society, Church Mission Society, Malabar Basel Mission, Salvation Army, etc. But we cannot deny the fact that social transformation does not emerge suddenly, but it is a culmination of a long process in the traditional pattern of our caste-ridden society. Apart from the impact of western education, the role played by several social reformers and movements in shaping the social, cultural, and spiritual discourses of modern Kerala society can never be questioned.

In the current thesis, an effort is made to evaluate the Ramakrishna Movement's influence and efforts on Kerala society, as well as its potential and

limitations in terms of bringing about a fundamental transformation of society. Although monks have served as its leaders up until this point, the movement nonetheless has enormous social relevance from a national standpoint. It has been depicted as monastic, universal, tolerant, non-sectarian, liberal, humanitarian, progressive and scientific. Today the constructive programme of the Ramakrishna Movement is vast and incalculable. It is based on the vedantic idea of man's divinity and the omnipresence of humanity's self-service, regardless of caste and faith.

The Ramakrishna Movement began in Kerala with the formation of Vedanta Societies, primarily propagated what came to be known as Neo-Vedanta. In due course Ashramas began to be established. This was the prelude to the Ramakrishna Movement. However, the characteristics of the movements differ greatly from other social movements. The majority of its works are so quiet and devoid of controversy that they fail to sufficiently grab the media's attention. There is no conscious attempt to publicise their works. Moreover, the Ramakrishna Movement avoids confrontation with any other institutions and so remains non-controversial.

The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission is a spiritual organisation dedicated to the service of humanity. The Ramakrishna order comprising of monks was instituted by Sri Ramakrishna himself, whereas the administrative machinery was mobilized by Swami Vivekananda.

Their activities in serving humanity have expanded over the years, and it remains committed to serving 'God in Man' as a form of spiritual practice. The thesis seeks to demonstrate that, despite several flaws in the social reform process, the Ramakrishna Mission played an essential part in the social advancement of contemporary Kerala.

The Research question is whether it has been able to bring about a revolution in the consciousness of man which in turn lead to a social change. A cursory glance makes it clear that it has expanded its organizational network, bringing about radical changes in society. The present work tries to evaluate how far the Ramakrishna Mission is successful in its efforts.

The Ramakrishna Movement has been credited with championing the cultural revival or renaissance of modern India. The various branches of the mission are running hundreds of institutions having 172 centres throughout the world, giving importance to selfless service of mankind without any discrimination based on caste, creed, nationality, and religion.

The Ramakrishna Movement stands apart from other social movements due to the fact that while other movements which took birth and flourished during the lifetime of its spiritual leader and Guru got weakened after the demise of its founder, it did not happen in the case of the Ramakrishna Mission. Rather, an organized institutional movement came into existence to disseminate his ideals among the people. Many spiritual leaders have tended to approach

spirituality from different perspectives. Because of this, even if Paramahansa's goals can be classified as the vision of a social reformer, the spiritual ideal he promoted was incredibly difficult for his followers to understand. Another crucial aspect is that even among his closest disciples, different people interpreted spirituality differently. This can be seen in the variations between the vision of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa whose spirituality was personal and tended towards ascetism, and that of Swami Vivekananda whose approach towards spirituality was grounded in a more materialistic viewpoint.

Therefore, efforts to promote spiritual awareness as promoted by Sri Rama Paramahansa were not prioritised when the Ramakrishna Mission was founded. However, the mission played an important role in instilling spiritual values in the common people. By making spirituality accessible to all, the Mission was instrumental in breaking the parochialism of spirituality. Until then, spirituality was believed to be something reserved for a particular caste, or for the followers of some divine leader, or the life of a *sanyasi*. The Ramakrishna Mission proved that spirituality could be attained by the common man as well. The Ramakrishna Mission played a vital role in the democratization of spirituality. This was achieved through the practice of practical spirituality, or in other words, spirituality through social activities. Though this was much more grounded in materialism than the higher-level spirituality advocated by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa as stated earlier, it was effective in reaching the vicinity of the depressed.

The Ramakrishna Mission has also never tried to commercialize spirituality by marketing it, even in this globalized era. The Ramakrishna Movement has seen a steady pattern of growth and expansion. However, what needs to be understood is the efforts that the Mission has made to influence and improve the situation in local regions rather than focusing on its global and organizational expansion. Only slight development has been observed in the number of social and outreach projects, partnerships, and centres. Although the Mission is currently working in the areas of education, health, and environmental conservation, the current situation includes a large number of other institutions and volunteer organisations that are also engaged in these fields, expanding the options available to the lower strata of the society. In addition, the youth of the present generation do not tend to show affiliation towards established and institutionalized volunteer organizations.

The Ramakrishna Mission and its branches throughout Kerala execute varieties of activities with missionary zeal and spirit. In 1913, the first Ramakrishnas Ashram was opened in Kerala at Haripad and in course of time centres grew up in Tiruvalla, Trichur, Trivandrum, Quilandy, Ottapalam, Calicut, Alleppey and in other parts of Kerala. In these Ashramas all were treated in equal terms as devotees of God without any consideration of caste or creed. In particular, mention should be made of the inter-dining organised by Swami Nirmalananda. He set an example by undertaking the task of collecting the leftovers of lower castes and cleaning the vessels himself. If Swami

practised what he preached, the disciples would also act likewise. He brought his followers from various parts of Kerala together. Thus, he had formed a united spiritual Kerala long before the political leaders began a movement for the political unity of Kerala.

Swami Agamananda, the founder of Kalady Ashrama, Combined Vedantic knowledge to Sufism and the humanitarian perspectives of other religious sects and his approach was beyond the vision and mission of the Ramakrishna Mission and his activities are more community centred than institutional. This approach got wide acceptance even from the leftist parties and progressive thinkers who were not in favour of spreading traditional literatures like vedantas to the masses.¹

Though Ramakrishna Mission had a set of goals abiding its constituent objectives there were followers who held diverse views and mode of operation in propagating the basic principles of Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Tyagishananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, started a centre at Trichur, and Swami Tapasyananda built up a modern hospital in Trivandrum, several other eminent monks with their devoted and silent work have brought up the Ramakrishna movement to its present effective eminence. Swami

¹ P. Govinda Pillai, a communist leader in his book "Kerala Navothanam" (II Volume) acknowledges Swami Agamananda for encouraging Progressive thoughts among the youth and granting permission to conduct the programmes like the 'Akhila Kerala Karshaka Sabha Sammelanam" in 1958 at Sri Sankara College established by him at Kaladi.

Tyagishananda and Swami Agamananda, who were prominent leaders of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, started hostels for students from the lower castes, and taught them Sanskrit and the Hindu scriptures. Intellectuals and laymen from different castes and class inculcated and imbibed the concepts and ideas of the Ramakrishna Mission. Among them were leftist thinkers such as N.E. Balaram, M.N. Govindan Nair, Moyarath Shankaran, and Unni Raja and E.M.S. Namboothiripad, as stated above, and scholars like S. Guptan Nair and Sukumar Azhikode.

The activities of the Ashrams were not confined to eradication of caste disabilities. In rural and tribal areas, the mission provided dwelling units, provided household toilets, and organized awareness programmes on health, hygiene, family planning and drug abuse, above all the mission rendered valuable services by distributing ration hygiene kits and study materials for the needy. One of the important features of the Ramakrishna Mission institutions imparting education is the active involvement and dedicated services of large number of monks of the mission. Under the leadership of Swami Tyagishanada, an educational institution that catered mainly for the Dalit boys was established in 1915 in Trissur town. Gradually the residential section was divided into two parts, one for boys and another for girls. Later a library and a reading room were added to the Ashrama. In 1934 Mahatma Gandhi visited the place and laid the foundation for the hostel and temple. The work for Dalits started by him is still being continued by the Ramakrishna Math Trissur. The educational

institutions established by the mission throughout Kerala are greatly appreciated for their high educational attainments and their contribution to Dalit upliftment.

The mission has a glorious record of a century of medical service under difficult conditions. This was provided to the needy regardless of caste, community and class. The remedies were cost-effective and extended to the poorest in the remote corners of the country.

One of the special features of the institutions established by Mission centres is their achievement of the best possible results and a high standard of service with the least possible expenditure.

The Sarada Math, the women wing of the Ramakrishna Mission have centres throughout Kerala. The main centres are located at Puranattukara, Thrissur, Eranakulam, Ottapalam, Calicut and Thiruvananthapuram. These centres run hostels for poor girls. Women are given training in tailoring and such other vocational training in their locality. As stated earlier, the Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram founded by Swami Nirmalananda at Ottapalam on 10th December 1926 was functioned as an offshoot of Ramakrishna Mission in the Malabar region. Regardless of the opposition from conservatives this ashram extended a helping hand to the *Brasht Namboothiris* and bring them into the mainstream of the Namboothiri society. Their engagements prompted Namboothiri women to discard their outdated dress

including *marakuda* and *ghosha* and to embrace modern and progressive dress like sari. Ashramam provided modern education, conducted marriages between ostracised Namboothiris and *antharjanam* with an aim to destruct the strong fortress of caste orthodoxy. The marriage between Narayan Namboothiri with Arya Antharjanam of Arappad Illam is well attested by V.T. Bhattathiripad in his autobiography *Dakshinayanam*.

The *Prabuddha Keralam*, the mouthpiece of Ramakrishna Math and mission in Kerala which has been in existence since 1915, has done much to popularize Indian culture and spirituality in general and Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Movement throughout the length and breadth of the state. Compared to what is offered in Ashramas, the magazine would reach a larger readership.

Many eminent men used to contribute articles for the said magazine. A large number of religious and spiritual books, especially in Malayalam published by the Maths in Kerala also did much to instill spiritual knowledge among the people, more so as these were made available at cheaper costs. Swami Agamananda was the first to begin religious discourses. These religious discourses were attended by large number of people and later they were published in books called *Veeravani*. These ventures did much to arouse the dominant spiritual interest among the people.

The ideals of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda including the concepts of a universal religion and an egalitarian society, have overtly or covertly influenced the leaders of the religious reform movements in Kerala. With this idea in mind, the S.N.D.P.'s mouthpiece publication was given the name *Vivekodayam*.

Examining the development of the majority of Kerala's social and religious reform groups shows that, in their later phases, they were impacted by political ideologies, casteist identification, and societal outlooks. However, the Ramakrishna Movement has stayed away from sectarian ideologies, at the same time, keeping the focus of the universal religion in mind, as stated elsewhere. This was a great achievement. Though the number of new *Sanyasis* joining the ashrams in Kerala is relatively lower than that of West Bengal and in North Eastern regions, those who do join are those with a passion for selfless service. The common man who has been influenced by the ideas of Swami Vivekananda also do their part through donations, contributions, and volunteering activities.

The inter-dining practise known as *misrabojanam*, which was started by Swami Nirmalananda and Swami Agamananda for the benefit of the underprivileged, is still carried out in ashrams today. The doors of the ashrams are open to all irrespective of caste and creed. Thus, though the Ramakrishna Movement is primarily known as a religious-reform movement, it was also a

centre for dissemination of rationality and logic which makes it distinct from other similar movements. The ideology behind such activities were to introduce *ashrama samskara* rather an *ambala samsakra*.

Social reform movements tend to become routine, and this has become a challenge faced by the Ramakrishna Mission. Another problem is the tendency for internal schisms to develop. The dependence on monastics as the primary decision-makers can cause the management of the publishing, medical, relief, and educational operations to sputter under the strain. Another challenge faced by the mission in modern times is that laymen are not sufficiently interested to join in its spiritual discourses and activities. The movement has served the poor and is doing other relief activities, but now other movements who take immediate action and the urgency of changing the social system are addressing reform and revolution in many parts of our country. Hence, the mission activities have been further modernised by using computers and other technologies in turn with the modern requirements. In Kerala several new spiritual institutions like Chinmaya Mission, Amrita Institutes and the like are doing the same services similar to Ramakrishna Mission.

It cannot be denied that Ramakrishna Mission achieved so much in such a short span of time. The Mission provided relief work during natural calamities, during the times of epidemics, the monks provided medicines apart

from providing awareness in hygiene and health which helped in arresting its spread.

Several reform movements which started during the nineteenth century and continues their activities till this day mainly concentrates on uplifting the conditions within their own caste and community, and not aware of the needs of reforms for the whole society. Moreover, such movements which originated with the idea of reform have now deviated from its declared objectives. The Rama Krishna Movement in Kerala did not assume the proportions of a vast movement like SNDP and NSS but can regarded as one as it has its own organisation, ideals, cadres, and the following.

Admittedly, the Ramakrishna Mission too had its own limitations, but its contributions in the social sphere and the social vision it managed to put in to action within Kerala Society, cannot be overlooked or side-lined. The Ramakrishna Vivekananda movement became a global phenomenon, with a clear vision to serve humanity, as mentioned earlier. So, there is much scope for further development. The concept of universal religion as exemplified by Swami Vivekananda in his statement, 'Manava Seva, Madava Seva' is still followed by the Ramakrishna Mission, thus making it distinct from other organizations. Hence the relevance of the present study.

GLOSSARY

1. *Amabala Samskara* : Following the rigid caste hierarchy of the age
2. *Antharjanam* : Name given to Namboothiri women
3. *Arathi* : A ritual in temples
4. *Ashrama Samskara* : Following the concept that all are equal before God
5. *Avarnas* : People belonging to low caste
6. *Ayitham* : Untouchability
7. *Brasht* : Ostracism
8. *Desam* : Division of the territory
9. *Ghosha* : Lit., Traditional dress covering full body of women belonging to Namboothiri Brahmins
10. *Homakunda* : Fireplace set for *homa*
11. *Iswara Koti* : God like persons lit., one who could merge with the absolute and reform
12. *Mantradeeksha* : preparation or consecration for a religious ceremony, is giving of a mantra or an initiation by the guru (in Guru–shishya tradition) of Indian religions
13. *Marakkuda* : Traditional type of umbrella used by Namboothiri women (Cadjan umbrella)
14. *Marumakkathaya* : A System of matrilineal inheritance prevalent in regions what now form part of the Kerala
15. *Misrabojanam* : Inter-dining
16. *Padasala* : A place where children are educated
17. *Prasada* : The things returning to the devotees after the offerings made to the God

18. *Sambandham* : Was an informal mode of marriage followed by Namboothiris, Nairs, Samanths, Kshatriyas, Kshatriyas and Ambalavasis among their own communities as well as with each other in colonial Kerala.
19. *Sangha* : Association
20. *Sanyasins* : Hindu Nuns
21. *Sanyasis* : Hindu Monks
22. *Savarnas* : Upper caste
23. *Thampuram* : My Lord
24. *Thampuratti* : My Lady
25. *Tharavad* : Ancestral home of aristocratic families in Kerala
26. *Uttupura* : Lit., the place where food is made with the soul

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(26.02.2020), and 10.00 am to 11.45 am (27.02.2020).

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pm to 5 pm (19.11.2018).

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Copy of the Letter written by Ravi Varma, dated 31.07.1927

- 2 -

wish and pray K.K. also may have initiation from Him on His way back.

Sri Sri Tulsi Maharaj had His Bhiksha here. Krishna Menon also took his meal here. H.H. took rest till 1:30 when I took Him to Ashram where our Head Master (Gopalakrishna Iyer) and children had already arrived. For about an hour or less Tulsi Maharaj was attending to packing His things. From about 3 to 5:30 p.m. He entertained us with His inspiring and instructive talk. I relived my days in the Holy Aspect Lodge and was reminded of the Blessed Days at Dakshineswar in Bhagawan's Days. It is only when you come in contact with a Direct Disciple of Bhagawan that you realize to the full extent the advantage of coming in contact with a great soul. Without any effort from ourselves we get charged with spirituality. I am anxious that by Bhagawan's Grace you must be allowed to leave Mysore and to be always with Sri Sri Tulsi Maharaj.

Very glad to read all that you write about Veena Seshanna and his grandson.

.....
.....(family news).....

I am glad that H.H. Swami Srivasanandaji is with you. Jiten Maharaj wrote to me to say that another young Swami from the Madras Math has also gone to your help. You will convey my love and Sashtanga Pranams to H.H.Swami Srivasanandaji.

.....
.....

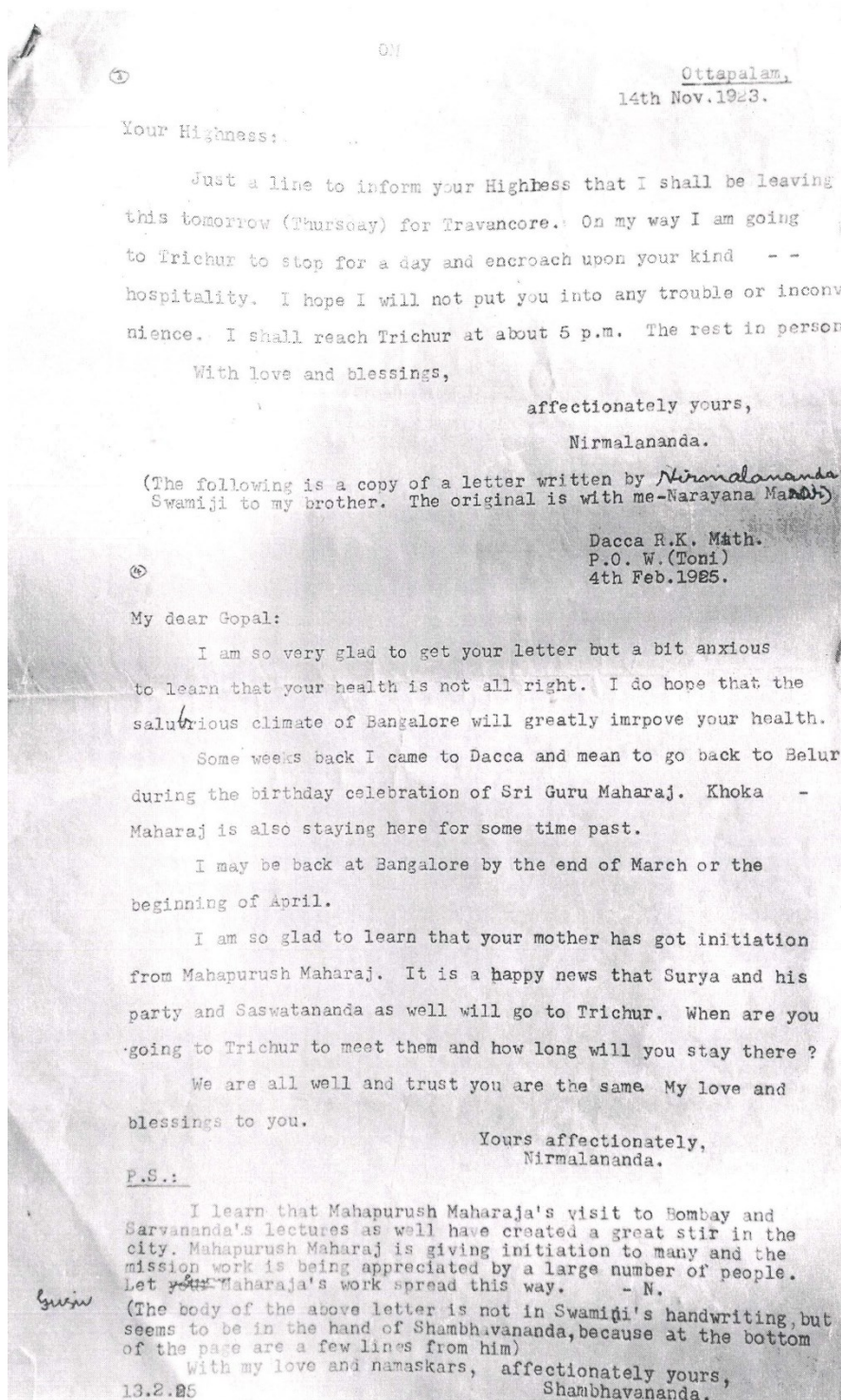
I hereunder copy letters received from Sri Sri Mahapurushaji and H.H.Swami Pranavanandaji. I hear regularly from Priya Maharaj who wrote to me that Sri Sri Mahapurushaji often blessed us. With love and best wishes,

sâ/- R.V./3rd Prince.
(Ravi Varma)

Source: Alam Bazar Math, Kolkata, West Bengal

Appendix II

Copy of the Letter written by Swami Nirmalananda



Source: Alam Bazar Math, Kolkata, West Bengal

Appendix III

Copy of the Niranjana Uttam Balak Award



**Sri Sharada Ashrama
S.R.K. nagar, Ottapalam 679103
Palakkad dt., Kerala**

Niranjana Uttama Balak Award

This decennial commemorative commendation is bestowed on

Master Dinoop P.M.

in appreciation of his efforts to imbibe the spirit of excellence as reflected in his consistently creditable performance in curricular and allied fields, extra-curricular activities, regularity in attendance and an endearing disposition and behaviour developed during his association with the Niranjana Balavihar.

December 1st, 1998

Dheerananda Swamiji
Monk-in-charge

Source: Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashram, Ottappalam

Appendix IV

Balance Sheet of Ramakrishna Math As on 31st March 2017

| Previous Year Rs. | Funds and Liabilities | Schedule | Current Year Rs. | Previous Year Rs. | Properties and Assets | Schedule | Current Year Rs. |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | Funds: | Q | | | | | |
| 2,553,635,362 | Land and Building Fund | | 2,942,874,059 | 2,490,944,649 | Fixed Assets | A | 2,865,297,940 |
| 442,189,235 | Movable Properties Fund | | 469,840,229 | | | | |
| 1,706,116,155 | Endowment & Permanent Fund | | 1,904,401,957 | 3,549,213,900 | Investments | B | 3,841,267,946 |
| 203,447,293 | Development Fund | | 211,635,357 | | | | |
| | General Funds: | | | | | | |
| 962,594,206 | General | 927,386,149 | | | | | |
| 92,648,782 | Education and Cultural | 65,282,621 | | | Current Assets: | | |
| 132,711,461 | Medical | 162,508,220 | | 11,172,751 | Stock of sundry Materials (at cost) | 10,130,657 | |
| 10,522,276 | Rural Development | 9,343,943 | | 242,003,042 | Closing stock | 246,316,642 | |
| | | ----- | | | | C | |
| 1,198,476,725 | | | 1,164,520,933 | 22,593,134 | Sundry Debtors (Considered Good) | 9,390,111 | |
| 18,462,114 | Relief Fund | | 19,982,560 | 178,669,296 | Cash and bank Balance | 162,907,921 | |
| 249,363,503 | Other funds | | 284,891,053 | 454,438,223 | | ----- | |
| ----- | | | ----- | | | | 428,745,331 |
| 6,372,394,387 | | | 6,998,146,148 | | | | |
| | SECURED LOAN: | | | | Loans and Advances: | | |
| 7,955,712 | From Banks | | --- | 10,565,855 | (Considered good) | | |
| | Current Liabilities: | | | 8,063,104 | Loans & Advances | 8,778,903 | |
| 4,566,492 | Short Term Loans | E | 4,451,451 | 16,152,168 | Deposits | 8,603,838 | |
| | | | | | Other Receivables | 12,332,097 | |
| | | | | | | ----- | |

| Previous Year Rs. | Funds and Liabilities | | Current Year Rs. | Previous Year Rs. | Properties and Assets | Current Year Rs. |
|----------------------|--|---|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 98,619,690 | Deposits | F | 122,917,894 | 34,781,127 | | 29,714,834 |
| 9,442,360 | Sunday Creditors | | 12,662,256 | | | |
| 36,399,257 | Other Liabilities | G | 25,848,306 | | | |
| ----- | | | ----- | | | ----- |
| 149,027,99 | | | 166,879,907 | | | |
| ----- | | | ----- | ----- | | ----- |
| 6,529,377,898 | Total | | 7,165,026,055 | 6,529,377,898 | Total | 7,165,026,055 |
| ----- | | | ----- | ----- | | ----- |
| | Significant Accounting Policies | R | | | | |
| | Notes to the Accounts | S | | | | |
| | Schedules A to G and Q, R and S referred to above form an integral part of the Balance Sheet | | | | | |

Source: General Report 2017. Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, West Bengal

Appendix V

Letter submitted to Harijan Welfare Department

o/n

Harijan Welfare - Malabar District. Sri Ramesh Krishna
 Mission Students' Home, Kallai. Construction of the
 new dormitory for Harijan Students - Financial
 Assistance. Grant Requested.

1 cf.
 1 cf.

Story. See Ramesh Krishna Mission dated 8.4.56
 This order to trace all previous papers at page 1 cf.
 C.No S.No. 452/56.

Submitted

2) The previous papers are set put up. The
 letter dated 18.4.55 was from the Secretary, Sri Ramesh
 Krishna Mission, Kallai was recommended for the
 grant towards the construction of a new dormitory
 was recommended and sent to the Director of
 H.W. Please see page 3 cf (A). A copy of the report
 may be submitted to the Director and request for
 further orders may be based on the report may
 be communicated to the file.

h
 27.4.56

Yes. At home M
 D.W.O 27/4/56

into with a draft report to the Dr. H.W.

h
 27.4.56
 U.

VP 4.56
 D.W.O

P 5 cf

Govt. Memo. No 45142-T/56-1. (ILK) d/30.4.56

Submitted with a draft reply to the Dr. of H.W.
 Kozhikode

h
 6.5.56
 L6

NA-10-6.5.56

D.W.O

Source: Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

Appendix VI

Letter from District Welfare Officer, Harijan Welfare Department to Ramakrishna Ashram, Kallayi

2.

Submitted with a reminder to the Dr. of H-10.

NA-30676

W 9/6/56
D.W.O.

14/6/56
Census today (19th)
Why is this
dated 14/6/56?

CP
9/6/56

Sub: The date has since been corrected as 19.6.56.

14/6/56

Govt. No. 2911 (L.T.C.) dated 14.6.56 P. 11/4

Submitted

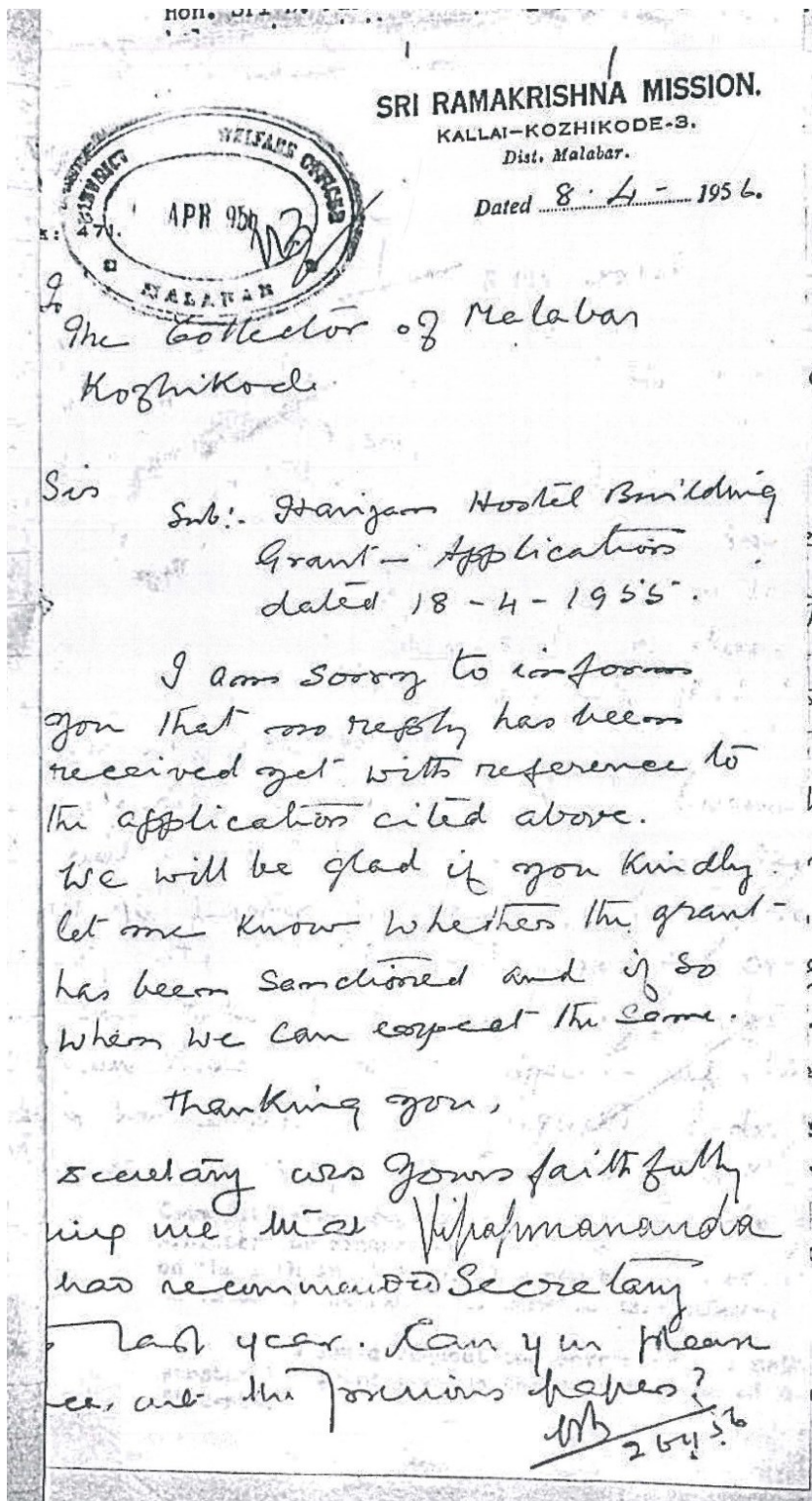
2) The Govt. have sanctioned a building grant of Rs 9,600/- towards the construction of the dormitory attached to St. Anne's Krishna Mission, Kallayi. A copy may be given for L.T. for ~~any~~ ~~action~~ ~~action~~ draft sent. put up may be approved. D.W.O.

W 9/6/56
D.W.O.

Source: Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

Appendix VII

Letter to the District Collector of Malabar, Kozhikode



Source: Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

Appendix VIII

Letter to Director, Harijan Welfare, Madras

8

Ref
Ltr s.No 482/sb.
Do

cl: 1 copy of
letter.

Sd/-
9/5/55

Sir,
Harijan Welfare - Malabar District - Sr. Rama.
Krishna Mission Students Home - Kallai - Construction
of the new dormitory for Harijan Students -
Financial Assistance - Grant. Requested.
P 3 C A
P.Ltr's Ltr 16263/55 dated 11.5.55

I send herewith a copy of the
reminder dated 27.5.55 received from
the Secretary, Sr. Rama Krishna Mission, Kallai
Kozhikode requesting orders on their original
application dated 18.4.55 which is sent to you
in this office - Cited
I request orders be issued
with sanction may be issued.
27/5/55 J.S. C.L.S.

with attention
ref cited above
at the time
of the
in the
has renewed
request for the grant.

Communities we propose to put up a new dormitory. Hon.Sri C.Subramaniam,

Source: Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

Appendix IX

Memorandum of Department of Industries Labour and Cooperation

HON. SRI C. SUBRAMANIAM, MINISTER FOR INDUSTRIES, LABOUR AND COOPERATION
help us to get the grant. But so far no reply has been received by us.



20480
3-MAY 1956

SPECIAL

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIES LABOUR AND COOPERATION

MEMORANDUM NO. 45142-T/56-1, dated 30th April 1956.

Sub: HARIJAN WELFARE - Education - Ramakrishna Mission, Kozhikode - Students' Home - Construction of dormitory - Grant for

Ref: Letter from the Assistant Secretary, Sree Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode dated 27/4/56.

*not at a
to the
Director
referring to
the previous
correspondence*

A copy of the letter cited together with its enclosure is forwarded to the Director of Harijan Welfare for remarks before 15/5/1956. His attention is, in this connection, invited to this Department's Endorsement No. 76063-T/55-1, dated 16/8/1955.

N.R. Kothandaraman,
Assistant Secretary to Government.

To the Director of Harijan Welfare, Madras (with enclosure)
Copy to the Collector of Malabar

/Forwarded/By Order/

trr/30/56

J. Nulian Pillai
SUPERINTENDENT.
30.4.56.
ABZ
30.6.56.

Communities we propose to put up a new dormitory. Hon.Sri C.Subramaniam,
Minister for Industries, Labour and Cooperation

Copy of letter dated 27th April 1956 from the Assistant Secretary, Sree Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode-3, Malabar Dist. to the Hon'ble ~~Sri C. Subramaniam~~ Minister for Finance and Education, Madras.

Last time, in April, when you visited Kozhikode, Swami Vipapmananda, Secretary, requested you in person, for a grant for a Harijan Hostel building. You promised to help us. We put in an application (a copy of which is enclosed herewith) to the Government through the Collector of Malabar. I understand that the Director of Harijan Welfare who visited our institution in May, 1955, has recommended our application. In this connection I met Hon. Sri B. Parameswaran, Minister for Harijan Welfare and he also promised to help us to get the grant. But so far no reply has been received by us.

Due to scarcity of funds we were not able to complete the construction so far. The estimated cost of the building is Rs.19,000/-.

On the expectation of getting this grant only we proceeded with the construction of work, against various financial difficulties. It will be a great blow to this small institution if the Government stops the grant at this stage.

It may be mentioned here that our Centre is doing Harijan work for the last 12 years and we have not asked for grant for any capital expenditure.

So I would request you to kindly reconsider our application for the building grant and pass orders for the disbursement of the same as early as possible.

Awaiting an early favourable order.

Copy of letter dated 18/4/55 from Sri Vipapmananda, Secretary, Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode-3 to the Collector of Malabar, Kozhikode.

Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode, which is a branch of the All India Ramakrishna Mission, Regd. under Act XXI of 1860, with its Headquarters at Belur, Calcutta, is situated on the Kallai Feroke Road. This centre of the Mission is engaged in philanthropic activities for the last two decades in Kozhikode. A High School, an Elementary School, a students' Home for Harijans, ~~orphan~~ orphans and other students, studying in the High School and a Charitable Dispensary are our main activities at present.

The Students' Home forms one of our important activities. Started in 1944 for housing a few orphans and Harijan students who were the victims of the Cholera epidemic of Malabar in 1943, the Students' Home grew into one of the important residential homes in Malabar. After we have opened our own High School in 1953, the importance of the Students' Home has increased. More Students are seeking admission into the Students' Home. We had to restrict the number for want of sufficient accommodation and other conveniences.

To give facilities to more students of the Harijan and Backward Communities we propose to put up a new dormitory. Hon. Sri C. Subramaniam, Minister for Finance and Education laid the foundation stone of the new block on the 11th April 1955. The new block is of 68' x 30' size and the rough estimate of the same will come to Rs.15,000/-.

We would request the Government to help this institution by a substantial grant towards the construction of the new dormitory for Harijan Students.

Thanking you,


/True Copy/

tmr/304.

G. Nalan Pillai
SUPERINTENDENT
80.4.56
30.4.56

Appendix X

Department of Industries Labour and Cooperation Order No. 2911, dated 14th June 1956


11
16 JUN 1956

ABSTRACT

Harijan Welfare - Education - Malabar District - Ramakrishna Mission
Students' Home, Kallai - Construction of dormitory - Building
grant - sanctioned.

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIES LABOUR AND COOPERATION

C.O.No. 2911 dated the 14th June 1956
Read the following:

Letter from the Assistant Secretary, Sri Ramakrishna Mission
Kallai, Kozhikode dated 27th April 1956
Copy of Letter from the Collector of Malabar No. R.L. Dis.
S. 482/56 dated 27th April 1956
Letter from the Director of Harijan Welfare, No. L. Dis.
27174/56 dated 19th May 1956

ORDER

The Secretary, Sree Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode
has requested that a building grant may be sanctioned to the Students'
Home run by the Mission for the construction of a new dormitory
for Harijan students. The Students' Home is a hostel subsidised by the
Harijan Welfare Department. The Mission is reported to have started the
construction of the dormitory in order to provide facilities to the
boarders before the reopening of the schools. The Director of Harijan
Welfare has reported that half the estimated cost of the new dormitory works
out to Rs. 9,600/-. The Government sanction, as a special case, a
building grant not exceeding Rs. 9,600/- (Rupees nine thousand and six
hundred only) to the Mission for the construction of the dormitory, even
though the Mission has started the construction of the building.

2. The expenditure will be debited to "47. Miscellaneous Departments -
Harijan Uplift. & Development schemes (i) Schemes included in the Five Year
Plan - I, Harijan Welfare Department - C. Communities eligible for help
by the Harijan Welfare Department - Education - 9. Grants-in-aid - Other
grants".

3. The Director of Harijan Welfare is requested to make necessary
provision for this expenditure while submitting proposals for reappropriation
of funds for 1956-57.

/ By order of the Governor/

G.G.Reddi,
Secretary to Government.

To
The Secretary, Sree Ramakrishna Mission, Kallai, Kozhikode.
The Director of Harijan Welfare, Madras I
The Collector of Malabar.
The Accountant General through Finance
The Accountant General by name.

/ true copy /
/ forwarded/ by order/

D. Nuthan Pillai
Superintendent
15.6.56.

1 GRao 146

Source: Regional Archives, Kozhikode.

Appendix XI

Flood Relief Report of Ramakrishna Mission

Phone: (033) 2654-1144, 1180, 5700.
Fax: (033) 2654-9885.
E-mail: relief@rkmm.org
Website: www.belurmath.org



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

(Relief Section)

P.O. Belur Math, Howrah
West Bengal – 711 202, India

FLOOD RELIEF SERVICES IN KERALA – A BRIEF REPORT

An extraordinary southwest monsoon lashed Kerala with incessant torrential rains and forced the state to release excess water from most of the dams resulting in flooding of all the major rivers, landslides and loss of hundreds of lives, livestock and property. In response to the grim situation, the following centres are conducting primary flood relief services:

Kalady: Incessant rains and flooding of the Periyar (Purna) river has wreaked havoc in the Ernakulam district. Flood waters had entered our Ashrama premises and some portions of it were under 3 feet of water. The situation turned further grave owing to lack of electricity and connectivity. On 15th August, the local authorities made the Ashrama's school a relief camp and more than 1800 local people were provided food and shelter in it for 7 days. The centre provided milk to small children and medical aid to patients at the camp. The centre has so far distributed 16,790 kg rice, 1679 kg dal, 300 kg coconut oil, 979 kg assorted spices, 1679 kg salt, 1100 kg sugar, 4108 bed-sheets, 30 towels, 4185 plastic mats, 4185 buckets, 4185 mugs, 4108 jugs, 4185 bars of bathing soaps, 4185 tubes of toothpaste, 8216 toothbrushes, 1174 vials of antiseptic liquid and 500 mosquito-coils among 4108 flood-affected families in Ernakulam district from 10 to 27 August. *Relief distribution is continuing.*

Koyilandy: In response to the flooding of various parts of Kannur district, **Koyilandy** centre has distributed 9793 kg rice, 2935 kg dal, 288 kg semolina, 3054 packets of snacks, 72 kg tea leaves, 508 kg sugar, 342 litres of water, 150 dhotis, 1669 lungis, 302 shirts, 798 T-shirts, 171 trousers, 1289 saris, 891 ladies' garments, 43 children's garments, 1578 bed-sheets, 1446 towels, 288 tarpaulins, 220 bowls, 220 lids, 1320 packets of candles, 135 kg of nutrition mixture, 618 bars of bathing soap, 576 sanitary items, 107 vials of antiseptic liquid, 288 buckets and 288 mugs among 1492 flood-affected families in Kannur and Kozhikode districts from 14 to 2 September. *Relief distribution is continuing.*

Kozhikode: **Kozhikode** centre distributed 7300 kg rice, 1420 kg dal, 880 packets of biscuits, 10 kg milk powder, 3 kg tea leaves, 10 kg sugar, 17510 bedsheets, 1755 lungis, 5442 shirts, 5442 T-shirts, 1800 ladies' garments, 100 assorted garments, 6612 bars of bathing soap, 13224 bars of washing soap, 6612 tubes of toothpaste and 13224 toothbrushes among 2120

flood-affected families in Wayanad and Kozhikode districts from 16 August to 13 September. *Relief distribution is continuing.*

Tiruvalla: In response to the flooding of various parts of Pathanamthitta district, **Tiruvalla** centre distributed 2386 kg rice, 485 kg flour, 111 kg vermicelli, 971 kg dal, 2067 packets of biscuits/rusks, 55 packets of baby food, 25 kg tea leaves, 971 kg sugar, 765 litres of drinking water, 721 dhotis, 261 lungis, 344 T-shirts, 610 saris, 1259 ladies' garments, 200 assorted garments, 1386 bed-sheets, 1305 towels, 1274 mats, 683 buckets, 100 cooking pots, 100 ladles, 181 tumblers, 281 plates, 100 kg bleaching powder, 1432 bars of bathing soap, 181 bars of washing soap, 300 other sanitary items, 181 mugs, 181 packets of candles, 181 packets of matchboxes, 306 toothbrushes, 206 tubes of toothpaste, 404 umbrellas, 404 wipers, 81 mosquito-coils and other materials among 1484 flood-affected families in Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts from 16 to 26 August. *Relief distribution is continuing.*

Coimbatore Mission: In the wake of flooding in various parts of Palakkad district, **Coimbatore Mission** centre distributed 8999 kg rice, 1785 kg dal, 953 kg assorted vegetables, 1726 litres of edible oil, 7430 kg assorted groceries, 2150 buns, 2583 packets of biscuits, 1883 kg sugar, 1522 blankets, 187 gents' garments, 85 ladies' garments, 92 children's garments, 1937 mats, 460 water pots, 1491 sets of utensils (each set containing 2 pots, 1 *karahi*, 2 ladles, 5 plates, 2 tumblers and 1 mug), 649 kg bleaching powder and 1990 plastic bags among 2499 flood-affected families in Palakkad and Idukki districts of Kerala from 19 August to 6 September.

Thrissur: **Thrissur** centre gave shelter to 324 flood-affected persons at the relief camp in its higher secondary school from 14 to 23 August. Further, it distributed 5032 kg rice, 110 kg cereals, 629 kg dal, 395 kg semolina, 130 litres of cooking oil, 384 kg assorted spices, 301 kg salt, 559 kg tea leaves, 2 kg coffee powder, 2 kg milk powder, 1624 kg sugar, 1211 packets of biscuits, 1375 blankets, 1688 saris, 1241 lungis, 447 trousers, 894 assorted garments, 1688 towels, 1241 mats, 464 pillows, 1879 bars of bathing soap, 1432 bars of washing soap, 1241 buckets, 638 tubes of toothpastes, 638 toothbrushes, 382 candles, 191 matchboxes, 223 litres of phenol and 447 sanitary items among 2114 flood-affected families in Thrissur district from 23 August to 1 September.

Kochi: **Kochi** centre distributed 3400 kg rice, 1380 kg dal, 165 litres of edible oil, 1050 kg assorted spices, 430 kg salt, 35 kg tea leaves, 680 kg sugar, 1110 ladies' garments, 820

dhotis, 240 T-shirts, 590 assorted garments, 680 bed-sheets, 680 towels and 680 plastic mats among 990 flood affected families in Ernakulam district from 20 August to 9 September.

Coimbatore Math: Responding to the flooding of various parts of Palakkad district, **Coimbatore Math** centre distributed 4800 kg rice, 720 kg dal, 680 kg onions, 288 kg of assorted spices, 720 kg salt, 235 litres of edible oil, 225 kg tea leaves and 720 kg sugar among 720 flood-affected families in Palakkad and Malappuram districts of Kerala from 21 to 27 August.

Pala: In response to the flooding of various parts of the Kottayam district, the **Pala** centre served 510 chapattis to 60 families and distributed 725 kg rice, 220 kg dal, 20 kg flour, 10 kg rice powder, 20 coconuts, 120 kg sugar, 120 kg salt, 4 kg of assorted spices, 2 kg tea powder, 270 packets of snacks, 500 ladies' garments, 500 lungis, 500 bedsheets, 70 bars of bathing soap, 70 bars of washing soap, 50 packets of washing powder, 770 towels, 70 toothpastes, 70 toothbrushes and 50 vials of oil among 845 flood-affected families in Kottayam and Ernakulam districts from 18 August to September.

Haripad: In the recent flooding of various parts of Alappuzha district our centre in **Haripad** was also inundated and its monastic member had to take shelter in our *Kayamkulam* centre. Despite the challenging circumstances, the centre distributed 2610 kg rice, 634 kg dal, 763 litres of edible oil, 522 kg salt, 522 kg sugar, 2181 litres of drinking water, 522 blankets, 522 saris, 522 lungis/dhotis, 522 bed-sheets, 317 towels, 317 mats, 317 mosquito-repellents, 317 phials of antiseptic liquid, 522 packets of matchboxes, 522 utensil sets (each set containing a tumbler, a mug, a plate and a bucket), 522 bars of bathing soap, 281 kg of bleaching powder and 317 litres of phenol among 522 flood-affected families in Haripad from 27 to 30 August.

Kayamkulam: On account of flooding of various parts of Alappuzha district our centre in **Kayamkulam** distributed 2200 kg rice, 200 kg dal, 200 kg semolina, 200 kg potato, 200 kg onion, 200 kg salt, 100 bedsheets, 200 towels, 100 buckets, 100 mugs and 100 mats among 400 persons in Alappuzha district from 15 August to 10 September.

September 15, 2018

Belur Math, Howrah

Swami Bodhasarananda

(Assistant General Secretary)

For detailed reports and photos, please visit: <http://media.belurmath.org/category/service/relief>

Source: Belur Math, Kolkata, West Bengal.