

**THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL  
JUSTICE:  
MALABAR (1882-1947)**

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*submitted to the University of Calicut*  
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*By*

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**THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:  
MALABAR (1882-1947)**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled, **THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: MALABAR (1882-1947)**, submitted for the award of the Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Calicut is a record of bonafide research carried out by Sri. P.M. ISMAEL, under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree before.

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## **DECLARATION**

I, P.M. ISMAEL, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, **THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: MALABAR (1882-1947)**, is a bonafide record of research work done by me under the supervision of Dr. K.J. JOHN, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any other degrees.

C.U. Campus,

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BGEM	-	Basel German Evangelical Mission
CDS	-	Centre for Development Studies
CPI	-	Communist Party of India
CSP	-	Congress Socialist Party
DMRT	-	Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust
FNR	-	Fort Nightly Reports
HSS	-	Harijan Sevak Sangh
ICSSR	-	Indian Council of Social Science Research
KPCC	-	Kerala Provincial Congress Committee
KRA	-	Kerala Regional Archives
KTC	-	Karnataka Theological College
MLA	-	Madras Legislative Assembly
MLC	-	Madras Legislative Council
NNPR	-	Native News Paper Reports
SIS	-	Servants of India Society
SNDP Yogam	-	Sree Narayana Dharma paripalana Yogam
TNA	-	Tamil Nadu Archives

## **PREFACE**

The present study "The Quest for Social Justice: Malabar (1882-1947)" deals with the historical processes by which the polluting and depressed classes of Malabar emerged from the age long caste tyranny and social oppressions perpetrated by the dominant communities. It examines the structural changes that took place in the Malabar society which resulted in the growth of public sphere. It is to be noted that colonial modernity, missionary discourses, socio-religious reform activities, nationalist struggle and the leftist class struggles enabled different sections of people to organise vigorous campaigns against the caste-ridden society which perpetuate social inequality. The elites thus emerged from the dominant castes, found it imperative to address the situations of marginality when the polluting castes like Tiyas decided to disassociate themselves with the anti-imperialist struggle. The study highlights the limitations of the dominant communities to launch an all-out struggle against social injustices. Gandhiji's perception of untouchability as a Hindu problem which the Hindus alone had to address and solve within the community limits put restriction on the struggle for social justice. But the impact of the reform movements forced the elite to look into the problems of social justice with a secular vision. At the same time the reform movements failed to give due attention to the economic grievances of the polluting and depressed classes. The study also focuses on the growth of depressed class consciousness and their efforts to address issues of marginality independently of the dominant discursive practices. It forces the present study to concentrate on the diametrically opposite visions of social justice pursued by the dominant groups and the low castes. Here attempt is made to highlight the struggles organised by the low castes to

enter the contested terrain of public sphere and their effort to carve out an autonomous sphere in the society. The study also highlights the role of class organisations in inverting the traditional power relations. The effective use of popular militancy and the class wise mobilisation of the people brought the depressed classes to the arena of public activity. It strengthened the public sphere, the quest for social justice and the secularisation of the society.

The pattern of documentation followed in the study is in the conventional style. At times 'Note No.' is used when two or more works of the same author is referred to in the same chapter. In such instances the author's name will be accompanied by a foot note number pertaining to the specific book of the same author already referred to in the same chapter. It is hoped that there would be no difficulty in following the method adopted here.

I am deeply indebted to a number of individuals and institutions who supported me in the course of my research. The first and foremost name I must extend my deep sense of gratitude is to Dr. K.J. John, former Head of the Department of History, University of Calicut, who supervised this work. He not only encouraged me but also initiated me into historical studies. Without his support and inspiration this work would not have been possible. Another person whom I must remember with utmost gratitude is my colleague, Dr. P. Mohandas. His encouragement, suggestions, comments and criticisms helped me a lot in preparing this thesis. My heartfelt thanks are due to Dr. K. Gopalankutty, Professor and Head, Prof. K.N. Ganesh, Prof. T.M. Vijayan and Sri. K.S. Madhavan, of the Department of History, University of Calicut.

I am also grateful to my friends, faculty members and colleagues in Govt. College, Kasargode and K.M.M. Govt. Women's College, Kannur for their love, encouragement and support rendered to me. Discussions with Dr.V.C.Sreejan, Dr. P. Chandramohan, Prof. Ashokan Mundon, Dr. P.P.Abdul Razak, Dr. Vasu Thilleri and Dr. E.K. Swarnakumari have benefited me a lot in formulating my thesis and I am grateful to them. I am thankful to Dr. Stella Joseph, Smt. K.S. Ammukkutty, K.P. Rajesh, Shihabuddin, Ramdas and many other friends for their valuable help. I am also thankful to the University Grants Commission for awarding me a Teacher Fellowship for completing this thesis.

I acknowledge with gratitude the service rendered to me by the staff of National Archives, New Delhi; Tamil Nadu Archives Egmore, Chennai; Regional Archives, Kozhikode; K.T.C. Archives, Mangalore; Mathrubhoomi Office Kozhikode; Librarian and Staff of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; ICSSR Library, New Delhi; Theosophical Library, Beasant Nagar, Chennai; Appan Thampuran Library, Trichur; AKG Centre, Thiruvananthapuram; M.N. Smarakam, Thiruvananthapuram; Kerala University Library, Thiruvananthapuram; Department of History Library and C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut; Paral Public Library, Kodyeri; Grameena Vayanasalas in Morazha, Perunthaleri, Chengalayi.

Above all I am deeply indebted to my family members for their constant inspiration, support and suffering throughout the course of my studies.

**P.M. ISMAEL**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The present study "The Quest for Social Justice: Malabar, 1882-1947" deals with the historical processes by which the polluting and depressed classes of Malabar emerged from the age long caste tyranny and social oppressions perpetrated by the dominant communities. It examines the structural changes that took place in the Malabar society and the response of different caste groups, particularly the low castes to colonial modernity, missionary discourses, socio-religious reform activities, nationalist struggle and the leftist attempt to invert the power relations in the society through class struggles. It also tries to unravel the growth of depressed class consciousness and their efforts to address issues of social equality and justice against the backdrop of the movements noted above. Along with this, an attempt is also made in this work to delineate the putative efforts of the polluting and depressed classes to address such issues independently of the dominant discursive practices. It also forces the present study to concentrate on the diametrically opposite visions of social justice pursued by the dominant groups and the low castes. The efforts of the low castes to enter the contested terrain of public sphere and their attempt to carve out an autonomous sphere of social activity to secure equal status in the society

necessitates a hermeneutical study of themes like social justice, public sphere and low castes.

### **The concepts of Social Justice, Public Sphere and Low Castes**

Social justice refers to the concept of a society in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, rather than merely the administration of law. It is generally thought of as a world which affords individuals and groups fair treatment and an impartial share of the benefits of society. It can also refer to the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within a society. Most individuals wish to live in a just society, but different groups professing distinct ideologies have different conception to what a just society actually is.

Social justice is also a concept that some use to describe the movement towards a socially just world. In this context social justice is based on the concept of human rights and dignity.

Many things intersect to form the context of social justice – ethical ideas of the people, laws, the evolving nature of claims, institutional issues relating to the delivery mechanisms of justice, ideas about rights and entitlements, ideas among the people about the responsibility of the government towards them etc. All these make the social context, social form and the social site of justice.

Thus we can witness various forms of social justice in reality – social claim as justice, attainment and restoration of dignity as justice, end to discrimination as justice, protection of the vulnerable sections of society as justice and finally autonomy as justice. Situations of marginality also necessitates the quest for social justice. Lack of access to means of representation/resources/survival and hereditary discrimination creates the problem of marginality.

In the traditional Malabar society the low caste people were the marginalised groups. They were denied access to the social, political and economic resources of the society. But the structural changes that took place in the Malabar society with the establishment of colonial supremacy slightly altered the situation. It gave opportunities to the polluting and depressed classes to articulate their views. The hereditary discrimination suffered by the marginalised groups forced them to search for alternatives in the changing social scenario. It was in this way the quest for social justice became a lively issue in the lower caste social consciousness.

Colonial hegemony over Malabar also contributed to the gradual development of the public sphere<sup>1</sup> as elsewhere in India. It has been argued

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussion of public sphere and its relation to the private sphere see Jurgan Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois society*, Tr. by Thomas Burger, Cambridge, 1989; Sandira Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Oxford University Press, hereafter OUP, New Delhi, 1990. Habermas says that in any consideration of the public sphere its relation to the private sphere cannot be

that colonial rule created a public sphere but left the private sphere free for the native elites.<sup>2</sup> In the colonial dispensation the public sphere was to be governed by British laws pertaining to areas like land relations, criminal law, laws of contract and of evidence. At the same time, the colonial state was reluctant to encroach upon the private sphere of the two major religious communities including their personal law and caste rules.<sup>3</sup>

The gradual growth of the public sphere and its governance through the British administrative apparatus and the judicial institutions enabled the low caste people to pursue their struggle for social justice. Interaction with the changing social scenario also forced them to see the British as their benefactors against the oppressive *varna* ideology.<sup>4</sup> It also forced them to

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neglected for it is in its relation to the private sphere that the public is itself defined and given shape (p.2). Sandira Freitag made distinction between the public sphere of Western Europe conceptualized by Habermas and what she terms the 'public arena' in India.

<sup>2</sup> Amir Ali, "Evolution of Public sphere in India" *Economic and Political Weekly*, hereafter EPW, Sameeksha Trust, Mumbai, Vol. XXXVI, No. 26 June 30 – July 6, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The reference to the *varna* system can be traced back to the vedic texts. The first three *varnas* (*Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* and *Vaisya*) are called *dwijas*. The fourth *varna* - Shudra - was meant to serve the other three *varnas*. The Brahmanical scriptures stated that once *Karma* and not birth that decided his *varna*. The *varna* system gave birth to caste system in which the caste of an individual was decided by his birth. Hence the flexible *varna* system was replaced by the rigid caste system. The period from c.500 BC to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. is widely regarded by the historians as the period of the formation of Indian caste system and its supporting ideology. "Caste in Indian History", Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History, Towards a Marxist Perception*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2000 p. 169. Throughout medieval India, the caste system remained an important pillar of class exploitation as there was an undoubted connection between caste and power. See Debi Chatterjee, *Up Against Caste*, New Delhi, 2004, Anil Bhatt, *Caste, Class and Politics*, Delhi, 1975, p. 23. Nicholas Dirks highlights the existence of entrenched caste identities much before the

make introspection into their position in the society vis a vis colonialism and the dominant groups. Such an attempt enabled them to evolve a 'new self' against the dominant perceptions. The critique of the 'low caste' status began in this way.

Low caste means the untouchable communities in the caste-hierarchy. Untouchables were persons of a discrete set of low castes, excluded on account of their extreme collective impurity from particular relations with higher groups in the hierarchy. In the Malabar society all the castes below the *Nairs* were treated as untouchables. They were *avarnas* i.e., people outside *varna* system. They had no position in the *varna* ideology. Among the untouchables, the *Tiyas* enjoyed considerable upward mobility on account of their success in imbibing the benefits of colonial modernity. Colonial trade and commerce, the growth of urban centres and colonial education also

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establishment of colonial policy though he tried to demonstrate that colonialism made caste the central symbol of Indian Society. For details see Nicholas B Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the making of Modern India*, Delhi, 2002. Dipanker Gupta in his well known essay on "continuous hierarchies and discrete castes" disagree with Louis Dumont's emphasis on caste as a single system based on consensual ideology of hierarchy. See Dipanker Gupta, *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and differences in Indian Society*, New Delhi 2000, Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, Delhi 1988. Gupta, on the other hand insist that castes ought to be treated as discrete units that have distinct ideas about legitimate social ranking that may not necessarily be consensual or even mutually compatible. Caste system evolved in Kerala with the establishment of Brahmin hegemony. See Elamkulam P.N. Kunhan Pillai, *Elamkulam Kunhan Pillayude Tiranjedutha Krithikal - Part I*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 2005, pp. 511-515. Raghava Varier, Rajan Gurukkal and K.N. Ganesh trace the evolution of caste system in Kerala to the expansion of agrarian society and the growth of new occupations. For details see Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *Kerala Charithram*, Mal., Vallathol Vidyapeetam, 1991, p. 88, K. N. Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innalekal*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, pp. 195-196.

contributed to their rise in the social scale. But they also suffered lot of disabilities. Dominant discourse referred them as *avarnas*.

Those below the *Tiyas* in the caste hierarchy suffered the worst form of discrimination. Dominant groups, used base names to describe them like 'Outcastes', 'Depressed classes', *Chandalas* 'Exterior castes' etc. Nationalists who followed the Gandhian tradition used to describe them with the glorified term '*Harijan*'. The term 'scheduled castes' appeared for the first time in April 1935, when British Government issued the Government of India (Scheduled caste) Order specifying certain castes, races and tribes as scheduled castes. But the low caste people questioned and rejected both the *savarna* nomenclature and the colonial ethnographic categories. This was not merely to contest dominant ascriptions of their identities but also more importantly, to question the notion of impurity and pollution attached to their community, identity and history. The depressed classes preferred the term '*Adidravida*' denoting their pure past and pure identity.<sup>5</sup> It was also an attempt to carve out an independent sphere of existence and an effort to evolve a 'new self' against the dominant discourses.

The term '*Dalit*' means 'ground down', 'oppressed' or 'broken to pieces'. Though it was used occasionally by B.R. Ambedkar and his associates from 1928 onwards, it gained currency from 1970's with the emergence of the Dalit

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<sup>5</sup> *Madras Legislative Council*, hereafter *MLC Debates*, Vol. IV, pp. 2047-2051.



Panther Movement in Maharashtra.<sup>6</sup> It implies a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on account of their lowly birth.

In the present study, the term 'polluting caste' and '*avarnas*' are used to denote those who are below the *Nairs* in the social hierarchy, especially the *Tiyas*. The terms 'depressed classes' and '*Adidravidas*' are used to denote those at the bottom level of the traditional pyramidal society including *Cherumas*, *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Nayadies*. Though the aboriginal and hill tribes like *Marathis*, *Mavilan*, *Karimbalan*, *Kurchiyas*, *Paniyas* etc., also belong to the category of depressed communities, the activities among these sections are not included in the study mainly on account of the following reasons. Firstly, these tribes retain certain peculiar customs and practices which differ fundamentally from the customs and practices of the depressed classes noted above. Secondly, most of them lived in areas of isolation with hunting and shifting cultivation. Their interaction with the hierarchical caste society was not as pronounced as that of the depressed classes in the plains. Similarly the institutions and movements that developed among other polluting castes like *Kammalas*, *Vaniyas*, *Chaliyas* and *Mukkuvas* (occupational groups) are not included in the study. At the same time it is to

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed analysis of the 'Dalit' consciousness See John C.B. Webster 'who is a Dalit', in S.M. Michale, ed., *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi, 1999 pp 68-77. Also see Anupama Rao, "Representing Dalit Selfhood" *Seminar* No 558, Rameshraj Trust, New Delhi, February 2006.

be noted that the struggle for social justice initiated by the numerically superior *Tiyas* contributed to the upward mobility of these sections.

So the present study concentrate on the efforts of the polluting and depressed classes of Malabar like *Tiyas* and *Adidravidas* to achieve social equality and justice in the context of social movements, institutions, ideologies and political struggle which contributed to the social transformation. It also tries to delineate the varying perceptions on social justice articulated by the dominant groups as well as the polluting and depressed classes.

### **Review of Literature**

At the outset itself, it is to be stated that historians, anthropologists and sociologists have delved into the traditional customs and practices of distinct groups in the Malabar society. The foreign notices, ethnographic studies and census reports form an important stream of literature dealing with social customs, practices and institutions.<sup>7</sup> The reports published by the Basel

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<sup>7</sup> See Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, Trans., Henry E.S. Stanley, London, 1886. Sheik Zainuddin, *Tuhfat ul Mujahiddin*, Tr. M.H. Nainar, Madras, 1942. Francis Buchanan, *Journey From Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1988. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of East Indies*, London, Vol. II, 1807, Ludovico D. Varthema in H.K.Kaul, *Travellers in India*, Delhi, 1988, Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. I, Reprint, Madras 1989. Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremoies*, Oxford, 1897. *Census of Madras Presidency*, 1871, Madras, 1874. Ward and Conner, *A Descriptive Memoir of Malabar*, Reprint, Thiruvananthapuram, 1995. Herman Gundert, *Malayalam Dictionary*, Mangalore, 1872. William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, New Edition, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000.

German Evangelical Mission from Mangalore, the innumerable articles and reports published in magazines, journals and newspapers like *Shivayogivilasam*, *Shivayogavilasam*, *Abhinavabharatam*, *Atma Vidya Kahalam*, *Mitavadi*, *Gajakesari*, *Mathrubhumi*, *Malayala Manorama*, *The Hindu*, *Unninambudiri* and *Prabhatham* also gives us information on the customs and practices of the people. This has been supplemented with the indigenous literature.<sup>8</sup> Though the different streams of literature differs in emphasis of the details of customs and practices, all of them agree on the prevalence of extreme form of untouchability, caste system and the institution of agrestic slavery. The indigenous *Brahminical* literature also refers to the *janmam-kanom-pattom* mode of land relations, the *jati maryada* and the transaction of *adiyar* etc. Indigenous scholars have utilised the literature left by the foreign travellers and ethnographers and the Brahmanical literature to arrive at their own conclusions regarding heirarchy and dominance in the society.<sup>9</sup>

The customs and practices of the traditional society have been dissected in a big way in the recent years by the indigenous scholars and those from abroad. This should be delineated against the background of the immense academic output on caste system and untouchability, the two focal

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<sup>8</sup> M.R. Raghava Varrier, ed., *Kerolpathi Grandhavai, Kalathunadu Tradition*, Calicut University, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> C. Achutha Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Eranakulam, 1911. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *Cochiyryja Charitham*, Trichur, 1912. T.K. Gopala Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk*, Madras, 1900. P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathompatham Noottantile Keralam*, Mal., Kottayam, 1988.

points of Indian social formations. This left us with a variety of competing theories on the origins of caste and untouchability and the evolution of the two in the regional specificities of this vast country.<sup>10</sup> The peninsular region of the country, particularly Malabar, also became an area of immense interest to the sociologists, anthropologists and historians of both indigenous and international streams.<sup>11</sup>

The structural changes that took place in the Malabar society has also been studied from various perspectives by the scholars. The economic transformation of Malabar in the age of colonialism and the changes which took place in the agrarian structure is one such genre of literature. The seminal contributions of scholars like K.N. Panikkar, P.K. Michael Tharakan, K.K.N. Kurup, K. Ravi Raman, T.C. Varghese and P. Radhakrishnan are the

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<sup>10</sup> See a. J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India*, Oxford, 1963.

b. Louis Dumont, *op.cit.*

c. Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power*, Berkley, Los Angels, 1965.

d. M.N. Sreenivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1966.

e. Nicholas B. Dirks, *op.cit.*

f. Dipankar Gupta, *op.cit.*

g. Irfan Habib, *op.cit.*

h. Debi Chatterjee, *op.cit.*

i. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, New Jersey, 1993.

j. Vivekanand Jha, "Stages in the History of Untouchables", *Indian Historical Review*, hereafter *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1, July 1975, pp. 14-31. "Candala and the Origin of Untouchability", *IHR*, Vol. XIII, 1986-87, pp. 1-36.

k. Suvira Jaiswal, "Varna Ideology and Social Change", *Social Scientist*, New Delhi, Vol. 19, Nos. 3-4, March-April, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> See M.S.A. Rao, *Tradition, Rationality and change*, Bombay, 1972. C.J. Fuller, *The Nayars Today*, Cambridge, 1976. Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, New Delhi, 1976. P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Caritam*, Mal., Trivandurm, 1974. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *op.cit.*

few works in this category.<sup>12</sup> Studies on socio-religious life also have been brought out, but the number is not very substantial compared to the economic changes and land relations.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the missionary activities in Malabar, we have some works dealing with the activities of the Basal Mission in Malabar. Jayaprakash Raghavaiah analysed the industrial investments of the Basel Mission and its impact on social transformation.<sup>14</sup> The anti-caste ideology of the Basel Mission and its efforts to introduce modern western education are discussed in detail by K.K.N. Kurup,<sup>15</sup> Wilma John and a host of other scholars.<sup>16</sup> With reference to the Catholic missionary activities in Malabar the writings of the Church historians gives us insight into their activities.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See K.N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State – Religion and Peasant uprisings in Malabar, 1836 – 1931*, Delhi, 1989.

P.K. Michael Tharakan, "Development of Colonial Economy in Kerala (1850-1957)" in P.J. Cherian, ed., *Perspectives on Kerala History*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999. K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry, Nationalism and social change in India*, Allahabad, 1991, *Modern Kerala*, New Delhi, 1988.

K. Ravi Raman, *Bondage in Freedom: Colonial Plantations in Southern India*, Working Paper No. 327, CDS, Thiruvananthapuram, March, 2002.

T.C. Varghese, *Agrarian Changes and Economic Consequences: Land tenures in Kerala, 1850-1960*, Calcutta, 1970.

<sup>13</sup> M.S.A Rao, *op. cit.*

G. Lemoncinier, *Religion and Ideology in Kerala*, Trans Y. Rendel, Delhi, 1984.

P. Bhasakaranunni, *op.cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Jayaprakash Raghavariah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara. 1834-1914*, New Delhi, 1990.

<sup>15</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, Basel Mission and social change in Malabar with special Reference to Dr. Gundert in K.K.N. Kurup and K.J. John, eds., *Legacy of Basel Mission and Herman Gundert in Malabar*, Calicut, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Wilma John, "Basel Mission and Socio-Economic Revolution in Malabar" in K.J. John, ed., *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, Cochin, 1981. Also see Murkoth Kunhappa, 'Heritage of Basel Mission in Malabar' in the same book.

<sup>17</sup> D. Ferroli S.J., *The Jesuits in Malabar*, Bangalore, 1939. Bishop Maxwell Noronha, "The Diocese of Calicut", *Ibid.* Fr. Joseph Tafferel, *Fr. Peter Caironi*,

The activities of the socio-religious reform movements has been studied by scholars. But the emphasis is on the dissemination of reformist ideology and the growth of social consciousness among different sections of the society.<sup>18</sup>

The growth of Nationalism and Social change in Malabar also received the attention of scholars. But most of the works concentrate on the efforts of the elites to propagate nationalist ideology. Here the emphasis is on the 'upliftment' of the depressed classes by the nationalists to achieve counter hegemony in the struggle against imperialism.<sup>19</sup> The activities of the leftists in Malabar also received the attention of scholars. But the emphasis is on class mobilizations. Efforts were also made to focus on the issue of social justice though highlighting the communist strategy of struggles for property redistribution and economic egalitarianism.<sup>20</sup> Recently some attempts were

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*A Missionary indeed, A Missionary in deed*, No publication details available.  
*Sabdam-Mahadjanma Sathabdi Smaranika*, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> P. Chandra Mohan, "Popular culture and Socio-Religious Reform : Narayana Guru and the Ezhavas of Travancore " in *Studies in History*. Vol. 3, No. 1, 1987, pp. 57-74. M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making: A study of Sahodaran Ayyappan*, Palghat, 1993.  
K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*, New Delhi, 1988.

<sup>19</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Cognressum Keralavum*, Mal., Reprint, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986. P.K.K. Menon, *History of Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Reprint, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001.  
K. Gopalan Kutty, "Radical Movements in 20<sup>th</sup> century Malabar" in P.J. Cherian, *op. cit.*, K.J. John, "History of Freedom Movement in Malabar" in S. Raimon, ed., *History of Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Vol. III, Thiruvananthapuram, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> N.E. Balaram, *Keralathile Kammyunistu Prasthanam*, Mal., Vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1973.  
E.M.S. Nambudirippad, *Kammyunistu Party Keralathil*, Mal., 3 volumes, Trivandrum, 1984-88.

made to locate the rise of communism in Malabar through launching an egalitarian crusade against inequality by caste elites and shoring up religion in the country side.<sup>21</sup>

In this entire range of historical literature on social customs, institutions, practices and social change in Malabar, one looks in vain for a single contribution with primary focus on the issue of struggle for social justice with emphasis on the perceptions of the polluting and depressed classes. What these literature share in common is the belief in the 'upliftment' of the depressed classes rather than looking at the issue from the 'emerging self' of the underlings in the society. Hence, the gradual growth of the autonomous sphere of resistance of low caste people and their struggle for entry into the contested sites is the focus of the present study. The impact of colonial modernity, missionary discourses on social issues, perceptions of reform movements, nationalists critique of colonialism and caste inequalities, the leftist attempt to invert the traditional power relations are analysed against the background of the 'emerging self' of the lower orders of the society. The effective use of popular militancy though became a lore in the leftist strategy of struggle, the study also focus on its significance in changing the social relations.

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K.P. Kannan, *Of Rural Politarian Struggles : Mobilisation and organisation of Rural Workers in South – West India*, Delhi, 1988.

<sup>21</sup> Dilip M. Menon, *Caste Nationalism and Communism in South India: Malabar, 1900 – 1948*, OUP, 1994.

## **Organisation of Study**

The present study is arranged thematically overlooking at times the chronological sequence of events, institutions and movements. There are six chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter 'Colonialism and Structural Changes in Malabar' examines the changes in the traditional customs, practices and perceptions in the context of colonial penetration. It tries to analyse the upward mobility of polluting castes like *Tiyas* in the backdrop of changes in the production relations and the advent of colonial modernity. It also tries to examine the gradual growth of public sphere in Malabar and the frustrations and prospects of different groups to the changes in the society. The chapter try to highlight the significance of the growth of composite culture of subaltern groups in the factories, work sites and plantations parallel to the elitist culture of the western educated and the necessities faced by both sections to work in the direction of achieving social justice.

The second chapter, 'Missionary Discourses on Social Justice' primarily deals with the anti-caste ideology upheld by Christian missionaries of Protestant Basel Mission and the Jesuit missionaries of Catholic faith. It tries to analyse the emergence of Christian community from different caste groups and the efforts of the missionaries to mitigate the evils of caste from the Christian communion. Comparative study of the Church in Malabar with



that of converted Christians in the native states and other parts of Madras Presidency brings to light the success of missionaries in Malabar to eliminate the evils of caste from its followers. The role of education, modern hospitals and industrial establishments in creating a common space and the upward mobility of polluting castes like *Tiyas* through acquiring education from the mission schools are highlighted. It also try to evaluate the material assistance given by the Jesuit missionaries of the Chirakkal Mission to the depressed classes and their efforts to bring this section on an equal footing with the higher ups in the society.

The chapter 'Reform Movements and Social Mobility' focus on the impact of the reform movements on the caste fabric of Malabar society. It also try to highlight the response of elites of different caste to social customs and practices. Various efforts were undertaken by the reform movements to protect human dignity and social justice. The critique of caste and obsolete practices undertaken by the reformers of Kerala origin inspired the socio political activists in the succeeding days. At the same time the limitations of the reform movements to address the material and moral grievances of the depressed classes has been given due attention. It is to be noted that the reformists succeeded in influencing the vision of the elites of both dominant castes and untouchable communities, but succeeded only partially in presenting concrete programmes for ensuring social justice to the lowest strata of the society. The chapter also focusses on the enduring influence of

the reformers in the socio-political agitations of the later years and the long term objective of secularisation of society.

The fourth chapter 'Nationalist, Intervention in the Social Sphere of Malabar-Different Perspectives' tries to examine the changing perception of nationalist elites to social issues in the context of anti-imperialist struggle. This became extremely significant because in Malabar also, as elsewhere in the Madras Presidency, caste and its resolution seem to have influenced political activity far more than nationalism. The constant fear expressed by elites from polluting castes to nationalist political activity forced the later to take up social issues in a vigorous manner. This made Malabar the main centre of temple entry agitations in India. The chapter also tries to highlight the limitations of Gandian discourses on untouchability especially in the regional context of Malabar. Though the domineering influence of Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle against untouchability is given due consideration, attempt is also made to highlight the secular tradition of social reform permeated to the Malabar society. It even forced the caste elites to distance from the Gandhian perceptions on social justice. It is to be noted that the people of Malabar went beyond the Gandhian conception and took up the campaign against untouchability and segregation as a social problem rather than a religious problem. The activities of local level organisations in the struggle for the secularisation of society is also given due consideration. The unique strategy evolved by Swami Ananda Thirtha in addressing issues of social inequality and the attitude of Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust

(DMRT) and *Harijan Sevak Sangh* to injustices prevailed in the society are also discussed. The chapter also focusses on the gradual distancing of both radical nationalists and the depressed classes from the Gandhian strategy of struggle for socio-religious equality.

The next chapter 'Leftist Movement in Malabar and the struggle for Social Justice' primarily focus on the role of class organisations in the struggle for social equality. The inversion of traditional power relations through the mobilisation of peasantry, working class, youth and aided school teachers and their attempt to incorporate the polluting and depressed classes to their fold is given due attention. The chapter also highlight the impact of mass *mishrabhojanams* and the forceful entry to the contested sites; particularly the display of popular militancy by the underlings in the society. It also tries to delineate the influence of class organisations in shaping a secular culture.

The final chapter 'Polluting Castes and the Quest for Social Justice, tries to examine how the polluting and depressed classes developed their own strategy of struggle for achieving social equality and justice. Here a differentiation is made in the tactics employed by the polluting castes like *Tiyas* and the depressed classes below them in the social hierarchy with regards to occupying the contested sites. The comparatively better position of the *Tiya* elites enabled them to challenge the power relations articulated by the dominant groups in a better way than the depressed classes. They forcefully entered the public spaces right from the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century. The question of discrimination in the government offices, educational institutions, jobs and representative institutions became the focal point of community mobilisation of the *Tiyas*. The Chapter highlights the transition that took place among majority of *Tiyas* from community consciousness to class consciousness. As regards the depressed classes, an attempt is made to trace the gradual evolution of the depressed class consciousness. It is to be noted that the perception of social justice articulated by the depressed classes differ fundamentally from that of the caste elites. The chapter also highlights the contradiction in the strategies and tactics employed by the depressed classes vis a vis the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* of the Caste Hindus in the struggle for social justice. The depressed classes struggle for social acceptance concentrated mainly on claiming due share in representation, resources and means of survival as steps to overcome the situations of marginality. An attempt is made in this context to highlight the efforts undertaken by the depressed classes to ally themselves with the class organisations of the leftists. How far this alliance helped the struggle for social justice is the focus of this study.

The concluding chapter sums up the study.

### **Sources for the Study**

As regards the sources, the foreign accounts, ethnographic notes, census reports and traditional *Brahminical* narratives are used to analyse the traditional structure of the society. The Annual Reports of the Basel German

Evangelical Mission preserved in the Karnataka Theological College Archives are utilised to trace the activities of the Basel Mission in Malabar. The writings left by Jesuit Missionaries constitute an important source of information to the study of catholic missionary activities. The biographies and autobiographies of the socio-political activists of Malabar are profusely used to delineate their role in the struggle for social justice. The souvenirs, journals, books and newspapers published by the socio-religious reformers are used to trace their perceptions on the issue of caste system and untouchability. Special mention may be made about the collected works of Vaghatananda, the works of Shivayogi published by Alathur Siddhashramam and the works of Sivananda published by Siddhasamjam, Badagara. The back volumes of Journals and newspapers like *Mitavadi*, *Mathrubhumi*, *Manorama*, *Unni Nambudiri*, *Prabhatam*, *Deshabhmani*, *Shivayogi Vilasam*, *Shivayoga Vilasam*, *Abhinava Bharatam* and *Athma Vidya Kahalam* have been used as primary sources. The primary sources available at National Archives and Nehru Memorial Library Delhi, Tamil Nadu Archives at Chennai, Regional Archives at Kozhikode also have been tapped. The books, journals and magazines available at Theosophical library, Beasant nagar, Chennai; Appan Tampuram Library, Trichur, Kerala University library, Trivandrum; A.K.G. Centre and M.N. Smarakam at Trivandrum, ICSSR library at New Delhi, C.H. Mohammed Koya library, Calicut University, Department of History Library, Calicut University, Paral Public Library (Kodiyeri) and Private Collections have been utilised. Interviews with the depressed classes of

various parts of the erstwhile Chirakkal taluk also furnished lot of information. But the oral history thus collected is closely scrutinised with corroborative evidences from the print media and autobiographical sketches.

The pattern of documentation followed in the study is in the conventional style. At times 'Note No.' is used when two or more works of the same author is referred to in the same chapter. In such instances the author's name will be accompanied by a foot note number pertaining to the specific book of the same author already referred to in the same chapter. The Malayalam terminologies are given in italics and their corresponding meaning in English has been given in brackets. A separate glossary of such terms has also been given.

## CHAPTER I

# COLONIALISM AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN MALABAR

Malabar had come into the hands of the English East India Company under the terms of the treaties signed with Tippu Sultan at Seringapattanam in 1792. On the north it was bounded by the South Canara District, on the south by the Princely state of Cochin, and on the east by the Western Ghats. The area was at first administered by the commissioners and supervisors of the Bombay Presidency. In 1800 Malabar was handed over to the Madras Presidency. The Malabar district of the Madras Presidency covers an area of 5794 square miles.<sup>22</sup> Malabar in this study means the British Malabar, one of the districts in the Madras Presidency, directly under the rule of the British.

Ecologically and geographically Malabar (the entire Malabar coast including South Canara) occupies a unique position in the sub continent. Ecological and geographical factors greatly influenced the pattern of settlement. Because of the undulating nature of the terrain, the paddy fields are scattered among hills and hillocks with the result that small holdings of paddy fields and garden lands with houses (*purayidams*) came into existence. The availability of water in almost all fields irrespective of the nature of the land helped the development of individual occupation.

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<sup>22</sup> *Census of Madras Presidency*, 1871, Vol. I, Madras 1874, p. 346.

Under colonial rule Malabar society slowly and steadily underwent a transformation parallel to that of the Indian Society. The economic, political and ideological interventions of the colonial agent radically altered the caste based social ensemble of Malabar from early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The overt as well as covert incursions of the coloniser into the caste domain from 1800 onwards were, by and large, a direct fall out of their economic, political and cultural designs in the region.<sup>23</sup> The changes that were ushered in thus, drastically altered the living conditions of almost all social groups and classes. Thus Malabar was also brought under the orbit of colonialism in which the basic control of the economy and society were in the hands of the colonial masters.<sup>24</sup> The emergence of a national market attuned to colonial trade had, by and large, a calamitous effect on the artisans and peasantry while a tiny middle class consisting of the colonial salariat and professionals along with the commercial and trading elites experienced considerable upward mobility. To evaluate the transformation and the forces that worked behind it and to assess the impact of it, an understanding of the transition from pre-colonial society to the colonial society is imperative.

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<sup>23</sup> D. Damodaran Nambudiri, "Caste and Social Change in Colonial Kerala" in P.J. Cherian, ed., *Perspectives on Kerala History*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 426.

<sup>24</sup> Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 26. Prof. Bipan Chandra made an indepth study on the subordination of Indian Economy to the world capitalist economy under colonial rule.



## Pre-Colonial Social Landscape of Malabar

Pre-colonial Malabar society was a caste dominated society, where the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* or ruling chieftains,<sup>25</sup> the *Ambalavasis* or intermediary castes and the *Nairs* constituted the political and social elites.<sup>26</sup> They had religious, political, military and judicial responsibilities. The predominance of the *Brahmin* community over the rest of the society in Malabar, to a great extent, originated with their ownership of land.<sup>27</sup> The traditional *Brahmanical* literature - *Keralolpathy* - expounded the theory that all land belonged to the *Brahmins* and they obtained it from Lord Parasurama.<sup>28</sup> The *Brahmanical* prose narratives also have references about *Brahmins* settling *sudras*,<sup>29</sup> *maryada* (customary laws), *janmamaryada*, *janmam* and the transaction of *adiyar*.<sup>30</sup> '*Kerala Jatinirnayam*', another work of the *Brahmanic* tradition also refers to the formation of caste, system of landgrants and *Brahmin* ownership of land.<sup>31</sup> Though these claims are legendary, facts are available in support of

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<sup>25</sup> It is to be noted that the *Brahmins* of Kerala, as elsewhere in India, prepared the geneology of chieftains and attributed *Kshatriya* status to them. For details see Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kerala Charithram*, Mal., Vallathol Vidyapeetam, 1991, pp. 225-256. M.N. Sreenivas also highlights the process of some *Nairs* "ripened" into *Samanthas* and *Kshatriyas*. For details see M.N. Sreenivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, New Delhi, Reprint, 2005, pp. 37-39.

<sup>26</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry, Nationalism and Social change in India*, Allahabad, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Raghava Varier, M.R., ed., *Keralolpathi Grandhavari*, Calicut University, 1984, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>31</sup> K.S. Madhavan, "Self Perception of Jati in Pre-colonial Keralam", in P.K. Poker, ed., *Calicut University Research Journal*, Nov. 2001, p. 33.

it. In Malabar majority of the landlords were *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* were installed in an economically powerful position, by the *Janmi* system in which they enjoyed *Janmam* rights.<sup>32</sup>

*Brahmins* distributed the land among *Nairs* under the tenure known as *Kanam*. Parasurama brought *sudras* (*Nairs*) from outside and instructed them to follow the matrilineal system and protect the interest of the *Brahmanas*.<sup>33</sup> To live for *Brahmanas* and cow and bringing the barren soil under cultivation were attributed as the duties of the *Sudras*.<sup>34</sup> Acquisition of economic power by becoming the owners of the chief means of production (land) and 'the ritualistic subordination of lower castes through the practice of *jatimaryada* (caste duties)<sup>35</sup> elevated the *Brahmins* to the position almost of Gods in the society. Any legislation of British government in Malabar to deprive them of the *janmam* right over landed property was resented by the *Brahmins*. They claimed and established that *Devaswam* properties were set apart for the maintenance of their temples and they were the proprietors of these landed property.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Elamkulam P.N. Kunhanpillai, *Elamkulam Kunhanpillayude Tiranjedutha Krithikal*, Mal. Part I, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005, pp. 574-613.

K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innalekal*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, pp. 118-153.

Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-211.

<sup>33</sup> M.R. Raghava Varier, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> K.S. Madhavan, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> O.M. Narayanan Nambudiripad, Welcome Speech, Twentieth Annual Conference of Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha, Angadipuram, Quoted in *Mathrubhumi*, December 27, 1928.

*Brahmins* followed the *makkathayam* system of inheritance. Since the partition of the property among the family members would lead to the fragmentation of the holdings, the law of primogeniture was strictly followed by them. Only the eldest son was allowed to marry within the caste.<sup>37</sup> Others were allowed only to have concubinary relations with *Nair* women without any cares and obligations of matrimony.<sup>38</sup>

*Brahmins* were also the custodians of the *Dharmasastras*.<sup>39</sup> They were the law givers and interpreters. In all important civil and criminal cases they were at liberty to give judgements as *Vaidikars*.<sup>40</sup> In spiritual matters including the methods of worship they were the masters. They enjoyed the monopoly of scriptural knowledge. The dominance of the *Brahmins* over the castes inferior to them was extended to the claim that *Nair* women should put off the cloth covering the upper part of the body while offering prayers at the *Brahmanical* temples.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> V.T. Bhattatiripad, *Kanneerum Kinavum*, Memoirs – Mal., Kottayam, 1970, p. 46. Also see E.M.S. Nambudiripad, *Keralacharithram Marxist Veekshanathil*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, p. 212.

<sup>38</sup> C. Achutha Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam, 1911, p 193. Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, Trans., Henry E.S. Stanley, London, 1886, pp. 105-106.

<sup>39</sup> K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *Cochirajya Charitram II*, Trichur, 1912, p. 640.

<sup>40</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathonpatham Noottantile Keralam*, Mal., Kottayam, 1988, pp. 723-804.

<sup>41</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 12, 1924.

The fourfold *varna* system<sup>42</sup> in its entirety never existed in Malabar. The *Vaisyas* or their counterparts were non-existent in the social scale of Kerala.<sup>43</sup> The *Sudras* were the *Nairs* distinguished into higher and lower sections. The *Brahmins*, the intermediary castes and the *Nairs* constitute the caste Hindus - *Savarnas* - in the Malabar society. They account for 24.3 percentage of the Hindu population of Malabar in 1871.<sup>44</sup>

The *Nambudiris* designated the *Nairs* as *Sudras*. Logan says that the *Nairs* were treated as *Kshatriyas* in the traditional society.<sup>45</sup> The *Nairs* were the traditional militia and they awarded capital punishments for the violation of caste rules.<sup>46</sup> They became the tenants of the *Nambudiris* and used to sublet their holdings to the *Ezhavas* or to employ the *Pulayas* as serf labourers.<sup>47</sup> The alliance with the *Brahmins* did not deliver the *Nairs* from all their disabilities. The *sambandam* relation of the *Brahmin* with the *Nair* women did not bring them the benefits of a proper marriage and instead, they

<sup>42</sup> The *Varna* System or model has been studied from different angles by historians and sociologists. For details see Suvira Jaiswal, "Varna Ideology and Social Change", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, March-April 1991.

M.N. Sreenivas, *Caste in Modern India*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 63-69.

<sup>43</sup> M.S.A. Rao, *Tradition, Rationality and Change*, Bombay, 1972, p. 118.

<sup>44</sup> *Census of the Madras Presidency*, 1871, Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 346

<sup>45</sup> William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, New Edition, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 116.

<sup>46</sup> This has been noticed by the foreign travelers who visited Kerala. See for details Duarte Barbosa, *op.cit.*, p. 7; Shaik Zainuddin, *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahidin*, Tr. M.H. Nainar, Madras 1942, pp. 47-50; Francis Buchanan, *Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. II, Reprint, New Delhi, 1988, p. 410; Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of East Indies*, Vol. II, London, 1807, p. 108; Ludovico D. Varthema in Kaul H.K., *Travelers in India*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 423-24.

<sup>47</sup> George Woodcock, Kerala, *A Portrait of Malabar Coast*, London, 1967, p. 102.

along with their children became unprotected and desolate. Almost all sections of the *Nair* community followed the matrilineal descent system.

Below the *Nairs* in the social hierarchy were the *Tiyas*. Since the *Nairs* were recognised as the '*Sudra*' caste, the *Tiyas* accordingly belonged to the '*avarna*', that is, outside the varna system.<sup>48</sup> The *Tiyas* were heterogeneous in economic as well as in social status.<sup>49</sup> Most of them were subtenants or landless labourers - usually working under the high caste landlords belonging to the *Brahmin* and *Nair* communities. Yet, there were wealthy landowners among them. In Calicut the *Tiya* family of Kallingal Madam were big landlords second only to *Zamorins*. They owned ships and were engaged in foreign trade with countries like China.<sup>50</sup> They were given the title of '*Moopan*' by the *Zamorin*.<sup>51</sup> Similarly the royal family of Kadathanad used to appoint members of the *Tiya* family as masters in their courts.<sup>52</sup> The *Tiyas* also specialised in traditional Ayurvedic medicine and Astrology and were conversant in Sanskrit literature, which was normally regarded as the purview of the higher castes.<sup>53</sup> Concerning the social hiatus, it should be mentioned

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<sup>48</sup> The upper castes from *Nambudiris* to *Nairs* were referred to as '*savarna*'.

<sup>49</sup> For details see P. Bhaskaranunni, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-377.

*Tiyas*, *Billavas* and *Ezhavas* belong to the same category. They were referred to as *Ezhavas* in south and central Kerala including Palghat district and Valluvanad region and *Tiyas* in north Malabar.

<sup>50</sup> K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan*, Biography – Mal., Kottayam, 1971, pp. 39-40.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making, A Study of Sahodaran Ayyappan*, Palakkad, 1993, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. I, Reprint, Delhi, 1975, p. 94.

that *Ezhavas* in the Palghat were considered lower than other *Tiyas*. This type of differentiation within the community made C. Krishnan, the *Tiya* leader of Calicut, to be doubtful about the success of the idea of organising the *Tiya/Ezhava* community in the entire west coast. C. Krishnan also pointed out that the north Malabar *Tiyas* looked down upon those from the south.<sup>54</sup> Though such differentiation existed, in the caste ensemble of Malabar the *Tiya* community as a whole had only a low occupational and ritual status.

Below the *Tiyas* and other similar castes came those who were without land, who had to toil to make both ends meet. They deserved to be called the depressed classes in every sense. They include people like *Cherumas*, *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Nayadis*, etc. The *Cherumas* or *Pulayas* were the agrestic slaves who were maintained by their masters on a Spartan fare for centuries to keep them subsisting with body and soul together.<sup>55</sup> Logan reported that the population of *Cherumar* as per the census taken in 1857 was 187,812.<sup>56</sup> “The caste is very scantily clad; in many places the men do not wear cloth at all round their waists, but substitute for it a fringe of green leaves. Their women used at one time to go similarly clad, but this practice has fallen into disuse in Malabar”.<sup>57</sup> The house of the agrestic slave - the *Cheruman* - is *Chala*.<sup>58</sup> Being attached to the soil they were in bondage like the cattle and greatly

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<sup>54</sup> K.R. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>55</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

below them in estimation. Left to the care of nature they got no sympathy from sickness or in old age or redemption from poverty. Francis Buchanan noticed that "the greater part of the labour in the field is performed by the slaves, or *Cherumar*. They are the absolute property of their *Devarus*, or Lords, and may be employed in any work that their masters please. They may be sold, or transferred in any manner that their master thinks fit".<sup>59</sup> Edgar Thurston also noticed that the *Cherumar* were "with their full consent, bought and sold and hired out ...".<sup>60</sup> The *Cherumar* had no right to reach near the places where the caste Hindus move. Nor did they have the right to worship the Gods whom the caste Hindus worship.<sup>61</sup>

Another section of the depressed class was the *Parayas*. They also were bound to the soil as the serfs and agricultural labourers. The manufacture of wicker, bamboo mats and cadjan umbrellas were their occupations. Their houses were situated away from the residential quarters outside the ordinary village limits, and were called *Cheries*.<sup>62</sup> They were everywhere the menial servants of the country, and whenever they reside they have allotted to them a separate place on the outskirts of the village, called *Pariacheri*, or *paraya* village, as their near presence would be pollution to the Hindus .... The poor *Paraya* has met with nothing but scorn and contumely

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<sup>59</sup> Francis Buchanan, *op.cit.*, p. 370.

<sup>60</sup> Edgar Thurston, *Ethenographic Notes in Southern India*, Reprint, Madras, 1989, p. 446.

<sup>61</sup> Francis Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

<sup>62</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

at the hands of Hindu castes in no way more entitled to consideration than himself".<sup>63</sup> In most cases they were denied the right to cultivate the soil for their own benefit and were destined to do any menial labour of hardest nature for other castes for a minimum wage. They were always ill treated and beaten up at pleasure by their masters. They also have only scarcest means to have food and clothing. They went about almost naked or at best clothed in the most hideous rags.

The most revolting thing about the *Parayas* was the nature of their food. As Abbe Dubois put it, "they contested with jackels, dogs and crows for carrions, and took away the semi-putrid flesh to their home to share among themselves without any rice or anything else".<sup>64</sup> The French missionary also brought the meditation of Christian morality coupled with Eurocentric historical perception when he says that 'even the helots of Sparta were a better placed community in society when compared to the ill fated, despised creatures known as *Parayas*'.<sup>65</sup> Like *Cherumas* and other depressed classes, the *Parayas* also had no access to the deities of caste Hindus or even to the shrines of lower castes like *Tiyas*. They were also denied entry into the residential areas of upper sections or even the public places.

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<sup>63</sup> *Census of the Madras Presidency*, 1871, Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 168.

<sup>64</sup> Abbe Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, Oxford, 1897, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



The *Nayadis* were another group of outcastes in Malabar. In the scale of pollution the *Nayadi* holds the lowest position.<sup>66</sup> Logan found the prescribed pollution distance attributed to *Nayadi* as 72 feet;<sup>67</sup> the maximum of the distance of atmospheric pollution. Francis Buchanan also noticed that even the *Cherumans* did not touch them.<sup>68</sup> But they were a tiny population as far as Malabar was concerned. According to the census report of 1921 there were only 417 *Nayadies* of whom 200 were males and 217 females.<sup>69</sup>

The foregoing description reveals the overall nature of the Malabar society at the time of British colonial intervention. It is clear that the Malabar society was hierarchical in nature. The *Brahmanas* occupied the summit of the hierarchy. The communities below them were in servitude to them with variation in degree and enjoyed concessions and disabilities corresponding to it. All were attached to the soil in different capacities; as *Janmis*, *Kanakkar*, *Pattakkar*, *Verumpattakkar*, *Adiyar*, etc. In this scenario the *Brahmanas* and the *Brahmanic* upper castes (*savarnas*) were the surplus earners and the polluting and depressed classes were the labourers and bonded slaves.

Slavery was an elemental institution of that society. Colonial administrators and ethnographers pointed out that in Malabar the communities

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<sup>66</sup> Edgar Thurston, Note No. 39, p. 447.

<sup>67</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>68</sup> Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-414.

<sup>69</sup> *Madras Legislative Council*, hereafter *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXIII, p. 790, KRA, Kozhikode.

of *Cherumas* and *Parayas* were condemned to perpetual slavery.<sup>70</sup> The colonial discourse on slavery was contested by the indigenous scholars. But they also brought to light the presence of large mass of agrestic bonded men called *adiyar* at the bottom, who remained as bonded untouchable labour force.<sup>71</sup> The *adiyars* were attached to the soil as permanent slaves by birth. They formed an integral part of the landed property and the owner was vested with the power to sell them in any manner that the master think fit. Such a condition prevailed in Malabar upto the end of the colonial rule.<sup>72</sup> Usually a husband and wife were not sold separately, but children may be separated from their parents, and brothers from their sisters.<sup>73</sup> The price of slave varied from place to place with the change in the crop pattern of different regions. Though the right to kill a slave had ceased to exist by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the deed of transfer clearly stipulated that "you may sell or kill him or her". In Malabar the *adiyar* were not employed as domestic servants or personal attendants. This was because of the notion of *theendal* and *thodil* (unapproachability and untouchability).

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<sup>70</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 176, Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 493, Thurston, No. 39, p. 441-453.

<sup>71</sup> Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *op. cit.*, also see Raghava Varier, *Madhyakala Keralam*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, pp. 23-32.

<sup>72</sup> *Mathrubhumi* - October 29, 1927; May 20, 1933., Representation of Depressed Classes to the Governor of Madras in Law, General, dept GO.No. 3543 dated 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode. G.O. No. 661, Law, General, dated 5.10.1948, KRA, Kozhikode. Also see C.H. Jayasree, 'Slavery in Colonial Malabar' in Kesavan Veluthat, ed., *Advances in History*, Calicut, 2003, p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

Pollution by touch, approach or sight was practiced by the Malabar society.<sup>74</sup> The concept of pollution and purity were the central features of the caste system in India right from its inception<sup>75</sup> and Malabar practiced the most virulent form of untouchability.

Pollution was practiced to preserve the exclusiveness of a community from that below it. The *Brahmins* being the 'pure race' could not pollute others but could only be polluted by others for above them there was no community. All other communities save the one at the bottom were capable of being polluted and polluting at once. The memorial submitted by the *Brahmin* inhabitants of Palghat in the course of *Kalpathy* agitations is a clear testimony to the *Brahmanic* perception of pollution by touch or approach. It says: "In Malabar except for high caste Hindus distance pollution is observed, the distance varying in proportion to the class to which the individual belongs. This social custom is not confined to the *Brahmin* or even the high caste Hindus but is observed even by a low class man against an individual of still lower class. This distance pollution is not only confined to men but applied

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<sup>74</sup> *Theendal* was a peculiar and notorious custom prevailed in Kerala. Gundert's *Malayalam Dictionary* (1872) and Logans *Malabar Manual* defines it as atmospheric pollution. (*Nayadi* at 72 feet, *Pulayan* at 64, *Kanisan* 36, *Mukkuvan* 24 ...). Thurston also gives us valuable information about it. Distance pollution, to which it is usually referred, means that a low caste person pollutes a higher caste not only by touch but by approaching him within a specific distance. Indigenous literature and foreign notices have detailed description on *theendal* and *thodil*.

<sup>75</sup> The vast historical, sociological and anthropological scholarship on the origin and evolution of caste system in India agrees to this point though they differ in the details.

with greater force to temples, tanks and even dwelling houses".<sup>76</sup> Even towns and market places were considered to be defiled by the approach of certain communities like *Cherumans* and *Nayadies*.<sup>77</sup> Logan also writes: "The Hindu malayalee is not a lover of towns and villages. His austere habits of caste purity and impurity made him in former days flee from places where pollution in the shape of men and women of low caste met him at every corner; and even now the feeling is strong upon him and he loves not to dwell in cities".<sup>78</sup>

In Malabar unapproachability was so keenly observed that the common expression of spatial measurement were *Thiyappad*, *Cherumappad*, etc. indicating the distance equivalent to that within which a *Tiyan* or *Cheruman* was not allowed to approach a caste Hindu. Among the dominant castes, the approach by a *Nair* to a *Brahmin* was permissible but he must not touch the *Brahmin*. While a *Tiya* had to keep 36 paces off from both *Nair* and *Brahmin*, the same *Tiya* was polluted by the approach of a *Pulayan*.<sup>79</sup> Foreign notices of late medieval Kerala and the colonial reports say that the pollution rule was so strictly observed that "anyone daring to pass on within pollution distance of a *Nair* would be cut down at once".<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> L.S.G Department, 1925, Mis., Series GO.No. 206 L and M dated 20.01.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>77</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>79</sup> J.H. Hutton, *Castes in India*, Bombay, 1963, p. 79. Whereas C. Achutha Menon's *The Cochin State Manuel*, pp. 195-196, stipulates 24 feet as *Tiyas* distance pollution *vis a vis savarnas*.

<sup>80</sup> Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 410, Barbosa, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143. Alexander Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 109, Ludovico Varthema, *op. cit.*, pp. 423-424.

The concept of pollution by touch or approach was the chief source of almost all disabilities suffered by the depressed classes. As noted earlier, the caste Hindus imposed restrictions on the polluting and depressed classes not only in their houses and temples, but even public roads and other public places were closed to them. This has been attested by foreign notices and colonial ethnography. Alexander Hamilton writes: "If a *poulia* (Pulaya) or *teyvee* (*Tiya*) met a *Nair* on the road, he must go aside to let his worship pass by, lest the air should be tainted ...".<sup>81</sup> Barbosa says that, "in the kingdom of Malabar there are 18 sects of Gentiles, each one of which is much distinguished from the others in so great a degree that the ones will not touch the others under pain of death or dishonour or loss of their property".<sup>82</sup> Logan's description of the denial of public places to the untouchables gives us more insights into the problem. He says, "in passing from one part of the country to another, they (the *Cherumans*) tramp along through the marshes in mud, and wet often upto their waists, rather than risk the displeasure of their lords and masters by accidentally polluting them while using the public roads".<sup>83</sup> The survey of the literature brings into our mind the strategy evolved by the *savarna* community to retain the producing *adiyar* class at the bottom of the social hierarchy and to distance them from the fruits of their labour.

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<sup>81</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>82</sup> Barbosa, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>83</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 148. Such a condition existed in Malabar even during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See *Mathrubhumi* December 16, 1924.

Pollution and purity percolated down to the worship pattern and the belief system also. *Brahmins* and other *savarna* classes controlled the temples and its immense property - *Devaswam* - for their own benefits. They worshipped deities like *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Vigneswara*, *Subrahmanyam Sasta* or *Ayyappan*, *Hanuman*, *Bhagavathy*, etc. and officiated as priests. The *Ambalavasies* or intermediary castes assisted the *Brahmins* in the performance of rituals. The *Nairs* also visited the temples and offered prayers. Though the *Nairs* had the right to worship the higher deities; they had no right to adore them by ringing the bell or to do homage to the deity from the *Namaskaramandapam*.<sup>84</sup> This clearly reveals the intermediary position of the *Nairs* in the caste hierarchy.

The lower castes like *Tiyas* have their own religious institutions and practices. They were not allowed to worship in the temples of the *savarnas*. In the *kavus* (sacred grove) and *kazhakams* of the *Tiyas*, they performed *pattu* (song) festival, *pooram* festival, *perumkaliyattam*, etc. The *Teyyam* or *Teyyattam* was a popular cult especially among the lower castes of Malabar. It had incorporated different forms of worship like the cult of mother goddess spirit worship, serpent worship, hero worship, tree worship, animal worship,

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<sup>84</sup> Enlightened *Nairs* all over Kerala began demanding equal treatment with *Nambudiris* in worshipping the temple deities in the 1930's. Instances of brutal assault for ringing the bell and offering prayer at the *Namaskaramandapam* was reported from Guruvayur where P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan were the victims. Similar incidents took place at places like Pilicode, Taliparambu, Narath etc. For details see A.K. Gopalan, *Ente Jeevitha Katha*, Autobiography - Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p. 37. Also See *Mathrubhumi*, December 22, 27 and 31, 1931 and February 16, 1932.

ancestor worship and gramadevata worship. Besides, it also incorporated large number of Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses into it.<sup>85</sup> The adoration with the sacrifice of cocks or fowls was a speciality of the *Teyyam* cult and *kavu* tradition. In the festivals and rituals of the lower castes like *Tiyas*, the consent of the *savarnas* was essential. For that they made traditional present of betel leaves and arecanuts with *fanams* (coins).<sup>86</sup> Besides, they also have to present customary offerings to the Brahmanical temples at a distance without having the privilege of offering prayers in a decent manner.<sup>87</sup> This infact reveal the degraded ritual status of the *Tiyas* in the caste hierarchy of Malabar.

The depressed classes like *Pulayas*, *Parayas* , *Nayadis*, etc. worshipped evil spirits like *Pysachi*, *Paradevata* and *Malaidaivam*.<sup>88</sup> They were not permitted to reach the vicinity of either the *savarna* temples or the religious institutions of the *avarnas*. At the same time they have to offer *fanams* (coins) and other valuables to the temples and *Tiya* shrines. In many of the *savarna* temples and *avarna* institutions, stone slabs were placed at a

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<sup>85</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero worship*, Calcutta, 1975

<sup>86</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Aryan and Dravidian elements in Malabar Folklore*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1977, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> The *Tiya* newspaper *Mitavadi* published series of articles written by *Tiya* notable which exhorted the community to abstain from such temples which shut down its doors to *Tiya* pilgrims. The campaign for the boycott of *Savarna* temples was also part of the attempt to build up community solidarity against the dominant discourse. See various articles in *Mitavadi* 1913-1919.

<sup>88</sup> Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 414-528.

distance (*adimakkallu*) to receive the valuable offerings of the depressed classes.<sup>89</sup>

The *savarna* domination was not restricted to the practice of *theendal* and the ritualistic domination. On the otherhand one can notice hierarchy and difference in food, drink, clothing and the like. Food and drink together with clothing and housing constitute the ground floor of material life, a level of history that changes only slowly overtime. This famous conclusion of Fernand Braudel, which lies at the very heart of his theory of the *longue duree*,<sup>90</sup> is applicable to the traditional Malabar society also. Here the hegemony of the *Brahmanical* life world was clearly visible in customs, usages and the language. Logan says: "The home itself is called by different names according to the occupants caste. The house of a *Paraya* is *cheri*, while the agrestic slave - the *cheruman* lives in a *chala*. The blacksmith, the goldsmith, the carpenter, the weaver, etc. and the toddy drawer (*Tiyan*) inhabit in homes styled *pura* or *kudi*, the temple servant resides in a *variya*m or *pisharam* or *pumatham*, the ordinary *Nair* in a *vidu* or *bhavanam* while the

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<sup>89</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi* Nov. 1, 1932; April 11, 1933; October 29, 1933. Large number of reports highlighting the resistance of depressed classes to pay '*adimakasu*' has been reported in the subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* daily. The procedure of offering '*adimakasu*' has been described by host of modern writers. In fact one of the agenda of the reformist movement in Malabar was empowering the underlings in the society against paying their money to those institutions whose doors were closed to them. For detailed description of this see A.M. Abraham Ayirukuzhil, *Swami Anand Thirthi: Untouchability Gandhian solution on Trial*, Translated by K.C. Varghese, Taliparamba, 1986, pp. 110-112.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in K.N. Chaudhary, *Asia before Europe*, Cambridge 1990, p. 151.



man in authority of his caste dwells in an *idam*, the Raja lives in a *kovilakam*, the indigenous *Brahmin* (Nambudiri) in an *illam*, while his fellow of higher ranks calls his house *mana* or *manakkal*.<sup>91</sup> Logan continues, "that all the excellences are the birthright of the Nambudiris, and that whatever is low and mean is the portion of the lower orders of the society. A *Nair* speaking to a Nambudiri must not call his own food "rice" but "stony or gritty rice", his money he must call his "copper cash" and so on."<sup>92</sup> Similar usages were customary in the case of polluting and depressed classes when speaking to higher ups in the *jati* hierarchy.<sup>93</sup> Likewise lower orders were not allowed to use quality wood or tiles for covering the houses; nor even "permitted to build houses or huts on the ground nor to inhabit the plains where there is corn ground but must dwell in woods and build on the heights of trees like birds, with grass and straw".<sup>94</sup> The clothing of the depressed classes was "only little straw made fast before their privities".<sup>95</sup> Logan also reports: "The caste (*cheruma*) is very scantily clad; in many places men do not wear cloth at all round their waists, but substitute for it a fringe of green leaves".<sup>96</sup> As K.N. Panikkar put it, these distinctions in dress, language and even food fostered sectoral identities based on caste, serving as channels for conveying ideas of

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<sup>91</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>93</sup> Barbosa, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>96</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

mutual exclusiveness.<sup>97</sup> The administrative ideology of the colonial state and the missionary discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century interacted with this *Brahmanical* perception of society and the untouchable life world. This interaction contributed substantially to the emergence of a new social milieu which was based on social equality and justice.

### **Colonial intervention in the Traditional Malabar Society**

The administrative measures and economic policy of the British reacted with the traditional Malabar society. After initial experiments, the British had eliminated the native chieftains from their political responsibility. They also had created a new bureaucracy that would work well to serve their interests. What they achieved through this system was supreme political dominance over the landlords and caste Hindus who had hitherto exercised a decisive control over the administration of the territory. At the same time the British were particularly cautious not to interfere with the social customs of the people. This was in conformity with the British policy of neutrality in caste affairs that they followed throughout the Indian empire.<sup>98</sup> Yet the administrative measures of the British sowed the seeds of change in the socio-economic and cultural topography of Malabar.

### **Land Revenue Administration**

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<sup>97</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *Communal Threat, Secular Challenge*, Madras, 1997, p. 26.

<sup>98</sup> P.N. Chopra, ed., *The Gazetteer of India, II, History and Culture*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 642.

From the very beginning extraction of agriculture surplus was the primary administrative concern of the colonial regime in Malabar. To achieve this, they devised a land revenue policy that would have a favourable balance with the administrators after meeting the expenses. While effecting land revenue settlement, they retained a good part of the old order with the aim of minimising the administrative expenses through utilisation of the traditional institutions of society.<sup>99</sup> As T.C. Varghese has put it, the British were interested to create and recognise a few customary superior right holders on land.<sup>100</sup> They also treated the *janmam* as absolute property right.<sup>101</sup> To ensure more revenue and to commercialise the agriculture, the British had to introduce western modes of revenue and tenurial system. By the commercialisation of agriculture they meant the conversion of land and the people tied up with land as commodity. At the same time the colonial authorities refused to bring about basic changes that would adversely affect the position of *janmies*. This was because of the British desire to base their power in an authority structure of native origin.<sup>102</sup> In actual practice there was not only the *janmi* or landlord between the cultivator and the state; but the whole pattern of tenurial relations, involving the sharing of products of the

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<sup>99</sup> M. Gangadhara Menon, *Malabar Rebellion, 1921-1922*, Allahabad, 1989, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> T.C. Varghese, *Agrarian Changes and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala, 1850-1960*, Calcutta, 1970, pp. 21-22.

<sup>101</sup> V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *Tenancy Legislation in Malabar, 1880-1970*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Calicut University, p. 56.

<sup>102</sup> A. Gangadhara Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

land between the members of a hierarchy according to customary regulations, was retained by the British, adding to it the share of the state.<sup>103</sup> The imposition of enhanced claims to the produce of the land<sup>104</sup> without affecting the *janmies* eventually turned out to be a powerful destabilising factor in the functioning of the traditional society. It also led to intense struggle on the part of peasants.

The peasants (*kanakkar*) started submitting petitions to the authorities demanding stoppage of *melcharth* and other arbitrary rights of the *Janmies*. Consequently the colonial Government was forced to issue the Madras Act No. 1 of 1887 which provided compensation for improvements made by tenants on leased lands. Similarly, the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 incorporated provisions for fair rent and fixity of tenure to the tenants. The failure of the colonial government to acknowledge the demands of the peasants resulted in the peasant mobilisations of the 1930's and 1940's cutting across caste and community lines. This mobilisation provided the food and fodder to those who struggled for the transformation of the society.

### **Trade, Industrial and Investment Policies**

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<sup>103</sup> T.C. Varghese, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-29.

<sup>104</sup> T.M. Thomas Isaac has calculated that in Malabar around 60 percent of the net agricultural income was paid out as rent or tax. See T.M. Thomas Isaac, "Some Aspects of Industrial development of Kerala", paper presented at the seminar, *Kerala: A Quarter Century After*, A.K.G. Centre for Research and Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1982.

Besides land revenue policy, the trade, industrial and investment policies of the colonial masters also affected the traditional fabric of the Malabar society. In Malabar, the company and some private individuals started plantations during the early decades of colonial rule itself using both 'free' and 'unfree' labour.<sup>105</sup> Though the growth of plantations and industries in Malabar was slow compared to the princely states, it resulted in the growth of a new economic order based on cash economy in the rural areas. The plantations attracted labourers belonging to different castes and communities. They not only worked together but also dined and lived together. This is testified by the report of the joint magistrate, Tellichery, which says that low caste people including *Tiyas*, *Cherumas*, *Kanakkans* and *Mappilas* live together in the coolie lines.<sup>106</sup> In such cases there was no room for caste discrimination or untouchability.

The industrial development of Malabar also was a slow process. The few industries that sprang up in Malabar during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were owned

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<sup>105</sup> K. Ravi Raman, *Bondage in Freedom: Colonial Plantations in Southern India, 1797-1947*. Working Paper No. 327, CDS, Thiruvananthapuram, March 2002.

P.K. Medieval Tharakan, "Development of Colonial Economy in Kerala, 1850-1947" in P.J. Cherian, *op. cit.*, p. 367.

Also see P. Mohandas, *A Historical Study of the colonial investments in Malabar and the Nilgiris in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Calicut University, 2005.

<sup>106</sup> Report No. L Dis 985/B dated 9.12.1926 from the Joint Magistrate, Tellicherry to the District Magistrate, Malabar reproduced in M.L.C. Debates, Vol. XXXVI, p 154.

by the Basel Evangelical Mission.<sup>107</sup> The mission started industries mainly to provide employment to the converts who have no other source of livelihood. In these industries the workers, mostly Christians converted from different castes worked together. Along with them, people belonging to different religious and social backgrounds not only worked together but also mingled with each other. Thus a new social space was created at the bottom level. The public and secular space created in the factories, and also in the plantations contributed to the social mobility of the people.

The commercial policy of the British contributed to the increase in the volume of trade both external and internal. The growth of trade and commerce and the gradual growth of industries resulted in the growth of urban centres. In these urban centres the *savarnas*-because of their caste inhibition as noticed by Logan<sup>108</sup> - were not at all active. This gave fresh opportunities for lower caste like *Tiyas* to accumulate profit. Jeffrey's study on Travencore pointed out that the trade in coconut products and liquor trade added to the prosperity of the *Ezhavas*.<sup>109</sup> The same picture can be applied to Malabar *Tiyas* also where Murkoth Ramunni, father of Murkoth Kumaran, was an influential figure in the toddy trade of North Malabar.<sup>110</sup> Some of the

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<sup>107</sup> For a detailed discussion on Basel Mission industries see Jayaprakash Raghavaiah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara 1834-1945*, New Delhi, 1990.

<sup>108</sup> Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>109</sup> Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 139-141.

<sup>110</sup> Murkoth Kunhappa, *Murkoth Kumaran*, Biography – Mal., Kottayam, 1975, p. 2.

*Tiyas* became wealthy by the supply of provisions, vegetables, toddy, etc. to the Europeans in their centres like Kannur, Thalassery, Kozhikode and Palakkad. Some of them also accumulated wealth through banking and money lending business.<sup>111</sup> The prosperity acquired through these economic activities enabled the *Tiya* middleclass to fight against defilement practices like untouchability and unapproachability.

But the impact of the colonial economic policy on the depressed classes of Malabar was not as bright as that of the *Tiyas* of the colonial urban centres. As noted earlier the company and the European planters employed slave labour in their plantations from the very beginning. But the *Janmam Kanom Pattom* mode of agrestic slavery with its specific cultural world was an obstacle to the free movement of agrestic slaves to the centres of new economic activities. So it was essential for the colonial system to detach the agrestic bonded labourers from the traditional agrarian relations. The ideology of utilitarianism and nascent capitalism also influenced the colonial masters. Christian missionaries also propagated the idea of liberation of slaves for their own evangelical motives. Compelled by these factors the Government of India abolished slavery in 1843. But this act had precious little impact until the opening up of large scale plantations in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In spite of the abolition of slavery in 1843, the practice of using slave labour

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<sup>111</sup> K.R. Achuthan, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41.

continued in Malabar upto the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>112</sup> But the cash wages paid to workers (exslaves) in the plantations helped them to shrug off the ties binding them to the traditional masters.

The transport and communication facilities introduced by the colonial regime also had tremendous impact on the society. The introduction of railway and the construction of roads, though began as an attempt to suck out the resources of the peripheral areas to the industrial needs of the metropolis,<sup>113</sup> had facilitated social, administrative and economic unification of the country. It also delivered a mortal blow to Hindu social order by rendering impossible the observance of the rules of caste and untouchability.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Colonial administrators and ethnographers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century like E.B. Thomas, William Logan, Edgar Thurston and others reported the existence of slavery even after the promulgation of the act of 1843. Logan says, "in 1852 and 1855 the traffic in slaves continued ... there is reason to think that they are still, even now, 1880, with their full consent, bought and sold, and hired out, although the transaction must be kept secret for fear of penalties of sections 370, 371, etc. of IPC ...". Logan *op. cit.*, p. 152.

The Report of the District Collector of Malabar regarding military recruitment during 1917-1918 also testify the practical existence of slavery, Recruitment File 1917-1918, KRA, Kozhikode. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century political activists like K. Kelappan, Keraleeyam and many others published articles on the practice of agrestic slavery. For details See *Mathrubhumi* May 20, June 17, 1933; April 22, 1938, June 4, 1938, August 5, 1939; Keraleeyan's article in *Prabhatam* August 29, 1938. The memorandums submitted by the depressed classes also highlighted the issue of slavery. See Law, General, Department, 1924, GO. No. 3543 dated, 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>113</sup> Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India": in *Karl Marx on India*, Aligarh Historians Society, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 48-49. Marx writes: "I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufacturers".

<sup>114</sup> A.R Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1976, p. 132.



The impact of modern transport and communication facilities - as harbinger of modernity has been well articulated by the Malayalam Press. *Malayala Manorama* of July 1, 1922 expect that "within ten years trains and motors will frequently pass through the heart of this land. Along with it took place the growth of cities and trade. ... The newly emerged hotels will attract the moneyed people irrespective of caste. This inturn will contribute to the decline of the practice of *theendal*".<sup>115</sup>

The construction of railway lines and roads had thrown open plenty of job opportunities. Here, the bulk of the labour force was supplied by the untouchable communities.<sup>116</sup> The cash wages given to them contributed to their social mobility. It also freed atleast a section of the people from the clutches of *savarna* landlords. The interaction with the white masters was a new experience to them. They found that the Europeans were not keen to observe the rules of pollution and purity. This new awareness strengthened their position vis a vis the upper caste people.

The growth of transport and communication facilities and the growth of trade and commerce resulted in the rise of towns. These modern facilities and institutions changed the immobile character of the society. The towns also necessitated the growth of tea shops and hotels. The depressed classes

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<sup>115</sup> *Malayala Manorama*, July 1, 1922.

<sup>116</sup> The existence of depressed class colonies in the railway purampoke confirm this. While interview the Dalits living in the railway land confirmed that their grandparents came and settled in these regions while they were employed in the railway construction work.

were not admitted to these places in the early years. But the struggle organised by them with the support of reformers and political activists yielded the result.

### **Colonial Judiciary and the Depressed Classes**

Dispensing justice to the conquered was another area which attracted the attention of the colonial masters. In pre-British days administration of justice was based on the *maryada* or custom of the land and *Brahmins* were the interpreters and law givers.<sup>117</sup> The British took over the responsibility of administration of justice from their hands and entrusted it with the civil and criminal courts established by the company. Each and every custom and practices of the people were examined in the new dispensation. Thus Malabar happened to be one of the largest inheritors of the grand system of British judicature based on the rule of law and strict sense of justice.<sup>118</sup> At the same time it should be born in mind that the colonial judiciary did not take a sympathetic approach to the cause of the depressed classes, to slavery, caste inequality, untouchability, poverty of the tiller of the soil, extremities of the caste tribunal etc. Even in judiciary the lower courts were controlled by the caste elites who were deaf to the most genuine grievances of the depressed classes. This is clear from the complaint raised by the enlightened sections of

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<sup>117</sup> P. Bhaskaranunni, *op.cit.*, pp. 725-802.

<sup>118</sup> C. Vasantha Kumari, *State and Social Change, The Role of Judiciary - A Case Study of Malabar, 1792-1940*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Calicut University, 2003, p. 16.

the depressed classes. They complained that "they did not get a fair hearing in courts except from European judges".<sup>119</sup> It was also pointed out that the 'litigants belonging to the depressed classes are not allowed to enter the courts and that they are examined while standing outside'.<sup>120</sup> Though the complaint was related to the courts in the (Madras) presidency, the situation in Malabar was worse as evidenced in the reports of the Malayalam newspapers like *Mathrubhumi*.<sup>121</sup> In spite of such genuine complaints, the introduction of uniform criminal procedure code applicable to all natives irrespective of caste status "happened to be good beginning to instil caste equality consciousness in radical minds in the succeeding years".<sup>122</sup> Though the immediate effect of the colonial system of judicature, which has "high sounding, complicated etiquettes and mannerisms"<sup>123</sup> was marginal; the avowed principles of the rule of law and strict sense of justice in the long run had the net effect of undermining the tyranny of *Brahmins* and other *savarnas* as interpreters and enforcing agency of law.

### **Colonial Salarial**

The gradual growth of colonial salariat was another factor in the social transformation of Malabar. In the pre-colonial Malabar polity, military and

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<sup>119</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XVI, p. 240.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>121</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 1, 1927, The failure to ensure justice to the depressed classes has been highlighted in the subsequent issues also.

<sup>122</sup> C. Vasantha Kumari, *op. cit.*, pp. 369-370.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

administrative functions were performed by the *Nairs*. The British, on the otherhand, recruited separate groups of soldiers from *Tiyas*, *Mappilas* and *Mukkuvans* and maintained them on regular payments.<sup>124</sup> The general policy of the British was to appoint natives from all castes and communities. They had declared in 1833 that no person would be disabled from holding any office or employment on account of his "religion, place of birth, descent or colour".<sup>125</sup> Further, the Board of Revenue's proceedings of 1854 stated that "the collectors should be able to see that the subordinate appointments in the districts are not monopolised by the members of few influential families. Endeavour should always be made to divide the principal appointments in each district among several castes ... and it should be a standing rule that the *two chief revenue servants* in the collectors office should be of *different castes*".<sup>126</sup> The same has been endorsed in 1922 and fresh instructions were issued which clearly stated that appointments are to be divided among the several communities.<sup>127</sup> In spite of such directives from the policy makers, the lower ranks of colonial bureaucracy in Malabar was drawn chiefly from the *Nair* community. This was chiefly because the *Nairs* were the first to get the benefits of colonial education which was the basic requirement for appointment in the colonial salariat. The *Nair* domination in the colonial

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<sup>124</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 250.

<sup>125</sup> S.V. Desika Char, ed., *Readings in the Constitutional History of India, 1757-1947*, Bombay, 1983, p. 250.

<sup>126</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXII, 3.2.1925.

<sup>127</sup> *G.O. No. 658, Public* dated, 15.08.1922, KRA, Kozhikode.

bureaucracy was one of the sensitive issue taken up by the *Tiya* and other backward class elites in their campaign for building up caste solidarity.<sup>128</sup> Series of memorandums submitted by the *Tiyas* and other backward communities of Malabar demanding due share in the bureaucracy and the deliberations in the Madras legislature regarding the statistical data of different castes and communities in Government jobs<sup>129</sup> gives us information about the upward mobility of *avarnas* excluding the depressed classes.

Though the polluting castes like *Tiyas* advanced substantially in acquiring modern education and Government jobs, the progress of the depressed classes was abysmally low. The very few who got education were not considered for appointments on flimsy grounds. In spite of different standing orders, appointments were given to unpassed *Nair* candidates ignoring the qualified depressed class candidate.<sup>130</sup> In such discriminations, the answer given by the authorities was that "educational qualifications are *not the sole text* in making these appointments".<sup>131</sup> It was also stated that "the qualifications of the unpassed candidates (caste Hindu) were superior to those of the others (depressed class)".<sup>132</sup> The consideration given to the "nominations made by his (appointing authority) assistants", "local influence" of the person appointed etc. were also highlighted.<sup>133</sup> These self explanatory

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<sup>128</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXII, pp. 390-97, Vol. LXXIX, p. 66.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XX, pp. 734-735.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

arguments clearly reveal the strategy of the upper class to exclude the untouchable communities from the domains of power. It also remind us the fact that inspite of wild pronouncements, the colonial bureaucracy drawn chiefly from the indigenous caste elites; blocked the entry of the depressed classes in the government service in one way or the other. But the severe threat posed by the world wars on the survival of the British Empire forced the authorities to overlook at least partially the caste taboos in appointing the sepoy. This situation enabled the depressed classes to get appointment in the military service. Later, some of the ex-service depressed class got appointment in the Government service also.<sup>134</sup> But their number was small.

Though the polluting castes and depressed classes suffered great hardships in enrolling the government service, the very idea of appointing government officers from different castes and groups affected the hegemonic position of the *savarnas*. Those who got jobs in the Government service became a distinct class. Though they were placed at the bottom layer of the colonial power structure; they were able to demonstrate the immense possibility of this newly acquired power. It also enabled them to articulate new social values as exemplified in the *saraswathivijayam* of Potheri Kunhambu.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with P. Gopalan, a depressed class leader of Kannur on 24.12.2007.

<sup>135</sup> *Saraswathivijayam* of Potheri Kunhambu - a *Tiyya* wakil of Kannur, graphically describe the liberative ideology of colonial modernity with sharp criticism on *savarna* caste practices, See Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswathivijayam*, Mal., Reprint, Kottayam, 2004.

## Education and Social Change

Modern education also played an important role in the transformation of the Malabar society. It gave a severe jolt to the traditional system by unyoking occupation from caste. Outside the caste framework it contributed to the upward mobility of individuals and groups in the process of westernisation, which permitted a chance for the lower castes to move up in the modern society.<sup>136</sup> In Malabar the dissemination of western ideas came through the English education initiated by the missionaries. Here the Basel Mission assumed the leading role in the spread of English education.<sup>137</sup> It began with the establishment of Basel Mission Schools at Tellicherry and at Barnasseri near Kannur. The Mission had an anti-caste ideology and it attracted lower caste people like *Tiyas* to its educational institutions. As a result, by 1914, more than half of the students of the Missions College - The Malabar Christian College - belonged to the *Tiya* Community.<sup>138</sup> The mission also opened schools for depressed classes like *Cherumas*, *Nayadies*, etc. in different parts of Malabar.<sup>139</sup> But their effort was only partially successful as evidenced in the reports.

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<sup>136</sup> M.S.A. Rao, *op.cit.*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>137</sup> *Basel German Evangelical Mission*, hereafter *BGEM, Reports* 1846, KTC Archives, Mangalore. Subsequent issues of *BGEM Reports* also highlight the educational efforts of the missionaries.

<sup>138</sup> *Mitavadi*, March 1914, p. 25.

<sup>139</sup> *BGEM Reports*, 1850, 1895, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1910.

The educational activities initiated by the Basel Mission were further promoted by the colonial government mainly through the local bodies. Later on, the socio-religious reform movements, the nationalist movement in Malabar, voluntary organisations and individuals like Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust and Swami Ananda Thirth, the Chirakkal Mission of the Jesuit missionaries, etc. also contributed substantially to the growth of modern education. As a result of the activities of various organisations and agencies, more and more children were enrolled in the schools. Caste-wise, the Nambudiri *Brahmins* were late in receiving the benefits of modern education; whereas the *Nairs* and other intermediary castes took the lead. Among the *theendal* castes, the *Tiyas* took the lead in education.<sup>140</sup> They had no caste inhibitions in undertaking this new venture and were culturally oriented for English education. As a result a good number of matriculates in the region came from the *Tiya* community. They were recruited in the Government service on the basis of merit and this job opportunity gradually led to the emergence of a group of salaried persons from the community. A job in the Government service removed the caste grievances of an individual who belonged to an inferior community. So the members of the *Tiya* community tried their level best to liberate themselves from the hold of caste through English education and employment in the Government service.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Murkoth Kunhappa, "Heritage of Basel Mission in Malabar" in K.J. John, ed., *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, Cochin, 1981, p. 243.

<sup>141</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 86.



Though *Tiyas* achieved some success in acquiring modern education, the condition of the depressed classes like *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Nayadies* was pitiable. Even the missionaries failed to enrol them in the schools partly because of the opposition of the higher ups in the society and partly because of the pitiable backwardness of these sections. The educational and social backwardness of these sections forced Mr. M. Krishnan Nayar, the MLC from Malabar to state that "there was not even a single educated person from the Nayadi community".<sup>142</sup> It is also worthwhile to note that these untouchable communities did not have any landed property nor do they have any accessibility to modern education. They were not even culturally oriented nor were they economically in a sound position to imbibe English education. Regarding their educational conditions Cecil M. Barrow, Principal of Kerala Vidyasala (Zamorins College), Calicut, made the following observation before the education commission of 1882: "The low caste being very low in the social scale hesitate to send their children to mix with *Brahmins* and *Nayars*, who would scout them .... Where a *Cheruma* to be found seen with a book in hand it would probably be seized and torn up by some passerby. This was actually occurred. A *Cheruma* school was tried at Calicut, but the *Nairs* and *Tiyas* used to way lay the boys as they were going to school and snatch to their books out of their hands".<sup>143</sup> This type of threatening and manhandling

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<sup>142</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXII, p. 397.

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Kamal Pasha, *History of Education in Malabar under the British rule, 1792-1947*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Calicut University, 1991, pp. 223-224.

of depressed class children continued even to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The local newspapers published series of reports of physical assaults, destroying books and slates and ill treatment of depressed class children in the schools".<sup>144</sup> Parallel to such incidents we also have reports of benevolence shown by the enlightened Hindus towards the education of the depressed classes.<sup>145</sup>

Though the educational achievement of the depressed classes was marginal when compared to other sections of the Hindu Community, the spread of education brought new ideas and practices in the society. In the Missionary institutions students belonging to different castes studied their lessons in the same class room. They also lived in the same hostel, though the dining arrangement was separate.<sup>146</sup> The feeling of equality cultivated in the Mission schools forced the *Tiya* students to demand for common hostel and dining facilities along with *Savarna* students not only for them but even for the depressed class students.<sup>147</sup> Thus it is clear that the gradual growth of co-education contributed immensely to the growth of common public space.

The spread of English Education brought new ideas and institutions. This was accelerated by the socio-economic changes that took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. English educated people, though a tiny section, began to

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<sup>144</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 19, 1924, July 1, 1924, December 6, 1924. The subsequent issues also have such reports.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, *BGEM Report* 1905, p. 71.

<sup>146</sup> *BGEM Report*, 1910, p. 48.

<sup>147</sup> *M.L.C. debates*, Vol. II, p. 4, Vol. III, p., 1426, Vol. V, p. 2142, *G.O. No. 2156 of the Law, Education, department* dated 16.12.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

question the value systems and practices of the traditional society. They placed individual liberty and the conscience of the individual as the prime mover of their activities. The educated elites began questioning the rationale of *tarawad* system and the unquestionable position of the *karanavar*, the practice of polyandry, polygamy and *sambandam* relations. These people started to bequeath self acquired property to their wife and children. The earliest expression of the changing perception towards self acquired property, *karnavar's* rights and privileges, *sambandam* relations, attitude towards English education and the cultural world opened by it, freedom of the individual to select his life partner, his career etc. can be noticed in the novel written in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by O. Chandumenon.<sup>148</sup> The novel portrays a young English educated *Nair* woman who successfully challenged the hallowed right of a Nambudiri landlord to have sexual relations with any woman of the *Nair* caste. It also reflects the first ideological stirrings against caste system.<sup>149</sup>

If '*Indulekha*' reflects the perception of the *savarna* elites to traditional values and practices in the contested terrain of modernity, '*Saraswathi Vijayam*' of Potheri Kunhambu interrogates the same from the perception of *avarna* elites. The novel visualise the acquisition of English education as the means to escape from the degraded position of polluting castes. The author

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<sup>148</sup> O. Chandumenon, *Indulekha*, Reprint, Kottayam, 2004.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

has no hesitation to question the values upheld by the Brahmanic lifeworld. The traditional customs, practices and value systems were dissected from the perspective of modernity, *avarna*/subaltern point of view.<sup>150</sup> This was made possible through the acquisition of liberal ideas and values. Thus the liberative potential of English education with its emphasis on humanitarianism<sup>151</sup> enabled those who acquired it to organise movements for achieving social justice.

Thus the colonial hegemony brought immense changes to the structure and form of the Malabar society. The administrative measures of the British along with their economic policies made many of the traditional practices obsolete. The colonial modernity enabled the people to acquire modern ideas and institutions like individualism, liberty, equality and the rule of law, capitalist enterprise, money economy and the cash wages to labourers and factory workers, benefits of modern transport and communication facilities like railways and public buses and the like. It also took them to new market centres and colonial urban centres, hotels and teashops, newspapers, journals and new generation literary works. Their outlook, attire, language, attitude to family and society all underwent changes in the course of time. The value system cherished by the educated intelligentsia and the colonial salariat was

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<sup>150</sup> Potheri Kunhambu, *op. cit.*, The author ridicules the *savarna* practice of *Mungikuli*, concept of polluting distance, *Nambudiris* opposition to *Nairs* using decent names instead of base names etc.

<sup>151</sup> M.N. Srinivas defined humanitarianism as "an active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex". M.N. Srinivas, Note No. 5, p. 51.

much different from the traditional belief systems. They also assumed leadership in changing many of the traditional practices and customs out of the sheer necessity of their own class interest. Parallel to this, in the factories and plantations, the subaltern sections mingled with each other irrespective of caste and religion. The culture thus evolved in the factories and plantations was a composite culture. These two streams - the elite culture of the western educated and the subaltern culture of the workers and coolies in the factories and plantations - worked in the direction of achieving social equality. Both of them had grievances against the exploitative mechanism of the colonial regime and the value system based on caste hierarchy. Colonialism also brought to the surface contradictions like colonial masters verses the colonised; the indigenous culture verses the western culture, etc. The educated people also came into contact with socio-religious reform movements and the gradually developing ideology of Indian nationalism. The contradiction between the coloniser/ colonized, traditional/modern forced the people of Malabar to search for an alternative culture embracing the entire society in the place of the compartmentalised pre-colonial Malabar society. Thus the stage was set for the struggle for achieving social justice and equality. The missionary work in Malabar opened new challenges to them. Through the work of socio-religious reform movements and the nationalist political activity, the missionary work was countered without compromising the issue of social justice.

## CHAPTER II

### **THE MISSIONARY DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Malabar was thrown open to the evangelizing activities of Christian missionaries as in other parts of India. The role of missionaries in religious conversion and socio-cultural change as well as the development of educational, industrial, health and self improvement schemes in Malabar has been acknowledged by many historical studies<sup>152</sup>. The studies on the growth of Christianity in modern Malabar also focused on the inter connections between religious conversion, social reform and social change. Christian missionaries were considered to be the pioneers in the field of education. They worked in the direction of the socio-economic development of weaker sections. Infact, education and social uplift have been synonymous with Christian evangelical activities. The present attempt is to trace the impact of Christian evangelical activities on the polluting and depressed classes of Malabar. It is also worthwhile to trace the interconnection between evangelical activities and the evolving self of the lower castes of the Malabar society. It also help us to locate the role of missionaries in promoting the

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<sup>152</sup> D. Ferroli, S.J., *The Jesuits in Malabar*, Vol. I, Bangalore, 1939; K.K.N. Kurup and K.J. Joha, eds., *Legacy of Basel Mission at Herman Gundert in Malabar*, Calicut, 1993, Jayapraksah Raghavariah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar an South Canara, 1834-1914*, New Delhi, 1990; K.J. John, ed., *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, Cochin, 1981.

struggle for social equality and justice in the wider context of colonial modernity, nationalism and social change.

The missionary activities of Malabar dates back to the arrival of the Portuguese on the west coast<sup>153</sup>. It was undertaken by the Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Jesuit Missionary orders of the Catholic church<sup>154</sup>. The Protestant Basel German Evangelical Mission started their activities in Malabar by 1834. Their activities extended to the whole of Malabar along with Karnataka and Maharashtra. The Catholic missionary activities began with the arrival of Vasco-Da-Gama at Kappad near Kozhikode. Fr. Pedro Covilham was the first Catholic missionary landed on the Malabar coast-along with Vasco-Da-Gama. The first church in Malabar was constructed at Kannur in 1501<sup>155</sup>. But the progress of Catholic Church in Malabar was a slow process.

The Catholic Missionaries and the Protestant Basel German Evangelical Mission had a tough work in Malabar. In spite of several years of sustained work, the missionaries succeeded in converting only a small segment of the people. The census of 1871 report that the total number of Christian population excluding the Europeans and Eurasians in Malabar was

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<sup>153</sup> D. Ferroli, *Ibid.*, pp. 86-91. Also see Fr. Geo Payyappally: "Pedro Covilham to Pedro Caironi: Evangelical Activities in Malabar" in *Sabdam-Mahadjanma Sadhabdhi Smaranika*, Mal., Kannur, 2005, pp 59-62

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>155</sup> Fr. Geo Payyappally, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

only 1750<sup>156</sup>. Of there around 1500 converts lived in the colonial urban centres of Kozhikode, Thalassery and Kannur<sup>157</sup>. But situation changed during the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Logan estimated the population of the Basel Mission followers to be around 2600 by 1887<sup>158</sup>. But their number increased to about 20000 by 1914. Similarly, the Roman Catholic population of Malabar at the time of the formation of Calicut Diocese on June 22, 1923 was only 6000<sup>159</sup> including Europeans and Eurasians. Kozhikode, Thalassery, Kannur, Vythiri and Mananthody were the main Catholic centers of Malabar at that time. Their number increased to around 12000 by 1946<sup>160</sup> excluding the tiny Catholic population of Wayanad.

### **Basel Mission Activities in Malabar and the Quest for social justice**

The Basel German Evangelical Mission, a product of Wurtemberg pietism, was founded in the year 1815. Since the Protestant Missions like LMS and the CMS concentrated their activities in south and central Kerala, Basel Mission decided to concentrate their activities in the Malabar region. In Malabar the Basel Mission activities began with the establishment of Mission

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<sup>156</sup> *Census of 1871*, Malabar District, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, Also see Maxwell Noronha, 'The Diocese of Calicut' in K.J. John, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

<sup>158</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*. Vol. I, Reprint, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 214.

<sup>159</sup> Fr. Joseph Tafferl, S.J. *Peter Caironi, S.J; A Missionary indeed; A missionary in deed*, P. 23.

<sup>160</sup> Fr. Geo Payyappally, Bishop Dr. A.M. *Patroni in Sabdam Smaranika*, 2005, p.87.



stations at places like Kallayi in Calicut, Nettur in Tellichery and Kannur in the north. Gradually its evangelical activities spread to the whole of Malabar.

### **Efforts of Conversion**

In the initial years the progress of the Basel Mission activities was a slow process. This is clear from the Mission report of 1850 which says that "the preaching of the Gospel has hitherto had little effect up on the natives around us. The *Brahmins* and the *Nairs* keep at a distance from the missionary. The *Tiers (Tiyas)* are more accessible, but altogether taken up with the cares of the world. The *Mussalmans* hate the Gospel and shows their hatred whenever they have an opportunity"<sup>161</sup>. The statement also reveals the fact that during this period the Missionaries counted heavily on the influential communities of Malabar.

The Basel Mission reports are replete with criticism towards the caste system prevalent in the Malabar society. For the Mission, it was absolutely necessary to ridicule caste system, as its ideology was more closely related to an egalitarian system originated from the philosophy of Christ. Such an element of social philosophy, embracing the whole humanity from *Nayadis* and *Parayas* at the bottom to *Brahmin* at the top, made Missionaries to destroy the barriers of caste in Malabar society. In the long run the '*Padirimadom*' became a symbol of anti-caste ideology.

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<sup>161</sup> *Basel German Evangelical Mission, hereafter BGEM Report, 1850, p.18.*

The Missionaries were fully aware of the octopus hold of the caste system in the Malabar society. The first report of the Mission itself stated that, "the lowest caste of Hindus are oppressed by a degree of spiritual indolence and brutalizing superstition..."<sup>162</sup> It was equally embarrassing to them that the *Pulayas* and other untouchable classes were not even ready to reach near the Missionaries<sup>163</sup>.

The Basel Mission activities of religious conversion began against the background noted above. Mission reports say that the people have the desire to become Christians, but are afraid of their caste<sup>164</sup>. It was stated that "those who wish to become Christians are not tolerated in their houses by their relatives"<sup>165</sup>. In many occasions those who attempt conversion were followed by family members persuading not to do the thing. The mission reports also say that dozens of people who expressed willingness to embrace faith were brought back by family members using all pressures and persuasions. In many occasions the converts expressed their feeling that "it must be horrible and unbearable to lose one's caste"<sup>166</sup>. Those people who administered baptism against such heavy odds, found themselves ostracized from the family and the society. It was also reported by the Missionary sources that such people withdraw from their local environment and took delight in

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<sup>162</sup> *BGEM Report*, 1841, p.6.

<sup>163</sup> *BGEM Report* 1845 p. 44, 1888, p.19.

<sup>164</sup> *BGEM Report* 1842 p. 6.

<sup>165</sup> *BGEM Report* 1843 p. 54. Similar statement can be found in the *BGEM Reports* of 1869 & 1870.

<sup>166</sup> *BGEM Report* 1845 p. 80.

migratory habits. "The embracing of Christianity entails with many losses of home, relations, caste, friends etc., so that a feeling of loneliness may take possession of an otherwise steady individual especially when he has a difficulty in earning his livelihood"<sup>167</sup>. The Mission report also says that "for those who forsake their ancestral caste and customs, we have neither houses nor gardens".<sup>168</sup>

Conversion into the Christian faith as family or individual often used to break ancestral family bonds. The converted families were usually ostracized by their caste relatives. For individual converts this was a still more painful experience. In such conversions Christian husbands were usually deserted by their wives and children and if converts were unmarried they were deserted by their parents and other kith and kin. It was reported by the Missionaries that many did not mind losing property and position, "but what they cannot overcome.... love of relatives".<sup>169</sup>

The natural human family bonds which were further strengthened by the caste framework did prevent many people from joining the Christian community through conversion. It was because of the family bonds and the bonds of caste hierarchy that several people postponed their baptism till the death of his father, mother, or wife. Love of their beloved ones even forced a number of baptized Christians to go back to their former castes. However

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<sup>167</sup> *BGEM Report* 1884 p. 60.

<sup>168</sup> *BGEM Report* 1897 p. 49.

<sup>169</sup> *BGEM Report* 1864 p. 48.

many joined the Christian fold, leaving the lamenting wife and children or parents behind.

### **Improvements in the Economic Condition of the Converts**

The Missionaries were faced with great challenge as they saw the pathetic economic condition of converted Christians, partly because of their low caste background and partly because of the deprivation they had to suffer for accepting the Christian faith. Many Christians were not only breadless but also homeless. Missionaries made repeated attempts to induce the landlords to allow the converts to remain in their homesteads. But these attempts failed<sup>170</sup>. Along with this, Mission also thought of providing training to the converts in occupations like carpentry and smith works. They also planned paper manufactory for the same purpose<sup>171</sup>. The poorer among Christians were provided work with in the Mission establishments as household servants. Promising ones were made Mission school teachers or catechists. But as the number of Christians increased experiments were conducted in agriculture. The lower caste converts of Anjarakandy were settled in Chovva and land was allotted to them for the cultivation of coconut and other garden products<sup>172</sup>. The agricultural mission of the Basel Mission undertook experiments in cultivation in the Kodakkal region of Malappuram district too.<sup>173</sup> Large

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<sup>170</sup> *BGEM Report* 1898 p. 49 and 1902 p. 80.

<sup>171</sup> *BGEM Report* 1847 p. 46.

<sup>172</sup> *BGEM Report* 1880 p. 48.

<sup>173</sup> *BGEM Report* 1897, p. 49.

number of Christians were also accommodated in the tile factories and weaving establishments of the Mission. The Mission report says that the prices of provisions were high and there was every possibility of Christians falling in to the hands of usurers. So a savings and lending bank and a co-operative society were started. Through this the Missionaries succeeded in making their people independent from outsiders<sup>174</sup>. Such material improvements were essential for maintaining the tiny Christian community intact because the Missionaries realized that most of the converts came for their daily board<sup>175</sup>.

The gleaning of the Mission reports confirm the fact that majority of the converts belong to the lower castes of Malabar. Among them majority belongs to the *Tiya* caste, followed by *Pulayas*, *Vettuvar* and other untouchable communities<sup>176</sup>. Mission reports also confirm the joining of *Nairs*, but only handful of cases<sup>177</sup>. The congregation of Anjarakandy consists of only the slave castes of Malabar like *Pulayar* and *Vettuvar*<sup>178</sup>. Nayadies raised some hope among the Mission circle in the initial days; but with few exceptions others left their creed to join *Muhammadanism*.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *BGEM Report* 1893 p. 52.

<sup>175</sup> *BGEM Report* 1894 p. 57.

<sup>176</sup> *BGEM Report* 1850 p. 18, 1864, p. 48, 1865 pp. 65-67.

<sup>177</sup> *BGEM Report* 1893 p. 51, 1894 p. 55, 10-5 p. 57.

<sup>178</sup> *BGEM Report* 1843 p. 58 and 1850 p.17.

<sup>179</sup> *BGEM Report* 1845 to 1851.

The Basel Missionaries thought of converting the *Tiyas* in large numbers to their faith. But they became bilious with the decision of *Tiya* elites to transform themselves into the *Brahminical* mode of worship. The construction of big temples on the model of the *savarna* shrines and the adoption of Sanskrit mode of worship by the *Tiyas* disillusioned the Missionaries. So the movement among the *Tiyas* which gave rise to 'great hopes'<sup>180</sup> for the Missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century deviated into a movement to accept Sanskritic Hinduism. The change in the attitude of the *Tiyas* also forced the missionaries to concentrate their activities among the depressed classes like *Pulayas*. In the long run they succeeded in converting sizeable section of the *Pulayas* of Chirakkal region to the Christian faith. In the Padikkal region of Payangady Basel Mission opened an *Adidravida* school and converted many number of *Adidravidas* to their faith<sup>181</sup>. Many of them joined the new faith to escape the brutal oppression of *savarnas* like *Nairs*, *avarnas* like *Tiyas* and the *Mappila* Muslims<sup>182</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup> *BGEM Report* 1907 p. 76.

<sup>181</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, March 17 and 24 and June 28, 1928.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, January 19, 1929.

## Educational and Cultural Upliftment of Converts

Basel Mission also adopted measures for the educational and cultural upliftment of the converts besides their material, moral and religious requirements. They opened primary educational institutions as part of their activities. These educational institutions were also used to spread the Gospel. Day schools, female schools and boarding schools were opened. The schools of the Mission were opened to children belonging to all castes and communities.<sup>183</sup> At the same time Missionary reports say that many of the higher caste people were afraid of the school<sup>184</sup>. Mission made earnest efforts to provide education to children belonging to the depressed classes like, *Pulayas, Parayas* and *Nayadies*<sup>185</sup>. Mission report also refers to the selfless work of the teachers who visited the Cheruma houses and collected the pupils everyday<sup>186</sup>. But their effort to accommodate the downtrodden sections achieved only minimum success mostly due to the opposition of the higher castes and partly due to the pathetic condition of the underlings in the society<sup>187</sup>. But the *Tiyas* benefitted immensely from the educational endeavours of the Basel Mission. This has been acknowledged by the Mission report of 1907. It says "if about 60 years ago the missionaries of Malabar had

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<sup>183</sup> Murkoth Kunhappa, "Heritage of Basel Mission in Malabar" in K.J. John, ed., *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, Cochin, 1981, p. 243. Also see Wilma John, "Basel Mission and Socio-Economic Revolution in Malabar" in the same work, p. 254.

<sup>184</sup> *BGEM Report* 1851 p. 32.

<sup>185</sup> *BGEM Report* 1850.

<sup>186</sup> *BGEM Report* 1886.

<sup>187</sup> *BGEM Report* 1845 p. 44

not opened schools and admitted students of every caste, the number of educated *Tiyas* would be small. The Missionaries take a real and unselfish interest in the social and material progress of the *Tiya* community.<sup>188</sup> The educational institutions thrown open by the Basel Mission enabled the polluting castes especially the *Tiyas* of coastal, Malabar to acquire modern ideas of equality and social justice. Those who acquired western education from the institutions founded by the Mission became the harbingers of social change in Malabar.<sup>189</sup> They also became organizers and propagators of the movement against obsolete customs and practices prevalent in the society.

### **Medical Work of the Mission and the Process of Socialisation**

Providing medical assistance to the needy was another area of activity of the Basel Mission. It is worthwhile to note that though the mission activities started in Malabar by 1834, the work of Medical mission started only in the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout India most of the Christian Medical work began as an after thought. Missionaries, who settle down in a particular area for evangelical work, were soon petitioned for medicine by the ill and the dying. From their personal supplies of drugs and potions, the missionaries doled out medicines as "unavoidable acts of charity"<sup>190</sup>.

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<sup>188</sup> *BGEM Report* 1907, pp 76-77.

<sup>189</sup> Murkoth Kunhappa in K.J. John, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>190</sup> Eva Bell, "Medical Work of the Basel Mission in India" in Siri Godwin, ed., *Legacy of Basel Mission - 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Publication*, Mangalore, 1986, p. 238.



The first clinic of the Basel Mission in Malabar was opened at Calicut in January 1886 by Liebendoerfer. In the first month 649 patients were treated; the number tripled by the third month. A little medicine and a lot of prayer went a long way in those days. "From *Raja* to serf, from learned man to illiterate labourer," all came to him for medical help<sup>191</sup>.

In 1892, a small hospital was built in Calicut, which had a decent consulting room, an operation theatre and provision for 14 beds. A catechist and a Bible woman were appointed to care for the spiritual welfare of the patients and their relatives. On May 23, 1893 Liebendoerfer took charge of a Leprosorium situated on the north beach of Calicut. With financial assistance from friends in India and the Edinburgh Leprosy Mission, the building was made hospitable for 23 inmates. In 1895 Liebendoerfer was succeeded by Dr. Stokes. The first lady nurse of the Basel Mission was Miss. M. Hanhart, who assisted Dr. Stokes in his work. An outstation was opened in Codacal in 1894. A second outstation was opened at Vaniyamkulum in 1896. In October 1903, a new Leprosy Assylum was opened at Chevayur, near Calicut on a site donated by the municipality.

The Leprosarium was a refuge for those who had been rejected by relatives and friends. The out castes were treated with love and compassion. Dr. Stokes also arranged facilities for occupational therapy like spinning, weaving, gardening and carpentry.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

The Mission hospitals in course of time attracted large number of patients belonging to different castes and communities. The Basel Mission report of 1906 says that at the Calicut hospital 4711 Christians, 1397 Muhammedans and 5828 Hindus were treated. Similarly out of 331 inpatients 173 were Christians, 10 Muhammedans and 148 Hindus. The Codacal hospital treated 4670 out patients and 62 inpatients. In Vaniyamkulum 3450 out patients and 116 inpatients received medical attention<sup>192</sup>.

The Missionary reports clearly reveal the fact that people hailing from different caste and religious background flocked to the mission hospitals to receive medical assistance. The Mission reports also refer to the suspicion of high caste people like Nambudiris. They avoided the hospital as far as possible. The report of 1900 recalls the experience of a dresser being called to attend a *Nambudiri* who was bleeding to death. In spite of the critical state of the patient, the dresser was not permitted to touch him, merely to give instructions to a *Brahmin* to perform the ministrations. This unsatisfactory arrangement peeved the dresser who got up to leave. Only then did the *Nambudiri* give in, but soon after the dresser had finished with the treatment, the patient was carried down to the holy tank and was dipped in the (foul) water to remove pollution<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>192</sup> *BGEM Report* 1906 p. 62.

<sup>193</sup> *BGEM Report* 1880, p.124.

Women were reluctant to come for treatment to the hospital since there was no separate accommodation for caste women<sup>194</sup>. At the same time there was no objection to Christian doctor examining them in the privacy of their homes<sup>195</sup>. Similarly, the low caste people like *Cherumas* did not want to be admitted to the hospital for fear of polluting the other patients.<sup>196</sup>

The hospitals opened by the Basel Missionaries, though organized as part of the evangelical activities, played a very significant role in the destruction of the notions of pollution and purity. In the first place it exhorted the people to relieve themselves from the traditional practices of using charms and amulets. More important than this was the mingling of people belonging to different ritual and social status. Such mingling sowed the seeds of mutual sharing of sorrows and problems. It also enabled the rising class of elites in the Malabar society to argue that untochability, unapproachability etc have no ground and are hence meaningless practices.

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Eva Bell, *op. cit.*, p.242.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p.243.

## Basel Mission and the Caste System

The Basel Missionaries made concerted efforts to see that caste did not raise its ugly head in the Church. In Indian society where caste plays a vital role in life, from cradle to the tomb, the Missionaries were confronted with this question from the very beginning. But it goes to the credit of the Basel Mission that from the beginning of its work in India it had an unchanging policy of rejecting caste in the church. The Mission reports categorically stated that "unless they [aspirants to communion] give up caste bona fide they should not be admitted to the communion. No peace, no truce with the spirit of caste has been the watchword of the Brethren."<sup>197</sup> In order to mitigate the traces of caste from the communion the Mission organized marriages between the converts hailed from different castes<sup>198</sup>. Interdining among Christians belonging to many castes in the previous stage were also organized to mitigate the evils of casteism from the Church members.<sup>199</sup> In course of time the relentless efforts of the Missionaries achieved some success. This should be viewed against the background of caste problem crept into the churches in South Kerala and Tamilnadu.<sup>200</sup> Contrary to this the Basel Mission report of

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<sup>197</sup> *BGEM Report* 1850.

<sup>198</sup> *BGEM Report* 1851.

<sup>199</sup> Wilma John, "Contributions of Basel Mission to the socio-cultural life of the west coast of India" in K.K.N. Kurup and KJ. John, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>200</sup> In these places the Church accounts itself refers to converts from polluting castes as village Christians, depressed class Christians and the like. For details see P. Sanal Mohan: *Dalit Discourse and the Evolving New Self: Contest and strategies*, School of Social Sciences, M.G. University, Kottayam. Also see John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, New Delhi, 1994.

1879 stated that "we think it is good to give an unequivocal testimony that caste is no difficulty in our congregations. There is no problem of interdining and intermarriage; from the beginning it is set right. Second and third generations are all mixed up. There are only very few cases of caste feeling."<sup>201</sup> In 1914 again it was claimed that "from the beginning of our work in India to the present day we have never allowed this monster (casteism) to raise its head in our churches and our strict loyalty to the principle of love in this respect has been crowned with success."<sup>202</sup>

It is true that the Basel Mission had succeeded to a great extent in building up a Christian community which was free from caste prejudices and discrimination. However, as the missionaries themselves reported, the "caste spirit" produced some obstacles to the evangelical activities. Many deserted the faith due to their inability to overcome the pressures imposed by the caste society.

The critique of caste by the Basel Mission had its impact on the Malabar society. The Christian community thus emerged, though numerically small, had tremendous impact on the society. Though large majority of *avarnas* and depressed classes refused to embrace the new creed, the elites of the *avarana* community emulated the missionaries in their campaign against the degradation of man on the basis of caste status. This is clear from the

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<sup>201</sup> *BGEM Report* 1876, p.40.

<sup>202</sup> *BGEM Report* 1914, p.22.

statements of *avarna* leaders like Murkoth Kumaran, C. Krishnan and other *Tiya* notables of Malabar<sup>203</sup>. Murkoth Kumaran repeatedly stated the gradual growth of self confidence and self respect among the lower castes was due to the work of the Christian Missionaries<sup>204</sup>. Thus the ideological campaign against the evils of the caste system, untouchability and the struggle for social equality was laid down during the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the work of Christian missionaries.

The Basel Mission's evangelical work also invited opposition from various corners. Muslim reformers were the first to oppose mission work. Syed Hamid Sahib Sanavulla Makti Tangal through his pamphlet "*Kathora Kutharam*" (terrible axe), "*Anjanavadha*" (ignorance destroyed) and "*Paropakari*" (A journal published by him) challenged the arguments of the Missionaries. The Mission report say that the polemical writings of this Muhammadan "caused a great deal of stir. Its object is to confuse the minds of the people by using various exploded rationalistic arguments"<sup>205</sup>. The failure of the Mission to retain the *Nayadi* converts under its fold has been reported in the earlier annual reports which says that " at last they (*Mussalman* priests) have succeeded in enticing our poor colonists (*Nayadis*) by whatever means; is not yet become quite manifest."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> For details see various articles in *Mitavadi*, 1913-1919.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *BGEM Report* 1885 pp. 79 & 80, 1886, p.81.

<sup>206</sup> *BGEM Report* 1851, p.32.

The opposition to Mission's campaign for evangelisation also came from the Theosophical society, Brahma Samaj and other reform movements. The Mission report of 1905 says that " in Malabar the influence of Christianity is manifested not only by a good number of converts but also by violent opposition in some quarters and by the great efforts of the educated classes to propagate a reformed and purified Hinduism by the Brahma and Upanasa Samaj, by the press and by lectures. Mrs. Beasant gave new impetus to those efforts by delivering addresses in the principal towns of Malabar... by flattering the national pride of the Hindus, she won the hearts of the Malayalees"<sup>207</sup>. The Missionary activities among the lower castes also provoked the caste elites to address issues relating to caste segregation and social injustices prevalent in the society.

The Basel Mission work in Malabar and the impact of colonial modernity enabled the *avarnas* and the depressed classes to demand for entry into public spaces like schools, government offices, public roads and ferries, teashops and hotels, public transport and other similar facilities. The missionary influence in mitigating the evils of caste system also provoked the elites of the *savarna* communities to look into the demands of the polluting castes with sincerity and sympathy. It forced the *savarnas* to acknowledge the fact that if their fellow beings would insist on nontouchism, then the *avarnas* with missionary assistance would adopt new strategies. The most

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<sup>207</sup> *BGEM Report* 1905, p.65.

articulate among them also realized that such a course would be detrimental to the interests of Hinduism. Such an awareness forced the *savarna* elites to condemn the caste restrictions like the ban imposed on the polluting castes to walk through the roads adjacent to the Tali temple, the non-admission of polluting caste students in the Zamorins Guruvayurappan college and the like<sup>208</sup>. The concern of the *savarna* elites to such problems can be gauged in the letter written by A.R.Narayana Iyer to the editor of the 'Commonweal' reproduced in *Mitavadi*. It says: "Of all the difficulties produced in the way of *Hindu* progress, none draws our attention more than the refusal to admit *Tiyans (Tiyas)*... in to the Zamorins college. The college authorities are doing a most unjust thing by refusing admission to *their own brothers* and they expect great things from admitting Christians who are trying their level best to put down our sacred Hinduism... The poor *Tiyan (Tiya)* who refused admission to *his own Hindu College* ( italics mine) goes to the neighbouring Missionary college.... The Missionary, by hook or crook, tries to convert him and thus Hinduism is dying everywhere. Those who take a pride in the refusal of admissions are violating the most sacred of relations among the Hindus themselves. They are the cankers of this great religion, and they are eating away its heart and turning against its own children who ought to be its most faithful lovers and most ardent admirers. Calicut, some are afraid, has become the hunting ground of the *faddists*, and sooner the difficulties are

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<sup>208</sup> For details see the various articles and letters written by *Savarnas* published in the *Mitavadi* 1913-1919.



removed the better, for the *good* of Hinduism".<sup>209</sup> The letter is self explanatory regarding the anxieties of *savarna* elites. Such criticism from *savarna* elite was the greatest legacy of Basel Mission activities in Malabar.

The evangelical work of the Missionaries enabled the *avarna* communities like *Ezhavas/ Tiyas* and the depressed classes to bargain with the dominant castes. When the *savarnas* objected to the entry of polluting sections to the public spaces, the lower castes retaliated with the threat of religious conversion. The incidents that took place at Kalpathy during 1924 and 1925 was the best example of this strategy. When the Tamil *Brahmins* of Kalpathy resisted the entry of lower castes people to the streets of the Agrahara, some of those *Ezhavas*; who felt humiliated at the denial of basic rights, decided to embrace Christianity. Lower castes were able to use such an option because of the presence of missionaries in the vicinity.

### **The Catholic Missionaries and the Depressed Classes of Malabar**

Though the European Catholic Missionary work in the Malabar coast began right from the dawn of colonial penetration to this region,<sup>210</sup> the number of adherents to their faith was small. This is clear from the statistics of the Catholic population given by the Church sources.<sup>211</sup> But the Catholic

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<sup>209</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1914.

<sup>210</sup> For details, D. Ferroli, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-99.

<sup>211</sup> The Catholic population of Malabar at the time of formation of Calicut Diocese in 1923 was only 6000 including Europeans and Eurarians. Calicut Diocese had jurisdiction over the Catholic population lived in between Shornur in the South to Payyannur in the north. For details see Fr. Geo Payyapally *op.*

Missionary activities in Malabar intensified in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fr. Geoffry Know had undertaken Missionary activities among the Kurichias in the Kaniyampatta region of Wynad district during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He succeeded in converting some Kurichias to Catholic religion and empowered them with land and other necessary requirements. They were also freed from the clutches of moneylenders who collected exorbitant rate of interest. These material improvements enabled the tribal to lead a decent life<sup>212</sup>. Another missionary centre was opened at Kolayad near Kuthuparamba among the tribals. The Kolayad Mission activities began in the year 1921 by Fr. Paul Rosario Fernandus. The Chadragiri Mission and the Chirakkal Mission were the other two Catholic Missionary endeavours. Of these the Chirakkal Mission was the most famous and the most successful Missionary undertaking.

### **The Work of Chirakkal Mission**

The Chirakkal Mission or the Pulaya Mission<sup>213</sup> was founded by Fr. Peter Caironi S.J, a Jesuit Missionary from Italy. The pioneering work of Fr. Peter Caironi was further advanced by Jesuit Missionaries like Fr. John P Sequeira S.J, Fr. Joseph Tafferal and is at present under the guidance and supervision of Fr. L.M. Sukol S.J.

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*cit.*, pp. 59-62. Also see Fr. Joseph Tafferal *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>212</sup> Fr. Geo Payyampally, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>213</sup> The Chirakkal Mission was also referred to as 'Pulaya Mission' by the Missionaries. See Joseph Tafferal, *op. cit.*

The Chirakkal Mission was founded in the year 1936. The socio-cultural, economic and political condition of Malabar during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was conducive for undertaking Missionary activities especially among the depressed classes. The orthodox Hindu opposition to the Vaikom and Guruvayur *Satyagrahas*, the Kalpathy struggles and similar agitations in other parts of India convinced the polluting castes the limitations of the Gandhian strategy of repentance and 'change of heart' of the caste Hindus. The failure to pass the Temple Entry Bill put up by Dr. Subharayan in the Madras Legislature and the dismal failure of Mr. Ranga Iyers bill in the central Legislative Assembly was an eye-opener to many, especially the oppressed communities. The Nasik declaration of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar that he will not die as an untouchable<sup>214</sup> provoked the underlings to think about the ways and means of overcoming the taboos of untochability. In Kerala the *Tiyas/ Ezhavas* responded quickly to Dr. Ambedkar's declaration and began chalking out programmes for effecting religious conversion. In the Chirakkal region, the *Adidravidas* suffered worst oppression not only from caste Hindus but also from *Tiyas* and *Mappilas*<sup>215</sup>. The *Adidravida* conference of Chirakkal taluk held at Payyangadi on Sept 11, 1936 passed resolution favoring religious conversion. The meeting also resolved to form a committee to

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<sup>214</sup> Mathrubhumi, Oct. 16, 1935.

<sup>215</sup> *Mathrubhumi* October 30 and November 10, 1923. Reports of atrocities on depressed classes committed by the *Nairs, Tiyas* and *Mappilas* appeared in the later issues also. Also see *Native Newspaper Reports*, hereafter *NNPR*, March, April 1929, p. 384, p. 421.

conduct propaganda work among *Adiravidas* in favour of it<sup>216</sup>. But the request of the president of the conference that *Adiravidas* should embrace Islam was opposed by a section of the delegates<sup>217</sup>. The Jesuit evangelical activities intensified in Malabar against these developments.

The *Pulaya Mission* began its activities in the Payangadi region of the Chirakkal Taluk in the year 1936. Fr. Peter Caironi S.J moved to the Dalil Vadakkebhagam and pitched up his tent. He met the *Pulayas* and convinced them that he was going to free them not only from sin, but as well from their age long and manifold slavery; from their subjection to their landlords and moneylenders<sup>218</sup>. Soon his activities spread all over the Chirakkal area particularly Cherukunnu, Padyil, Kizhera, Kattakulam, Pallikara, Mathil, Madayi, Payangadi, Kunhimangalam and Payyannur. Within a short period Pr. Peter Caironi succeeded in converting hundreds of *Pulayas* to the Catholic Church.

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<sup>216</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 20, 1936.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> Fr. Joseph Tafferal, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

## **Policies of Mass Conversion**

The policy adopted by Pr. Peter Caironi in religious conversion was much different from the Basel Missionaries in several aspects. Fr. Joseph Tafferal the biographer of Peter Caironi gives us valuable insights on the strategy and tactics of conversion. Fr. Tafferal says: "He [Peter Caironi] would never accept individuals but only entire families. He would settle in life young people properly married. He would never tolerate the so called mixed marriages, for they weaken the faith, compromise the Christian way of life and split a family into different compartments so that its unity and beauty, and happiness are destroyed"<sup>219</sup>. Instead of accepting individuals, Caironi insisted on families joining the congregation. His motto was "either the whole caste, or no one".<sup>220</sup> He took such a decision on the ground that converting an individual was like "catching a bee from a bee-hive. It cannot live alone".<sup>221</sup>

This was a departure from the strategy adopted by the Basel missionaries. We have gone through the Basel mission reports which refers to the pain and agony of the converts losing their relatives while embracing the new creed. Contrary to such a departure from the traditional moorings, the *Pulaya Mission* of Peter Caironi stood for accepting the whole family and the whole caste/community. This was advantageous to the converts and the

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<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Missionaries. Now the converts have their kith and kin along with them in their new setup. Their strain lessened as they have their dear and near along with them in sharing the advantages and disadvantages of conversion. It also saved them from their despair, loneliness and the migratory habits as noted in the Basel Mission reports. It also lessened the work of the Catholic Missionaries who instead of converting individuals and families, now thought of mass conversion. Similarly the arrangement for leading the young converts a settled married life also has tremendous significance in the context of traditional Malabar society where the underlings were subjected to lot of sexual abuse and harassment. As noted in the Missionary records and the contemporary press, the upper castes and the *Mappilas* of the locality cared little for the honor and dignity of *Pulaya* women<sup>222</sup>. Whenever the landlord took fancy towards any *Pulaya* woman, then she had to submit herself to his sexual infatuation. The conversion to Christianity freed the *Pulayas* from such untold miseries. The depressed classes obtained freedom from sexual abuse through prolonged struggles<sup>223</sup>.

The Catholic Missionaries also had serious doubts about mixed marriages; i.e., marriages between converts and those in the traditional faith. They argued that such marriages would result in the weakening of Christian

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<sup>222</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, June 18, 1929, March 22, 1939. Also see Joseph Jafforal, *op. cit.*

<sup>223</sup> It was reported that converted Christians resisted the sexual harassment with force. They have also resorted to legal action with the help of Missionaries. *Mathrubhumi*, March, 22, 1940.

faith and also in the splitting of family into different belief systems. It was argued that such a development would not be conducive to the growth of Christian way of life.

### **Identification with the Untouchable Life World**

Pri. Peter Caironi and his fellow Missionaries lived along with *Pulayas*. Fr. Tafferal says, "Fr. Caironi would, not only touch, but even embrace the untouchables and kiss their children, and take them in his arms. He would enter their huts, sleep on a mat. He would go barefoot as they used to. He even like Gandhiji, did go without a shirt, because many of them at the beginning, had no shirts. Some how he went even so far as to take up their rough and tough ways of talking.... He did really become one of them in all aspects...".<sup>224</sup> This type of identification with the untouchable life world was a new experience to them. The people who suffered segregation and humiliation found in the Missionaries, their true friends. It also instilled courage and confidence and an awareness of human dignity in their mind.

The Missionary interaction with the untouchables was not restricted to their private domain alone. Fr. Caironi took his *Pulaya* converts with him everywhere he went, along the public roads and along the paths of the fields<sup>225</sup>. His reply to the high caste people who demanded clearing of untouchables on the way was; "we are not afraid to be contaminated by your

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<sup>224</sup> Joseph Jafferal, *op. cit.*, p.52.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

touch, hence either you clear the way, or we force our way straight off".<sup>226</sup> Such an assertion of right strengthened the position of untouchables in the society. Carironi also took legal action against all those who dared to insult, harm or commit any injustice against anyone of his *Pulaya* converts. Such an offensive stand reduced the misery of the untouchables considerably.

### **Economic Improvements**

Fr. Caironi took series of measures to relieve his converts from their indebtedness and economic misery. He found that most of the *Pulayas* were indebted to their masters. In order to relieve them from their indebtedness and bondage, Caironi examined the accounts his converts had with their landlords. "If they had real debts with them (landlords) he would pay them, but he would leave aside the exorbitant false compound interests. He did the same with the greedy moneylenders. He would pay them only what his converts had borrowed, adding the official rate of interest"<sup>227</sup>. Such an attitude taken by Fr. Caironi yielded good result. It is to be noted that the sufferings of the *Pulayas* was mostly due to their subordination resulting from liability and indebtedness. Conversion to Christianity and the Missionary care bestowed up on them, freed the earstwhile untouchables from their bondage and liabilities.

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<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.



The *Pulaya* converts were also given employment. They were given work either in the lands purchased by the Missionaries or in the housing schemes they had started. They were also given plots of land and a house of their own.<sup>228</sup> This was a novel action in the Malabar context. One of the pressing demands of the depressed classes in Malabar was the fixity of tenure to their homesteads so that they would not be evicted at the will of the landlord. Here the Missionary action enabled the converted untouchables to occupy a piece of land. It gave them human dignity and social status.

### **Education and Social Upliftment - Role of Chirakkal Mission**

The Catholic Missionaries also opened elementary schools for the education of the depressed class converts. Their children were provided with slates, books, decent cloths and the money for paying the fees. Children belonging to all castes and communities were admitted to their schools. At the same time the Christian Missionaries came in to conflict with the nationalists who stood for the abolition of labour schools.<sup>229</sup> The *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and social activists like Swami Anand Thirth argued that maintenance of separate schools (labour schools) would perpetuate the system of social segregation of untouchables. So they advocated the abolition of labour schools and campaigned for the fusion of education of all sections as the means for the eradication of untouchability.<sup>230</sup> Here the Missionary

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>229</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, July 28, 1939.

<sup>230</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 3, 1939, March 16, 1939.

influence enabled the leaders from the depressed classes to campaign against the abolition of labour schools<sup>231</sup>. The conversion of depressed classes to Christianity and the growing influence of missionaries among this section provoked the orthodox Hindu nationalists, particularly the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* to campaign against extending the benefits given to the *Harijans* to the *Pulaya* converts<sup>232</sup>.

The many sided activities undertaken by the Jesuit missionaries in the Chirakkal region and their counterparts in other regions contributed substantially to the upliftment of the depressed classes. The Missionary influence contributed to the material, moral social and educational upliftment of the downtrodden sections. The formerly despised *Pulayas* viewed the Missionaries with awe and respect. They affectionately called Carironi as "*Sangadathil Sahaicha Snehidan*" (The helping friend of those in sorrows). At the same time it should be noted that the Missionary work of the upliftment of the downtrodden section was an offshoot of their evangelization activities. It is also worthwhile to note that the evangelization work was only partially successful. The statistics given by Church historians indicate the fact that only a small segment of the depressed classes embraced the Catholic faith<sup>233</sup>. It is equally true that sizeable section of the Catholic population was

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<sup>231</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, July 28 and August 4, 1939.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, *Mathrubhumi*, November 28 and December 31, 1939.

<sup>233</sup> The Catholic population of Malabar excluding Wayanad was only about 12000 by 1946. For details see Fr. Geo Payyapally, Dr. A.M. Patroni. S.J. in *Sabdam, Mahadjanma Sadabdi Smaranika*, Kannur, 2005. p. 87.

the *Pulaya* converts to Christianity. But their number was small when we consider the total number of depressed classes in Malabar. At the same time the impact of conversion was much larger than the actual number of converts. The dignity and social status acquired by the converts enabled those outside the Catholic faith to challenge the existing power relations. There was another serious criticism that Fr. Caironi—who was instrumental in the conversion of lower castes to Catholicism—purchased the *Pulayas* through money, land and homes and other material benefits. There may be an element of truth in this criticism. But the fact is that the missionary work enabled the underlings in the society to stand on their legs. The Missionary work also forced the elites in the social ladder to look into the problems of the depressed classes with a sympathetic gesture. It is an undeniable fact that the conversion of depressed classes, though small, forced the caste Hindus to make introspection in to their social and religious practices. The necessity of maintaining religious solidarity in an age of expanding democracy forced even the diehard casteists to forge alliance with those beyond the pale of caste system through recognizing their legitimate grievances. It may be surmised that the work of the Basel Missionaries and Catholic missionaries contributed to the struggle for social equality and justice.

### CHAPTER III

## REFORM MOVEMENTS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

The structural transformation that took place in the Malabar society under colonial regime brought to the forefront new ideologies, institutions and practices. Values in conflict with *Brahmanical* worldview began to emerge by the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Socio religious reform movements originated in other parts of India made their entry into Malabar in this transitional phase of its history and culture. The powerful reform activities inaugurated by elites of Kerala also worked in the direction of socio-religious and cultural transformation. An analysis of the activities of these movements in the socio-cultural spectrum of Malabar helps us to locate their role in upholding human dignity and social justice.

In Malabar also, as elsewhere in India colonial modernity found its early admirers and adherents among the caste Hindus. The educated section among them developed a rich tradition of discourse with the new system. They located and discussed the colonial rule in the wider context of their social regeneration.<sup>234</sup> The western attack against Hindu culture and values

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<sup>234</sup> Bhikhu Parekh discussed the different streams of discourse developed by Hindu *bhadralok* in the all India context. See Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, New Delhi, 1989.

prompted them to reinterpret the same both at the ideological and institutional levels, and the conversion of the lower caste members to Islam and Christianity provoked them to take a changed attitude towards caste system and untouchability.<sup>235</sup> As a result, the hitherto difused and vague Hindu self consciousness acquired corporate articulation during the British rule.<sup>236</sup> The activities of socio-religious reform movements should be analysed against this background.

Reform movement originated in those places where the earliest impact of colonialism was felt. The British conquest of India was engineered with Bengal as their base. Naturally the Bengali bhadralok<sup>237</sup> were the first to react with colonial culture. They took the lead in the intellectual movement for the eradication of social evils and for socio-cultural regeneration. Thus the spirit of reform embracing almost the whole of India began with the efforts of Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal leading to the formation of Brahma Samaj in 1828.<sup>238</sup> The Brahma Samaj condemned idolatry, polytheism and the rigidities of caste system and put forward the vision of New India. In course of time the Samaj opened its branches in different parts of India including Malabar.

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<sup>235</sup> M.N. Sreenivas, *Social Changes in Modern India*, Bombay, 1966, p.50.

<sup>236</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *op. cit.*, p.34.

<sup>237</sup> *Bhadralok*, literally "well mannered person"; is a Bengali term used to denote the new class of 'gentlefolk' who arose during colonial times (1757-1947) in Bengal. It is still used to indicate the members of the middle class.

<sup>238</sup> K.N. Panikkar, "Socio-Religious Reforms and the National Awakening" in Bipan Chandra *et al.*, *India's struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1988, p.82.

The *Arya Samaj* founded by Dayananda Saraswathi was another socio-religious reform movement of Pan-Indian character which made its entry into Malabar. Dayananda opposed idolatry, rituals, priesthood and caste practices. To him the practice of untouchability had no scriptural basis.<sup>239</sup> As an ardent advocate of Hindu religion he was pained by the conversion of Hindus-mostly of lower castes - to Islam and Christianity.

The Theosophical Society founded by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott became an influential socio-religious reform movement in South India under the energetic leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant. It was the earliest organisation to feel its presence in Malabar. The Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swami Vivekananda also had some presence in the soil of Malabar. The Sree Narayana Movement under the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru was another organisation which influenced the social, religious and cultural landscape of Malabar. Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi, Vagbhatananda and Swami Sivananda Paramahansa also taught their perception of social equality in the terrain already watered by those movements mentioned above.

### **Theosophical Society in Malabar**

Among the socio-religious reform movements the Theosophical Society entered first in Malabar. In 1882 the first branch of the society was

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<sup>239</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *op cit.*, p.213.

organised at Palghat.<sup>240</sup> Another branch was opened at Tirur in 1884. In between 1902 and 1914 its activities spread to Badagara, Calicut, Manjeri, Nilambur, Ponnani, Alathur, Ottapalam and Chittoor. Later branches were opened at Kannur and Chovva. The branches at Tellichery, Badagara, Calicut, Kannur and Chovva functioned well and other branches ceased to exist.<sup>241</sup>

Theosophical Society was a spiritual movement aimed at the revival of Hinduism. It preached universal brotherhood of man irrespective of the distinctions of caste, creed, race or sex.<sup>242</sup> It laid special emphasis on the greatness of Hinduism and other oriental religions. In India, Mrs. Annie Besant was the chief exponent of the Theosophical Society. She defended Hinduism in its entirety-philosophy, yoga, rites and rituals, ceremonies and varnashram dharma.<sup>243</sup> Her aim was the spiritual revival of India as against the materialistic ideas of the west being preached in India by the English educated. Her enthusiastic preaching strengthened Hindus pride in their religion and culture which was severely criticised and condemned by European missionaries. The educated youth of India who face an identity crisis turned to Theosophical Society as it was an organisation promoted by westerners upholding the virtues of Hinduism.

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<sup>240</sup> M.K. Sivaraman, "A short history of Kerala Theosophical Federation" in the *Souvenir of Kerala Theosophical Federation Retention Platinum Jubilee Celebration*, Kozhikode 1989.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, Reprint, 1990, p. 294.

<sup>243</sup> S. Natarajan, *A Century of Social Reform in India*, Bombay, 1969, p. 76.

In Malabar also the missionary attacks on Hinduism was resisted by Theosophists. Basel Mission reports expressed deep concern over the argument of Colonel Olcott that "he has saved Hindus from the hands of the cruel missionaries."<sup>244</sup> Similarly the "brotherhood of the Hindus" upheld by the Theosophists "irrespective of the many hundreds of castes and caste prejudices" was of alarming concern to the missionaries.<sup>245</sup> The Theosophist emphasis on human brotherhood irrespective of caste attracted the educated people including the *avarana* elites to it. The *Tiya* leaders like C. Krishnan,<sup>246</sup> Murkoth Kumaran,<sup>247</sup> Rarichan Moopan and Kottiath Ramunni<sup>248</sup> co-operated with its activities. Kurumathur Parameswaran Nambudiripad, E.B. Hill, V. Moidu Sahib, S.V. Samual, A.C. Kannan Nambiar, Srimathi Narayani Kettilamma, Eralpad Vidwan Ettan Tampuran, Nilambur Manavedan Raja and Manjeri Rama Iyer were the prominent Theosophists of Malabar.<sup>249</sup>

The Theosophists of Malabar were in the forefront of the movement for the eradication of social evils. In 1914 Mrs. Annie Beasan organised a group of people called 'stalwarts' to fight against the inequalities based on caste, child marriage, suppression of women and racism.<sup>250</sup> The society also

<sup>244</sup> *Basel German Evangelical Mission*, hereafter *BGEM Report*, 1889. KTC Achieves, Mangalore, p. 16.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> K.R. Achuthan, *C. Krishnan*, Biography-Mal., Kottayam, 1971.

<sup>247</sup> Murkoth Kunhappa, *Murkoth Kumaran*, Biography-Mal., Kottayam, 1975, p.42.

<sup>248</sup> Vellat Karunakaran Nair, *A Short History of Asoka Sankara Theosophical lodge - Annie Hall - upto 1962*, Calicut, Reprint, 1988, p. 3.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.



organised *misbrabhojanam* (intercaste dining) at Annie Hall, Calicut in which *Brahmins, Nairs* and *Tiyas* denied together.<sup>251</sup> The Theosophists like Manjeri Rama Iyer also attended the marriage feast of a *Tiya* friend. The *Brahmins* who attended the function along with their family members were expelled from the community for the violation of caste rules.<sup>252</sup>

Mrs. Beasant was very much pained by the disabilities imposed upon certain communities of Malabar. Under her able leadership, the Theosophists of Malabar supported the rights of the polluting castes to use public roads. She viewed the closing of certain roads to polluting castes as a 'shameful insult' to a part of the Hindu community; disgrace to the Hindu religion.<sup>253</sup>

The approach of the Theosophists to pollution and purity was well articulated by Mrs. Beasant in her speech delivered at the Madras Provincial Conference of 1918. She said: "A panchama became touchable when his life was uplifted. The question (of untouchability) ought to be looked not from the point of view of custom but from the point of view of commonsense dictated by sense of cleanliness and sanitary environment of lower castes."<sup>254</sup> She also argued "for more active and widespread efforts in the direction of educating the depressed classes... by affording greater facilities for the education of these classes and by creating a public feeling against the gross

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<sup>251</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1917.

<sup>252</sup> Vellat Karunakaran Nair, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>253</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1917.

<sup>254</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1918.

and unfair notion regarding them as untouchables."<sup>255</sup> Inspired by these words the Theosophists of Malabar organised programmes for the upliftment of the depressed classes. They started a school for the *panchamas* at Palghat.

Mrs. Beasant criticised the double dealings of Hindus towards the depressed classes. She argued that without sharing the benefits of present rights and liberties (with the untouchables) the Indians have no right to ask for freedom.<sup>256</sup> With this objective in mind, the second District Conference of the Indian National Congress held at Calicut in April 1917 passed the following resolution:- "This conference is of the opinion that the disabilities imposed upon certain castes of Kerala fettering their free movement in public places are cruel and unjust and appeals to public opinion and the religious organisations in the district to concert immediate measures to remove them".<sup>257</sup> It became more significant in the context that the Political Conference held at Palghat in the previous years rejected similar resolution on the ground that "such issues should be discussed in the forum of the Social Conference".<sup>258</sup> The domineering influence of Mrs. Beasant contributed to such a change in the attitude of the political activists of Malabar.

The elite among the polluting castes of Malabar, especially the *Tiya* elites, co-operated with the Theosophists in the movement for ensuring them

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<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 6 December, 1927.

<sup>257</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1917.

<sup>258</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1916.

social justice. But they were suspicious about the Home Rule movement organised by Mrs. Beasant and the Theosophists. They were also skeptical towards the honesty and sincerity of the *savarna* political activists in implementing the resolution regarding the opening of public roads to all sections of the people irrespective of *theendal*.<sup>259</sup> The *avarna* elites co-operated with the Theosophists in their struggle for civil liberties to all sections; but kept themselves away from the political struggles for fear of *savarna* domination. Besides, Mrs. Beasant's defence of Hinduism in its entirety was also viewed with suspicion.

The influence of Theosophical Society was limited to the elites of the Malabar society. Even in their *mishrabhojanam* only the educated *Tiyas* participated. The depressed classes, “being 'unclean' and 'touchable only when his life was uplifted’”; were not admitted to intercaste dining or other activities. Though it was a pioneering attempt, it also shows the limitation of the reform activities undertaken by the Theosophical Society.

### **Brahmo Samaj**

The Brahmo Samaj made its entry into Malabar in 1898 with the establishment of its branch at Calicut. Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan was the moving soul behind this venture.<sup>260</sup> Under his initiative the Samaj opened its branches

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<sup>259</sup> *Mitavadi*, October 1917.

<sup>260</sup> P.S. Velayudhan *et al.*, *Kerala Charithram, Vol. II*, Mal., Ernakulam, 1972, p. 558.

at Palghat and Tellichery. Being advocates of monotheism and universalism, the Brahmosamajists recited *keerthanams* (devotional songs) acceptable to all creeds. In those days there were no *keerthanams* in Malayalam eulogising the virtues of monotheism. So the Brahmosamajists recited Tamil *keethanams* and those written by Maharshi Devendranath Tagore. Later they composed devotional songs in Malayalam. The '*Brahma Keerthanam*' written by Karat Govindankutty Menon was the first one in this respect.<sup>261</sup> Dr. Gopalan, V.K. Kunhikkannan alias Vagbhatanand Gurukkal, Swami Shivaprasad, Brahmavadi P. Kunhiraman, Mahakavi Kuttamath, Padmanabha Panikker and Aryabhatan also wrote *keerthanams* and were recited. *Keerthana Ratnamala*, *Ganamalika* and *Ghrihadharma Geethamruthan* were the important devotional songs published by them. The religious and moral teachings of Buddha, Moses, Jesus and prophet Muhammed found a place in their devotional songs. The *keerthanams* were recited with the aim of inculcating religious harmony and human brotherhood. In order to coordinate the activities of the Samaj, a Brahmo Hall was opened at Calicut in 1900<sup>262</sup> by Manavikrama Ettan Thampuran, the Zamorin of Calicut.

The Brahma Samajists were the pioneers in the movement for the eradication of untouchability in Malabar.<sup>263</sup> Through persuasive eloquence and sustained hardwork they led the *Pulayas* of Chevayur through the road to

<sup>261</sup> M.S. Nair, *Manasu Enna Diavam*, Mal., Kotakkat, Payyannur, 1991, p.20.

<sup>262</sup> P.S. Velayudhan, *op. cit.*, p.558.

<sup>263</sup> C.K. Moosath, "The Role of Kelappan in Harijan Activities" in the *Suvarna Jubilee Smaranika, Harijan Sevak Sangh*, Calicut, 1985, p.7.

Calicut. But the opposition of caste Hindus was so inhuman that they assaulted the *Pulayas* who accompanied the Brahmo Samajists. This resulted in many criminal cases.<sup>264</sup>

The Brahmo Samajists also gave due importance to the education of the depressed classes. They formed a Depressed Classes Mission to co-ordinate the work among the untouchable communities. Under its auspices a boarding school for pupils of the depressed classes functioned at Kallayi near Calicut.<sup>265</sup> The Depressed Classes Mission also managed two schools - one day school and a night school at Palghat. These institutions functioned well and catered to the educational needs of the depressed classes for several decades.<sup>266</sup>

The Brahmo Samajists also formed an organisation of *Pulayas* and *Thottis* (scavengers). This organisation held weekly meetings and advised the 'unclean' classes to lead a life of cleanliness and to avoid liquor.<sup>267</sup>

In order to undermine the octopus hold of caste system and pollution-purity divide, the Samaj propagated and promoted intercaste marriages and inter dinings. As a result the first known intercaste marriage in Kerala took place at Varkala in 1921 at the annual meeting of the Brahmosamaj.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>265</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXXVI, p. 328.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> M.P. Manmadan, *Kelappan*, Biography-Mal., Kottayam, 1984, p.116.

<sup>268</sup> M.S. Nair, *op. cit.*, p.20.

The impact of Brahmosamaj was tremendous in the socio-cultural transformation of Malabar. Reformers like Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi [Karat Govindankutty Menon] and Vagbhatananda Gurukkal (V.K. Kunhikannan) began their activities through Brahmo Samaj. According to Swami Brahmavrita the revolutionary spirit of Brahmosamaj worked directly or indirectly on all the Hindu reform movements of Kerala.<sup>269</sup>

The polluting castes had their own reservations about the movement. Though Kallingal Madathil Rarichan Moopan, an influential person belonging to the *Tiya* community, advocated for the *Tiyas* joining the creed; the response was lukewarm.<sup>270</sup> *Tiya* intellectuals like Murkoth Kumaran, on the otherhand, argued that their initiation into the movement would not remove their caste disabilities. Instead, it would create a group of people designated as *Tiya Brahmos*.<sup>271</sup> Besides, the Samaj did not have any concrete socio-economic programme for the upliftment of the downtrodden sections from their deplorable conditions. It also failed to attract the mass of untouchable population into its creed. At the same time the work of the Samaj kindled awareness among the educated elites of Malabar about the social evils. This awareness enabled them to organize movements against caste system, untouchability and other social injustices.

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<sup>269</sup> Swami Brahmavrita, *Maharshi Vagbhatanada Gurudevar*, Biography –Mal., Thottappally, 1971, p.101.

<sup>270</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1917, pp. 30-37.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

## Ramakrishna Mission

The educated people of Malabar were also attracted to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission. While, on his journey through Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, Swami Vivemananda described Kerala as a madhouse of caste, a 'lunatic asylum'.<sup>272</sup> He denounced the morbid nontouchism of the Hindus and actively campaigned against it.<sup>273</sup> The oppressive caste practices of this region made him to describe it as a "paradise of fools where everyone was happy in his ignorance, in his superstition and his age long social bondage".<sup>274</sup>

Vivekananda's famous critiques of Malabar customs and practices have provoked many young men to make introspection into it. Naturally they were instrumental in organising the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in this part of the country. In 1913 Ramakrishna Vedanta *Sangh* started its activities in Calicut. It developed into the Ramakrishna Asramam in 1930.<sup>275</sup> Another *ashrama* was started at Quilandy in 1915.<sup>276</sup> The Mission also started schools and hospitals in the vicinity of its *ashramas*. It admitted children belonging to various castes into the *ashramas* and arranged medical facilities free of

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<sup>272</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1964, p. 294.

<sup>273</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *op. cit.*, p.213.

<sup>274</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-295.

<sup>275</sup> P.S. Velayudhan, *op. cit.*, p. 558.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

cost.<sup>277</sup> But the influence of the Mission was confined to few urban centres of Malabar.

### ***Arya Samaj***

The *Arya Samaj* was another socio-religious reform movement of pan-Indian character which made its entry into Malabar during the early decades of the 20th century. Dayananda Saraswathi, the founder of the Samaj, argued that the practice of untouchability had no scriptural basis. As an ardent advocate of *Sanadhana Dharma* of Hinduism based on Vedas, he was pained by the conversion of Hindus-mostly of lower castes - to Islam and Christianity.<sup>278</sup> The untouchables of Malabar also preferred British rule to the tyrannical *Brahmin* rule".<sup>279</sup> This attitude of the untouchables coincided with the British argument that Indians were unfit for self government.<sup>280</sup> The Muslim demands for separate electorate and the complaint of over representation of the Hindus who treat the untouchables as outside the pale of the society posed serious challenges to the Hindu community.<sup>281</sup> *Arya Samaj* correctly diagnosed the political dangers inherent in these arguments and repeatedly warned against it. To counter such arguments, the Samaj organised

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 558-560.

<sup>278</sup> The Basel Mission Reports have details of conversion of Hindus to Christianity and Islam. See for details *BGEM Reports*, 1841-1914.

<sup>279</sup> *Mitavadi*, June 1919.

<sup>280</sup> Stephen Koss, *John Morley and the India Office, 1905-1910*. Yale University, 1969.

<sup>281</sup> *Mitavadi*, May 1919.



*Suddhi* movement to check the flow of untouchables to Islam and Christianity and to bring back those who already deserted the Hindu identity.<sup>282</sup>

The Malabar rebellion of 1921 opened space for the activities of the *Arya Samaj* in this part of the country. The proclaimed aim was to give relief to the riot victims. The Aryasamajists toured the riot affected areas and rescued several Hindus. They opened relief camps at Kozhikode, Mayanad, Nilambur, Tuvur, Tirurangadi, Neeralmukku and Kallai and gave food items and dress materials to the Hindu refugees.<sup>283</sup>

The Samaj also started *suddhi* movement to bring back those Hindus who were converted to other religions. By August 1922 they reconverted about 1890 people to Hinduism. But the *Cheruma* converts to Islam refused to come back to their earlier creed.<sup>284</sup> This was mainly because of their fear of untouchability and segregation practiced by the caste Hindus. This incident was an eye opener to the Samaj. So it began activities for the elimination of *theendal* and *thodeel* from the Hindu caste ensemble of Malabar.

The *Arya Samaj* was very much concerned with the divisions within the caste groups of Malabar. Its first effort was to bring the different groups of the *Nair* community to a single platform. To achieve this a *pandibhojanam* (intra caste dining) of different *Nair* groups was organised

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<sup>282</sup> *History of Freedom Movement File*, hereafter *HFM File* 1910-20, Tamil Nadu Archives, hereafter TNA, Chennai.

<sup>283</sup> P.S. Velayudhan, *op. cit.*, pp. 558-560.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 568.

under the auspices of the Samaj at Chovva near Kannur on 23rd January, 1923.<sup>285</sup> Through this work the Samaj succeeded in bringing caste solidarity among the *Nairs*.

*Arya Samaj* worked in the Tali temple premises of Calicut against the existing practice of utilising the services of Christian scavengers. The *savarnas* of Tali region were not willing to utilise the services of Hindu scavengers belonging to depressed classes to do the cleaning work for fear of *theendal*. The propaganda work organised by the Samaj ultimately yielded good response from the *savarnas*.<sup>286</sup>

### ***Arya Samaj* and Kalpathy Struggles**

At Palghat, the *Arya Samaj* unleashed a hectic campaign against the restrictions imposed on low caste to walk through the streets of Kalpathy *Agrahara*. The untouchables of Palghat, particularly the *Ezhavas*, were determined to put an end to the age old restrictions imposed upon them. They found that the Tamil *Brahmins* of Kalpathy were not even ready to tolerate Government officials belonging to polluting castes to discharge their duties.<sup>287</sup> Accordingly the *Tiya* Sub Inspector of Police, who was posted to maintain law and order during the car festival days in 1914 was withdrawn following the complaint of the *Brahmins*.<sup>288</sup> Likewise the Municipal Council,

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 568-569.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p.570.

<sup>287</sup> G.O. No. 782 L & M dated, 14.06.1893, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>288</sup> G.O. No. 206, L & M dated, 20.1.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

dominated by *Brahmins*, even passed resolution demanding the Government to cancel the transfer of a *Tiya* apothecary to Palghat.<sup>289</sup> Government rejected the request as 'it would cause much trouble and would also constitute a most inconvenient precedent.'<sup>290</sup>

The *Tiya* elites viewed the arguments of the Kalpathy *Brahmins* as humiliating. They began airing the views of religious conversion.<sup>291</sup> Some of them embraced Christianity.<sup>292</sup> There were also conversions to Islam.<sup>293</sup> The *Arya Samaj*, which was apprehensive of the conversion of lower castes, decided to concentrate their work in this region. Within a short period they succeeded in converting about 70 low caste people to their creed.<sup>294</sup> The Samaj also confronted the opposition of the Tabligh-a-Islam and complained that the Muhammadans were showing an inclination to range themselves on the side of the *Brahmins*.<sup>295</sup>

It was astonishing to the Samaj that the *Brahmins* had no objection to use the *Agraharam* streets by those people converted to Christianity and Islam as these are recognised religions.<sup>296</sup> The Chief Secretary of Madras Government also endorsed the same view saying that "conversion to the *Arya*

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<sup>289</sup> D.R. Files G.O. No. 946, MS, dated, 23.05.1904, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>291</sup> *Mitavadi*, March 1919.

<sup>292</sup> *BGEM Report*, 1888 p. 24.

<sup>293</sup> DL/9525/25 dated 7.2.1925 of the District Magistrate, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> *MLC debates* Vol. XXVI, p. 51. *HFM File* No. 77, p.18.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

*Samaj* is not on a par with conversion to Christianity or Islam."<sup>297</sup> Government gave necessary directions to the District Magistrate to act as "conversions not been made and take measures to preserve the statuesquo until the converts prove their claim in a civil court."<sup>298</sup>

Meanwhile the *Ezhavas* of Palghat became jubilent over the enactment of the Government order which categorically stated that "there is no objection to any person or persons belonging to any class or community walking through any public road, street or pathway in any town or village; and that there is no objection to any person belonging to the depressed classes having access to the premises of any public office, well, tank or places of public resort and to places and buildings where public business is transacted, in the same manner and to the same extent as persons belonging to the community of caste Hindus in the country".<sup>299</sup> This G.O. was issued with the unanimous support of the Madras Legislative Council and hence the *Ezhavas* felt that the public opinion was in favour of their position.<sup>300</sup>

Backed by the Government order which gave polluting castes the right to use public spaces and with the support of the *Arya Samaj*, the *Ezhavas* of Palghat decided to travel through Kalpathy. "When they moved to the

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<sup>297</sup> Letters from Chief Secretary - Madras, D.O. No. 5212, dated 13.11.25, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> G.O. No. 2660 L & M dated, 25.09.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>300</sup> Memorial of the *Ezhavas* of Palghat Taluk in G.O. No. 206 L&M dated, 20.1.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

*Agraharam* street, they were welcomed with stone-pelting".<sup>301</sup> The breach of law forced the Sub Divisional Magistrate to ban the entry of polluting castes through an order under section 144 Cr. P.C. during the car festival days; that is from 13 November to 15 November, 1924. When the car festival was over the *Brahmins* requested the authorities to extend the prohibitory order.<sup>302</sup> But the request was turned down by the authorities stating that "since public money is spent on the *Gramam* street, all classes of people have a prima facie right to have access to them."<sup>303</sup> It was also stated that if the villagers wish to contest this, their proper course is to seek for an injunction in the civil court.<sup>304</sup> Although theoretically the depressed classes got permission to use the public roads, practically it was refused to them. Though the streets in Kalpathy *Agraharam* were registered as Government *Purampoke*,<sup>305</sup> the attitude of the government was that "the people have no right to decide a street or road as public"<sup>306</sup> made the situation worse.

In November 1925 the *Ezhavas* with the support of *Arya Samaj* again tried to assert their right of way. Swami Sradhananda, the supreme leader of the *Arya Samaj*, reached Palghat to coordinate its activities. The government sensed the danger of breach of law and order, again issued prohibitory orders

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<sup>301</sup> D.O. Letter No. 9525/25 dated, 9.11.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>302</sup> Memorials from *Brahmins* in G.O.No. 206 L & M dated, 20.1.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>303</sup> MLC debates, Vol. XXI, p.2.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> G.O. No. 523 Public dated, 27.05.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>306</sup> G.O. No. 37 public dated, 9.1.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

to all polluting castes including those converted to *Arya Samaj* to enter the *Agraharam* streets for four days from 13 November to 16 November, 1925.<sup>307</sup>

The attitude of the Madras Government that converts to *Arya Samaj* has not the same social rights as enjoyed by the converts to Christianity and Islam irritated the Samaj. They organised meetings throughout Malabar and all over India to protest the attitude to the Madras Government and the *Brahmins* of Kalpathy.<sup>308</sup> Resolutions were passed in these meetings which reminded the Government and the *Brahmins* of Kalpathy of the dangerous consequences of denying elementary civic rights to the polluting castes. The Samaj also condemned the action of the Madras Government which illtreated the converts to *Arya Samaj* while giving fair treatment to the converts to Christianity and Islam.

The campaign organised by the *Arya Samaj* forced the government to appoint a commission to enquire into the matter. On the basis of the commission report, Government issued a notification in which it advised the aggrieved parties to place the matter before the court. Meanwhile, the *Brahmins* again attacked an *Ezhava* converted to *Arya Samaj* and police executed case. The court stated that the *Ezhavas* converted to *Arya Samaj* had the right to walk through the streets of Kalpathy and the *Brahmins* have no

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<sup>307</sup> G.O. No. 9525/25, Revenue, dated, 21.4.1926, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

right to obstruct him. These incidents paved the way for the ascertainment of civic rights by the polluting castes, especially the *Ezhavas*.

However, the *Arya Samaj* did not succeed in getting deep inroads into the Malabar society. Though their campaign for protecting the civic rights of the polluting castes received the attention of the people, the campaign for the revival of Hinduism was viewed with suspicion. The adamant attitude of those who spoke for the Hindu *Dharma* (*Sanatanists*) towards polluting castes made the work of the *Arya Samaj* more difficult. Besides, they also did not have any concrete programme for the socio-economic upliftment of the untouchables. But their sustained campaign kindled the spirit of social justice in the minds of the polluting castes. The political danger of conversion of untouchables to other religions aired by the Samaj also provoked the enlightened section of the *savarnas* to view the problem of casteism and untouchability with a sympathetic attitude. Though the effort of the *Arya Samaj* was to save Hinduism, the movement unleashed by it enabled the polluting and depressed classes to assert their freedom through forceful actions and legal sanctions.

### **Reform Movements of Kerala Origin**

The teachings of the intellectuals of Kerala origin like Sree Narayana Guru, Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi, Vagbatananda Gurudevan and Swami Sivananda Paramahansa also inspired the people to organize movements for

the eradication of social evils like *theendal* and *thodeel*. Large number of people were attracted to their teachings which resulted in the formation of organisations for the propagation and practice of their ideology. These reformers were well informed of the specific cultural realities of the region. They had an organic relation with the pressures, problems and aspirations of the society and were able to articulate their views in the language of the people. Under their guidance the socio-religious reform activities crossed the boundary of elitism and permeated to the entire society. Though the ideological moorings of these reform movements transcend from Sanskritisation to agnosticism, all of them campaigned against the social evils and this instilled in the minds of the people courage and confidence to resist such evils. Of these movements, the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru exerted remarkable influence in the society.



## The Sree Narayana Movement

Sree Narayana Guru was the social reformer of Travancore who took the battle against *Brahmin* hegemony through his consecration of *Sivalinga* at Aruvippuram in 1888. The consecration of the deity was not at all allowed to anyone other than a *Brahmin*. When the *Brahmanical* hierarchy questioned his action, Sree Narayana answered: "I am consecrating the *Ezhava* Siva and not the *Brahmin* Siva". This befitting reply silenced them. His clairvoyant action was an attempt to uproot the *Brahmanical* supremacy and thus a challenge to the whole establishment centred on that concept. He was establishing that the lower castes were also capable of leading a spiritual life and also that without being dependent on the *Brahmin* priests they could have their own temples of worship. Through this action he wanted to relieve the backward communities from the abominable practices like the worship of evil spirits with blood sacrifices of goats and cocks and fermented drinks. Through the consecration of the Sivalinga Narayana Guru was adopting the customs and practices of the Brahminical religion. This has been viewed as sanskritisation.<sup>309</sup> Thus Sree Narayana Guru sought to replace the worship of evil spirits by an innovative form of worship.<sup>310</sup> It was also the beginning of

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<sup>309</sup> M.N. Srinivas defined sanskritisation as "the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, "twice born" caste. For details see M.N. Srinivas, *op cit.*, pp. 1-43.

<sup>310</sup> P. Chandra Mohan, "Popular Culture and Socio-Religious Reform: Narayana Guru and the Ezhavas of Travancore" in *Studies in History*, 3.1. n.s. 1987, pp. 62-63.

his mission to reform the man, the community and the society as well from within.<sup>311</sup> Through the consecration of the *Sivalinga*, Naryana Guru was proclaiming that humanity is one and it was written down at the entrance of the temple that was built at Aruvippuram. It runs as follows:-

"Here is a model abode  
Where men live like brothers  
Bereft of the prejudices of caste  
Or the rancor of religious differences".

The *Ezhava* elites all over Kerala rallied under the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru. They formed a committee to look after the affairs of the Aruvippuram temple. From this humble beginning developed the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana *Yogam* which was registered under the Companies Act in 1903. Its aims were to look after the Aruvippuram temple affairs and the temples under it, and to work for the advancement of the community's religious and secular education, its agricultural, commercial and industrial development and to raise funds for such purposes.<sup>312</sup>

Sree Narayana Guru conducted a whirlwind tour of different regions of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Ceylon.<sup>313</sup> As one who believed that temples were essential to satisfy the spiritual cravings of the average individual, he

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<sup>311</sup> M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation Making: A Study of Sahodaran Ayyappan*, Palghat, 1993, p. 24.

<sup>312</sup> P.S. Velayudhan, *SNDP Yogacharithram*, Mal., Quilon, 1979, p. 97.

<sup>313</sup> SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1978, pp 16-17.

consecrated shrines in these places. The *Tiya* elites of Malabar invited him to consecrate the temples constructed by them at places like Tellicherry (Jagannatha Temple), Calicut (Sreekanteswara temple), Kannur (Sundareswara Temple) and Palghat (Visweswara temple). These temples functioned as a symbol of caste solidarity among the members of *Tiya* community in Malabar.<sup>314</sup> The consecration of the higher deities of the Hindu pantheon also boosted the morale of the *Tiyas*. Apart from this Guru's insistence on the eradication of social practices like *Talikettu Kalyanam*, *Tirandukuli*, propitiating deities with toddy and blood and the like worked in perfect harmony with the 'modernist' perception of the *Tiya* elites. Thus the changes initiated in the religious practices and the critical attitude taken towards 'pre-modern practices' contributed to social change among the *Tiyas*.

The *Tiya* elites of Malabar accepted the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru. They also began attending the annual conferences of the SNDP *Yogam* and even presided over some of the conferences. The *Yogam* held its annual sessions in Malabar also.<sup>315</sup> In spite of this, the SNDP *Yogam* did not secure strong base in Malabar. The membership of the *Yogam* confirm this. For instance, at the end of 1915 out of the 1299 members of the *Yogam* only 138 were from Malabar.<sup>316</sup> The Malabar *Tiyas* regarded the

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<sup>314</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*, Delhi, 1988, p. 87.

<sup>315</sup> P.S. Velayudhan, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-174.

<sup>316</sup> *Mitavadi*, June 1916.

*Yogam* as a 'Sabha of Southerners'.<sup>317</sup> They also tried to build their own independent organizations.<sup>318</sup>

The policy of the *Tiya* elites of Malabar was to synthesis to teachings of Sree Narayana Guru with the ideology of colonial modernity. The intellectual and social philosophy thus evolved, enabled them to organise a crusade against untouchability and unapproachability. But the impact of the Sree Narayana Movement was not much visible in the attitude of *Tiyas* to the castes below them. The *Tiyas*, who suffered discrimination at the hands of *savarnas*, had no hesitation to suppress and discriminate the castes below them. Newspapers and magazines published from Malabar have plenty of reports regarding the suppression of the other depressed communities by the *Tiyas*.<sup>319</sup> The *Tiya* elites who formed passive resistance league for securing their rights in the public spaces<sup>320</sup> found that their community was not enthusiastic to the same rights of the other depressed communities. Though the elites of the community made fervent appeals to treat the depressed class people with equality, it was not translated into the social plane in its entirety.

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<sup>317</sup> Various issues of *Mitavadi*, 1917-1918.

<sup>318</sup> *Tiya* intellectuals like Murkoth Kumaran exhorted the community to build an organization on the model of *SNDP Yogam* which should meet annually in Central Kerala, *Mitavadi*, September 1918.

<sup>319</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1923-1947, *Native News Paper Reports 1900-1947*, *Mitavadi 1913-1919*.

<sup>320</sup> Resolution No. 4 of the *Tiya* Conference held at Calicut on October 14, 1918 in *Mitavadi*, November 1919.

Admission of depressed communities into the *Tiya* temples was a serious controversy within the community for nearly two decades. According to Murkoth Kumaran, there arose a dispute among the *Tiyas* of Tellichery regarding the admission of *Pulayas* to the Jagannatha Temple. Failing to arrive at an agreement, Narayana Guru's intervention was sought. As per his direction the *Pulaya* devotees were allowed to worship at the fixed place for sometime. After a few years, the *Pulayas* were beaten black and blue and threatened to leave the place.<sup>321</sup> The *Tiya* youth who were influenced by the ideology of 'one Caste, One Religion and One God for man' again sought the meditation of Guru and succeeded in opening the temple to the depressed communities.<sup>322</sup> The *Tiya* temple of Calicut was opened to other depressed communities after years of debate.<sup>323</sup> The Sundaeswara temple at Kannur was opened only in 1932 in the wake of the Guruvayur *Satyagraha*.<sup>324</sup>

From the above analysis it is clear that the *Tiya* elites of Malabar had utilized the Sree Narayana Dharma to secure and widen civil rights and social status for them. At the sametime the relatively safe economic and occupational status of the *Tiya* elites prevented them from joining hands with the weaker sections particularly those whom they considered below them is social status. But the emancipatory potential of Sree Narayana Guru's

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<sup>321</sup> Murkoth Kumaran's article in *Mitavadi*, May 1917.

<sup>322</sup> Murkoth Kumaran, *Sri Narayana Guru Swamikalude Jivacaritram*, Mal., Calicut, 1971, pp. 275-276; *Mathrubhumi*, April 9, 1925.

<sup>323</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1923 to 1928.

<sup>324</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty, "The Guruvayur Satyagraha, 1931-1932", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, XIII, 1981, p. 51.

teachings was imbibed by the rising generations along with the ideologies of nationalism, socialism and communism and translated it into action for securing social justice.

### **Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi**

Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi was one of the prominent intellectuals of Malabar who propounded the ideas of social justice. His original name was Karat Govindankutty Menon. He was born on 26 August, 1852 at Kollankote in Palghat District. After completing traditional Sanskrit education he studied English up to the middle school level at Ernankulum.

Govindankutty Menon started his career as a petty revenue official. Then he entered in to the teaching profession as a High School Assistant at Calicut. During his stay at Calicut, Govindankutty Menon was associated with the Brahma Samaj movement. The Brahma Samajists of Calicut were in search of a man to compose *keerthanam* on 'One God' in Malayalam and Govindankutty Menon was their rightful choice<sup>325</sup>. The Brahma Samajists honored him with the title of 'Brahmananda Swami' as a token of their gratitude and in appreciation of his wide knowledge.

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<sup>325</sup> Govindankutty menon wrote a book titled *Brahma Keerthanam* on the request of Brahma Samajists. See Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi, *Moksha Pradeepam*, Mal., Alathur, 16<sup>th</sup> edn, 1991 P.IV

Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi was a prolific writer<sup>326</sup>. After his retirement from school service in 1907, he entered in to the life of an ascetic. His dwelling at Alathur came to be known as *Sidhashramam*. The ideology propounded by Shivayogi came to be known as '*Anandamatham*' or the Religion of Bliss. People from different parts of Kerala listened to his words. They opened centres known as '*Ananda Yogasala*'s' to discuss his teachings.

Shivayogi criticized idolatry, caste distinctions, untouchability, animal sacrifices, tradition that suppresses the rights of women and all other religious observances that forbade free thinking. He also criticized priestly domination and the authority of the existing rituals and observances<sup>327</sup>.

Shivayogi was against all types of dogmas. He refuted all the arguments on the existence of God as depicted by religions. *Anandadarsham* marks the culmination of his philosophy in which he places the 'mind' which inculcates '*Ananda*' as supreme.<sup>328</sup> It also aimed at the self realization of all men beyond the restrictions of caste and creed.

'*Ananda* cult' (the religion of bliss) propounded by Shivayogi differs fundamentally from the religions we know. In fact it was only a way of life free from all sorts of superstitions, rituals and caste distinction. It was an

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<sup>326</sup> Shivayogi has 16 books to his credit. For a detailed discussion of his works see M.S. Nair, *op. cit.*

<sup>327</sup> Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi, Note No. 92, pp. 200-214.

<sup>328</sup> Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi, *Anandadarsham*, Mal., 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Alathur, 1968, pp. 220-222.

ideology of social potest<sup>329</sup>. *Anandadarsham* regards all men as equals and it promotes the integrity of the community in to a single whole. The spirit of his argument is that there should exist no *Brahmin*, *Nair* or *Ezhava* but only *Maanavan*.<sup>330</sup> Shivayogi was an ardent critic of the priestly powers of *Brahmins*. He also viewed temples as centers of ignorance. He had no hesitation to criticize Sree Narayana Guru for erecting temples, consecrating idols and establishing parallel form of worship and priesthood.<sup>331</sup>

Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi criticized the evils of caste system and untouchability. He viewed caste system as definitely a man created institution and one cannot think that it is divine creaction.<sup>332</sup> His rational arguments against caste system<sup>333</sup> undermined its prestige and eroded the social base of the caste. He considers the elimination of the sense of inequality and discrimination practiced by the Hindus as the objective is writing *Mokshapradeepam*.<sup>334</sup> Casteism was viewed as the real cause for

<sup>329</sup> Asokan Mundon argues that the point of view of protest dissent will provide more insights to bring out the submerged meanings of the movements. See for details Asokan Mundon, *Renaissance and social change in Malabar A study with special reference to Ananda Samajam, Sidha Samajam and Atma Vidya Sangham*, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Calicut University, 2003.

<sup>330</sup> Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi - *Ananda Sutra*, Alathur, 1950, p. 8.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-12.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8, Note No. 92, pp. 183-184

<sup>333</sup> Shivayogi says that Leech is not like Chameleon, Chameleon is not like squirrel, squirrel is not like garden Lizard, garden Lizard is not like goat. Goat is not like elephant, elephant is not like horse, and horse is not like man. Grass is not like paddy. Coconut is not like fire, fire is not like air. Air is not like sky. The power (Shakti) which created everything in the universe, gave form and quality to it to be recognized even by children and it is pitty to think that power (Shakti) failed only in the case of man is creating distinctive signs to identify each and every caste. *Mokshapradeepam*, p.183.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, p II.



degeneration of Hinduism which stood in the way of progress. He also felt that Hindus will be saved only when such texts which propagate inequality are completely burnt. Through providing new meaning to *Brahminhood* as a status which could be achieved by anyone through learning and consistent practice,<sup>335</sup> Shivayogi had shaken to the roots the foundations of *Brahmin* superiority and the ideology represented by it as propagated by Hindu interpreters.

The teachings of Shivayogi and the *Sidhasharmam* founded by him became the intellectual centre of the movement against social injustices like caste system and untouchability. People belonging to various ritual and occupational status were attracted to his teachings and joined the new creed. They also founded *Ananda Yoga Sala's* to propagate his teachings. The intellectual onslaught against caste system initiated by Shivayogi also widened the public space developing in Malabar in the context of colonial modernity.

The progressive milieu thus emerged began questioning the rationale of the socio-political and cultural institutions which perpetuate social inequality. At the sametime it should be noted that Shivayogi also failed to explore the economic and political base of the social injustices prevailed in the society. But the people who were inspired by his critique of caste system

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<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

and untouchability imbibed the radical economic and political doctrines in their struggle for social justice.

### **Vagbhatananda**

Vagbhatananda was another great intellectual and social reformer of Malabar who campaigned against the social practices like caste system, untouchability, sacrifices associated with rituals and alcoholism. He also consistently fought for the rights of man in the context of colonial modernity and national upsurge against colonialism. He was born in 1885 in the village of Pattiyam as the son of Vaileri Cheeru Amma and Tenankandiyil Vazhavalappil Koran Gurukkal. His original name was Vaileri Kunhikannan. Vaileri Kunhikannan was brought up in the traditional *Gurukula* pattern of education and attained proficiency in Sanskrit, Indian philosophy and logic. After education he moved to Calicut and started a Sanskrit school- *Tatvaprakasika Ashramam* - at Karaparamba near Calicut.

At Calicut Kunhikannan Gurukkal co-operated with Brahma Samaj along with Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan and Karat Govindankutty Menon, who later become Brahmananda Swami. Their combined effort was a stimulus to the socio-religious reform activities of Kerala.<sup>336</sup> Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi called him 'Vagbhatananda' in praise of his capacity of eloquence and scholarship.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> *Vagbhatanandante Sampurna Krithikal*, Mal., Calicut, 1988, Preface, p. VIII.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid*, p. XLV.

Vagbatananda had high respect for the socio-religious reform movements. He correctly assessed the contributions of the reform movements in socio-cultural transformation of Kerala society. He was influenced by the teachings of Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi and Ponmadathil Krishna Swami alias Vayath Swami.<sup>338</sup> Vagbatananda also had great respect for the activities of the nationalist leaders like Gandhiji, Swami Vivekananda Rajagopalachari and others in the cause of social justice.

Vagbatananda's career stretched to various fields such as philosophy, spiritualism, social and religious reform, journalism, upliftment of the lower strata of the society and the like. The '*Thattwa Prakashika Ashramam*' opened by him served as the first and last resort of education to many members of untouchable castes who were interested in Sanskrit learning.<sup>339</sup>

Being an erudite scholar in the traditional philosophy and learning, Vagbatananda used the holy scriptures as a weapon in his fight against caste hierarchy and meaningless practices including idol worship.<sup>340</sup> For propagating his views on religious and social values Vagbatananda founded an organization named '*Atma Vidya Sangham*' in 1917. It was the agency to teach *Atma Vidya* and also the agency for undertaking socio-religious reform

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<sup>338</sup> Vayath Swami was active in the campaign against social evils like untouchability in the Azhikode region of Kannur District. See for details *Azhikode Panchayat Vikasana Report*. Also see *Vagbatanandante Sampurna Krithikkal*, p. XLIV.

<sup>339</sup> M.S.Nair, *Vagbatananda Guruvum Samoohya Navoathanavum*, Thiruvananthapuram 1998, p. 24.

<sup>340</sup> Vagbatananda, *op cit.*, pp. 821-838.

activities. With religious universalism as the basic principle Vagbatananda argued that the foundation of all religions is the belief in one supreme being. In other words *Atmavidya* aims at the knowledge of Brahma - the supreme creator-through the pure form of *Rajayoga* called *Nirgunopasana* or worship without an idol. He also argued that the spark of the same Brahma shines in every human being and as such all are equal and could become identical with the *brahma* after realisation. Through this argument he challenged the hegemony of the upper castes. To him religion prefers the rule of *Dharma* instead of the tyranny of upper castes.<sup>341</sup>

Vagbatananda was a friend of the untouchables. The clarion call of *Atmavidya Sangam* was:

"Awake, remember the creator  
Arise and fight against injustice"<sup>342</sup>

This fight against injustice was organized in a big way by the *Atma Vidya Sangham*. Vagbatananda believed that only those who treat both *Brahmins* and *Pulayas* as equals alone are great men.<sup>343</sup> To implement this belief Vagbatananda along with his disciples visited the huts of depressed communities. He taught them the necessity of prohibition and cleanliness.

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<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 245-246.

<sup>342</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 193-194

He also encouraged them to throw away the chains of stone beads worn by their ladies as the symbol of their inferior status.

*Atma Vidya Sangham* under the leadership of Vagbatananda organized inter-caste marriages and interdining. Vagbatananda called it *Preethivivaha* and *Preethibhojana*. The *Atma Vidya Sangham* of Azhikode organized a massive *mishrabhojanam* in 1927 as part of its annual conference.<sup>344</sup> Many *Pulayas* attended the *mishrabhojanam*. But the orthodox *Tiya Karanavars* of the locality ostracized those who attended *mishrabhojanam*. The *Karanavars* even denied the services of washerwomen (*vannathimattu*)<sup>345</sup> to the families of those who attended *mishrabhojanam*.<sup>346</sup> But nearly one thousand *Tiyas* of the locality convened a meeting and decided not to obey the orders of the *Karanavar*.<sup>347</sup> Vagbatananda also attended the intercaste marriage held at Varkala in 1921 at the annual conference of the Brahma Samaj.<sup>348</sup> Vagbatananda cited ancient scriptures to substantiate the validity of these actions. He says that Lord Krishna- the Guruvayurappan of *Sanatanists-*

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<sup>344</sup> M.T. Kumaran Master, "Azhikode Atma Vidya Sangham" reproduced in the souvenir of *Kerala Atma Vidya Sangham 80<sup>th</sup> State Conference*, Kannur, 2007, pp. 8-9.

<sup>345</sup> The cloth given by the washer woman was essential to cleanse the people from the shroud of pollution. We have evidences of the denial of the services of washer woman by the *Tiya karanavars* even to upper caste. For details see P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathonpatham Noottandile Keralam*, Kottayam, Reprint, p. 304. Also see Sivananda's critique of *Vannathimattu* in Swami Sivananda Paramahansa, *Siddha Vidyarthikalkulla Nadavadikramangal*, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. Badagara, 2003, pp. 14-15.

<sup>346</sup> *Souvenir of the Azhikode Atma Vidya Sangham*, Kannur, 2007.

<sup>347</sup> *Mathrubhoomi*, June, 1929.

<sup>348</sup> M.S. Nair, Note No. 106, p.20

himself practiced inter caste marriage and interdining. He also highlighted the *Mukkuva* lineage of Kurupandavas, Bhimasena's- alliance with Hidumbi- a Nishada woman, and Lord Krishna's association with the Pandavas etc. to substantiate his point. His argument to the *Sanatanists* was that, if Lord Krishna - their patron deity at Guruvayur temple did not observe caste rules, then why should they insist on these rules and regulations.<sup>349</sup>

The *Atma Vidya Sangham* under Vagbatananda led a procession of untouchables along the public road at Kannur ignoring the strong threat and protest of upper castes. This incident took the land by storm.<sup>350</sup> This was followed by a series of events throughout Malabar asserting the rights of depressed classes to walk through public roads. He even exhorted those *Sanatanists* who practice theendal to clear the way for the smooth movement of depressed classes.<sup>351</sup> Disciples of Vagbatananda also dug wells and tanks for the use of entire people including depressed communities like *Pulayas*.<sup>352</sup>

Though Vagbatananda propagated *Nirgunopasana*, he had no hesitation to support temple entry movements. His deep knowledge of the scriptures enabled him to locate Viswamitra, Parasara and Vedvyasa- the famous exponents of Hindu *dharma*- as the descendants of *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Mukkuvas*. Through detailed exposition of Hindu Philosophy he had

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<sup>349</sup> Vagbatananda, *op. cit.*, p. 893.

<sup>350</sup> M.S.Nair, "A Revolutionary Philosopher" in Pragathi, M7, 1980 p.107.

<sup>351</sup> Vagbatananda, *op. cit.*, p.821.

<sup>352</sup> *Mathrubhoomi* Oct I, 1927

dashed to the ground the entire edifice of the arguments put forward by *Sanatanists*.<sup>353</sup> In reply to a disciple who questioned his act in contrary to his principle against idol worship, he said: "It is a problem of human rights. To worship or not to worship is another problem".<sup>354</sup> *Atmavidya Sangham* argued that untouchability survives in the temple premises. So every step should be taken to expel this devil- untouchability from temple premises. In 1926 itself *Atma Vidya Sangham* demanded that all Hindus - irrespective of the fact that whether they believe in temples or not-should be given equal rights in the temples.<sup>355</sup>

Vagbatananda was also aware of the economic exploitation associated with caste system and untouchability. When the orthodox sections ostracized the people who co-operated with the activities of the *Atma Vidya Sangam* in the Badagara region, Vagbatananda organized them in to a co-operative unit.<sup>356</sup> This establishment-The Uralunkal Labour Contract Society-gave economic security to the weaker sections. He also directed the lower caste people to fight against the economic exploitation of the upper caste people.<sup>357</sup> When a *Harijan* labourer in a tile factory of Feroke was beaten to death, a hunger *Satyagraha* was organized by K.P. Gopalan, to book the culprits.

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<sup>353</sup> Vagbatananda, *op. cit.*, pp. 821-876.

<sup>354</sup> Swami Brahmavrita, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>355</sup> *Mathrubhoomi* May 27, 1926.

<sup>356</sup> P.P. Pradeepkumar, "Vagbatanandanum Atama Vidya Sanghavum" in Sri *Vagbatananda Gurudevan Samaraka Vayanasala Smaranika*, Eranjippalam, 1989.

<sup>357</sup> Vagbatananda, *op. cit.*, p 822.

Vagbatananda made an impressive speech in support of the hunger *Satyagraha* in which he criticized the economic system of exploitation and its alliance with the foreign Government.<sup>358</sup>

From the above analysis it is clear that Vagbatananda's attempt was to reform Hinduism by removing idol worship, bloody sacrifices etc and to uphold the Hindu dharma through the realisation of Brahma that is within.<sup>359</sup> Purifying religion was only one aspect of his activity. Besides this he unleashed a hectic campaign against restrictions imposed on certain sections of the people in enjoying the amenities of the civil society. The *preethibhojanam* and the *preethivivaham*, taking depressed classes to the public places, campaign for opening temples to the untouchables (though he had no faith in temples), citing scriptures to authenticate the rights of depressed classes, all these were vigorous steps undertaken by him to ensure social justice to all sections including untouchables. Such activities instilled courage and confidence in the minds of the people. At the same time it should be noted that majority of the activists of *Atma Vidya Sangham* were the progressive milieu drawn from communities like *Nambudiris* at the top to *Tiyas* at the bottom.<sup>360</sup> With few exceptions, the depressed classes were not directly associated with the movement. It is true that some of the *Pulayas*

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<sup>358</sup> K.K.N Kurup, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>359</sup> For details see various issues of *Atma Vidya Kahalam*, 1929-1931.

<sup>360</sup> See the list of prominent disciples of Vagbatananda in *Vagbatanandate Sampoorana Krithikal* p. XIV, pp. XLVI to XLVII.



joined the movement<sup>361</sup> but majority were more or less indifferent to it. In a sense it was also a reform movement for the upliftment of the depressed classes but not of the depressed classes. At the same time the multitude of activities undertaken by the *Atma Vidya Sangham* contributed to widening the public space and strengthening the secular culture of the region. The space created by Vagbatananda and *Atma Vidya Sangham* was utilized by radical movements in promoting the interests of workers, peasants and landless labourers and depressed classes in the later years.

### **Swami Sivananda Paramahansa and Siddha Samaj**

The *SidhaSamajam* founded by Swami Sivananda Paramahansa at Badagara is a monastic order which questioned the customs and practices prevalent in the Malabar society. Its branches were opened at places like Kayanna (Kozhikode District), Mannoorkara near Kattakkada (Thiruvananthapuram District), Eayoor near Taliparamba (Kannur District), and at Amman Palayam (Salem District, Tamilnadu). The reason for the foundation of the *Samajam* is given in the introduction to the *Siddhavedam* as “when people irrespective of caste, creed and position began to follow him in large numbers being convinced of the teachings and initiated in to the noble path, the necessity for a corporate living was felt and *Siddhasamaj* was founded by his holiness in the year 1920”.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> M.T. Kumaran Master in '*Azhikode Atma Vidya Sangham*', Souvenir.

<sup>362</sup> Swami Sivananda Paramahansa, *Lokasanthikulla Jeevitham*, 2007 p.53

Not much detail is available for the reconstruction of the history of the *Samajam*. Same is the case with the preparation of the biographical sketch of the founder of this monastic order. The devotees of the *Samajam* made an attempt to include the biography of the founder in the third edition of *Lokasanthikulla Jeevitham* (Living for world peace). On expressing dislike by the founder it was removed forthwith.<sup>363</sup> Sivananda believed that the *Siddhavedam* is the real life history of 'Jeeva', the vital force known as 'life'. Sivananda pointed out that he does not have a separate existence from 'Jeeva'-the vital force. Thus the possibility of getting a printed version of his early history is permanently closed. The inmates of the *Samajam* followed this strictly and have strong objection to disclosing the life history of the Swamiji and the *Samajam*. But one of the books have the statement that Sivananda was born at Badagara.<sup>364</sup> He served the police department for a while and quit it for unknown reasons. After a wandering life for sometime, he came back to Badagara and started his preaching, which included a critique of the caste and many of the religions practices existing in the society. Gradually he could enlist a group of supporters which necessitated a communitarian existence. Thus the *Siddhasamaj* came in to existence.

The *Samajam* was organized on the fundamental principle of equality irrespective of caste, creed and sex. All precautions to facilitate the smooth

<sup>363</sup> Swami Sivananda's letter published in *Siddhavedam*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 2004.

<sup>364</sup> Statement given by Siddhasamajam president in Sivananda Paramahansa, *Keralanacharam*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Badagara, p.III; *Siddha Vidyarthikalkulla Nadavadikramangal*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Badagara, 2003.

functioning of the order were instituted from the very inception. The *Samajam* has laid down rules and regulations meant to be observed by all members who were initially admitted to the order.<sup>365</sup> The rules of conduct stipulate that the *Siddha Vidyarthi* should be free from all responsibilities and liabilities. If there is any private property in his name, it has to be transferred to the joint property of the *Samajam*. Once a person is enrolled in to the *Samajam* he is bound to consider the *Samajam* as the family and all other members as the members of his family.<sup>366</sup> All the members of the *Samajam* are bound to engage in the practice of *Siddha Vidya* for 8 hours a day.<sup>367</sup> They were also expected to engage in the production of commodities for the bare minimum living of the community.

The followers of Swami Sivananda were divided into two categories viz the house holders and the members of the *Samajam*. The house holders are free to live with their family in accordance with the rules of conduct to be followed by *Siddha Vidyarthies*. Their social gathering, marriage etc were restricted with those who were exposed to *Siddha* way of life.<sup>368</sup>

Swami Sivananda has suggested *Siddhavidya* as the means to attain Moksha (salvation). The practice of *Siddhavidya* is the true worship God. It

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<sup>365</sup> See for details Swami Sivananda Paramahamsa, *Siddha Vidyarthikalkulla Nadavadikramangal*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed Badagara, 2003, p. III.

<sup>366</sup> *Lokasanthikulla Jeevitham*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55 *Siddha Vidya* should be practiced from 3 to 5.20 in morning, 12 to 2.20 in the afternoon, 6 to 7 in the evening and from 7.30 to 9.50 in night.

<sup>368</sup> Swami Sivananda Paramahamsa, Note No. 132, p. 17.

is the worship of the life force-vayu-the *Jeevasakthi*. The worship of life force is *Pranayama*.

The *Siddhasamajists* were permitted to wear only white cloth.<sup>369</sup> They were directed not to crop their hair. Similarly the *Samajists* had to take food and water from the same vessel. This is known as *Sagdhi Sapeethi*.<sup>370</sup> The use of white cloth for all inmates (that too in the same manner); the prohibition to introduce any novelty in the case of hair style or beards and the eating from the same vessel, all these contributed to undermining the existing hierarchy in food, dress and clothing in the caste ridden society of Malabar.

Besides the above mentioned practices, institutions which perpetuate social inequality like caste system were attacked from theoretical and spiritual moorings. Sivananda viewed caste and caste practices as concoction by vested interests. He also expressed strong dislike for ritualistic observances like the practice of pollution, *ettumattu*, *pula*, *talikkettu*, temple ceremonies and animal sacrifices at the temple precincts. In fact *Keralanacaram* written by Swami Sivananda presents a rational and intelligent critique of caste practices, superstitious beliefs and the privileged position claimed by upper castes.<sup>371</sup> The *Sadhuvaya Viddhi* (poor idiot) - the central character in *Keralanacaram*- is represented as an outcaste who mingle freely with all

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<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21, *Loka Santhikkulla Jeevitham*, p. 56.

<sup>371</sup> See for details, Sivananda Paramahansa, *Keralanacaram*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Badagara, 2005.

irrespective of caste and social status.<sup>372</sup> The critique he undertakes makes him the wisest man.<sup>373</sup> Through this central character, Sivananda categorically stated that caste is unreal and if at all it exists, caste and *theendal* are deliberately created and imposed on society by the apex group of the caste society.

Through his central character (*Sadhuvaya Viddhi*) Sivananda also cites empirical reasons to proclaim the impossibility of remaining pure in the physical environments of Kerala. He narrates the events related with Malabar rebellion in which many upper caste ladies left the place with the help of untouchables and Muslims.<sup>374</sup> He also stressed the functional dependency of high castes upon the low castes when he highlights the role of washer woman in keeping the *Brahmins* and other high castes in ritually pure position through the practice of giving *mattu*.<sup>375</sup> Sivananda also pointed out that the people belonging to all strata's (from *Brahmins* at the top to *Pulayas* and *Nayadis* at the bottom) breathe the same air, drink the same water, purchase commodities from the same market etc. Hence there is no logic in claiming caste superiority.

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<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>373</sup> Asokan Mundon, *op. cit.*, p.74.

<sup>374</sup> *Keralanacharam*, p.22.

<sup>375</sup> Sivananda Paramahansa, Note No. 132, pp. 14-15.

The followers of Sivananda practiced interdining and gave wide publicity to it.<sup>376</sup> Some of his disciples even took *Adidravidas*, *Tiyas*, *Chaliyas* and *Nairs* to their house and co-dining was organized.<sup>377</sup>

Those who had some hesitation in practicing interdining became convinced of its necessity in due course. Inter caste marriages were also organized under the auspicious of *Siddhasamajam*.<sup>378</sup> The critique of caste dragged the *Samajam* in to legal proceedings against the custodians of Lokanarkavu on the matter of using temple pond by the inmates.<sup>379</sup>

Sivananda's critique of caste was radical and extremely logical. Even those who had some hesitation to follow the *Siddhasamaj* way of life found some meaning in the critique of caste by Sivananda. The common dress pattern, non-cutting of hair and beard, common dining and common living-all these were forms of dissent and protest practiced by *Siddhasamajists*. But their challenge to the deeprooted notion of family system and private property were not acceptable to the large majority of Malabar society. The emerging paradigm of colonial modernity also recognized the sanctity of family relations and private property. As a result *Siddhasamaj* remained as a small group with little impact on the family and property relations of Malabar. But

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<sup>376</sup> *Mathrubhoomi*, May 24, 1923.

<sup>377</sup> *Mathrubhoomi*, June 2, 1936.

<sup>378</sup> *Mathrubhoomi*, May 24, 1924.

<sup>379</sup> Proceedings of the sub divisional Magistrate of Calicut dated 30 July 1931 in G.O. No 155\31 unclassified file, KRA, Kozhikode.

the criticism against obsolete caste and ritualistic practices were used by the rising generations in their search for social equality and justice.

The critique of caste and social practices unleashed by the reform movements-both all India and native movements-had tremendous impact on the Malabar society. The rising generation of political activists found it difficult to mobilize the people without challenging the existing caste and the ritualistic practices. They found that the social terrain of Malabar was ploughed to the core by the reform movements. Sizeable section of the political activists of Malabar entered the arena of political activity through their association with reform movements in one way or the other. They used the critique of caste to mobilize the people irrespective of caste, religion and sex. It was left to them to advance the movement against caste and social injustices further to establish a just and equitable social order. To them the struggle against social inequalities was not only necessitated by religious and social interests but also by the political needs of the society. The expansion of electoral reforms and the demands of the unprivileged depressed classes for social justice also awakened them to action.

CHAPTER IV  
**NATIONALIST INTERVENTION IN THE  
SOCIAL SPHERE OF MALABAR –  
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES**

The socio-religious, cultural and political awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had its impact on the Malabar society also. The reform movements discussed in the previous chapter had tremendous impact on a sizeable section of the people to trigger of public action. Though the social base of the reform movements was constituted by the intellectual milieu of the society, the work they initiated brought more and more people to the arena of public activity. Thus the socio-religious reform movements, as elsewhere in India, provided the base for the nationalist activities in Malabar. The critique of the caste system and untouchability which obstructed the progress of the society coupled with the challenges of colonialism provoked the elite class to take up issues relating to social justice along with political agitations. The fear, anxiety and hostility expressed by the *avarana* elites towards the *savarna* bias of the nationalist movement were other factors. The missionary criticism towards traditional customs and practices, repeated statements from *avarana* leaders on religious conversion, the '*swatantra samudaya vaadam*' of the *Tiya* elites, the widening of the electoral base and the Muslim complaint on the over representation of Hindus who treat untouchables as 'beyond the pale of



Hinduism', the colonial policy of 'divide and rule' etc were the other factors which necessitated nationalist intervention in the social scenario of Malabar.

The nationalist intervention in securing social justice took different strands in the course of time. The activity in the pre-Gandhian era was one such stream. Even during Gandhian era, different strategies were adopted taking into consideration the regional specificities of Malabar. Though the official leadership tried to adhere strictly to the Gandhian conception of the problem and the methods of action envisaged by Gandhiji, parallel activities encompassing more meaningful strategies were also experimented in Malabar. Swami Ananda Thirth's strategy of dynamic intervention in the sites of social injustice was one such stream of activity. The socialist and communist attempt to deviate from the Gandhian strategy and linking issues of social injustice with class oppression (economic inequality) was still another stream of activity. The gradual growth of the autonomous sphere of the depressed class-consciousness was another distinct stream of social activity.

### **Political activists and Social issues – Pre Gandhian era**

The nationalist movement in Malabar during the Pre-Gandhian era was an upper caste organisation.<sup>380</sup> Caste wise the *Nairs* formed the largest group

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<sup>380</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Congrassum Keralavum*, Mal., 1935, Reprint Thiruvananthapuram, 1986, p.292. Also see K.J. John, ed., *K. Madhavan Nair Janma Sathabdi Smaranika*, Mathrubhumi, Calicut, 1983, pp. 1-16.

in the Congress mainly because most of the professionals of the District belonged to that community. Though the *Tiyas* of the urban centers' of Malabar were well exposed to western influence, they remained themselves away from the nationalist movement in its early years. This was mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, the *Tiya* elites believed that they owed the British for their economic development and social position. Secondly, they feared the revival of upper caste domination if the Congress would come to power. Murkoth Kumaran aired the views of educated *Tiyas* in the following words. "Congress is the organisation of the men of upper caste who have to bath if they touch up. If the congress comes in political power our country will be ruled by men of upper caste ... It is the British who have done good for us.... It is our duty to oppose in the best interests of our community, those who try to end the rule of the British who are the only well wishers of the lower classes".<sup>381</sup> C. Krishnan and Koottiyath Ramunni, other prominent *Tiya* leaders also expressed similar views. C. Krishnan refused to participate in the Home Rule Movement on the ground that it was the movement of the caste Hindus and against the interest of the lower castes. He categorically stated that "the victory of the Home rule movement is not our (*Tiya*) victory."<sup>382</sup> The *Ezhava* sabha of Palghat passed resolution urging its members not to co-

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<sup>381</sup> Cited in Moyarath Sankaran, *Ente Jeevithakatha*, Autobiography- Mal, Calicut 1965 p.119 Also see *Mitavadi*, March 1919.

<sup>382</sup> *Mitavadi*, October 1917.

operate with the Home rule movement in any manner.<sup>383</sup> Similar views were expressed by *Tiya* notables in other urban centres also.<sup>384</sup>

The nationalists of Malabar also were the victims of the evil effects of caste system and untouchability. Chettoor Sankaran *Nair*, the only Malayalee to preside over the annual session of the Indian National Congress, says that, "like other non-*Brahmins* of southern India, I had not been taking a prominent part in the Congress sessions ....On our journey to the north to attend the Congress meetings our *Brahmin* friends would often ostensibly avoid our company when taking meals....They would tell their friends that we were *sudras* which in northern India meant low caste".<sup>385</sup> As a member of an aristocratic family and as the leading lawyer in Madras, Sankaran Nair enjoyed a prominent position that might have neutralised his relatively inferior caste status. But the depressed communities suffered the worst discrimination even from political activists. As a result most of them refused to take any interest in the Congress activities. The elites from *avarna* communities, especially *Tiyas*, passed resolutions condemning caste inequalities. The *Tiyas* even formed 'Passive Resistance League' and decided to launch agitations on the model of Gandhiji's struggles in South Africa

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<sup>383</sup> *Mitavadi*, November 1917.

<sup>384</sup> For details see *Mitavadi*, November 1917, Sept. 1918

<sup>385</sup> C. Sankaran Nair, *Autobiography of Sir C. Sankaran Nair*, Madras, 1966, p.55.

against the social tyranny of the higher castes.<sup>386</sup> They also demanded separate representation to them in the elected bodies.<sup>387</sup>

The agitations organised by the *avarana* elites against closing of public roads to polluting castes and the wide publicity given to such agitations provoked the rising generation of political activists to adopt concrete programmes to fight social injustices. They travelled in the company of polluting castes; attended their marriage functions and also attended *Mishrabhojanam* organised at Annie hall on April 23, 1917.<sup>388</sup> The second District Political Conference held at Calicut in April 1917 passed resolutions urging the public opinion and the religious organisations to remove the evils of untouchability.<sup>389</sup> Another demand put forward by the nationalists of Malabar was opening of Zamorin's college to students of all castes.<sup>390</sup>

The resolutions passed at the Second District Conference and the action oriented public protests like *Mishrabhojanam* and Tali road agitation<sup>391</sup> indicate the fact that the nationalists of Malabar began agitation against social injustices even before the national movement took up such issues at the

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<sup>386</sup> *Mitavadi*, November 1918.

<sup>387</sup> Memorandum submitted by the *Tiya* elites of Malabar, *Mitavadi*, November, 1917.

<sup>388</sup> *Mitavadi* May 1917.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Op.cit*, p.32.

<sup>391</sup> The noticeboard put up in the Tali samooham road to restrict the passage of the polluting castes provoked the political activists of Malabar like K.P. Kesava Menon and Manjeri Rama Iyer to join hands with C. Krishnan, the *Tiya Vakil* of Calicut in defying the order. For details see *Mitavadi*, November 1917.

national level. Such experiences enabled them to submit the problem in a vigorous manner at the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Kakkinada. The Gandhian discourse on untouchability gave more precision and clarity to the struggles which they initiated in the previous decade.

### **Nationalists and the Quest for Social Justice-Gandhian Era**

The nationalist movement in Malabar gained unprecedented momentum with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi in the national politics. It also began concentrating on issues of social and religious importance following the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

The unique strategy evolved by Mahatma Gandhi was that both social reform and political movement should go hand in hand. In this respect he assimilated the political strategy of the extremists and the secular reformist attitude propounded by the liberals. Such a strategy enabled him to project the counter hegemony evolved by the Indian nationalists through prolonged popular struggles on a moral, political and ideological level.<sup>392</sup> Gandhiji correctly perceived the political importance of the struggle against untouchability. So he put it high on the national agenda and gave it unprecedented momentum.<sup>393</sup> Gandhi repeatedly reminded his countrymen that so long as they treat some of their own people as untouchables they could

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<sup>392</sup> Bipan Chandra, *et al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 505-517.

<sup>393</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, New Delhi, 1989, p.215.

not consistently blame the foreign Government for treating them as 'Pariahs of Empire.'<sup>394</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi had criticised untouchability as “excrescence on Hinduism, a poison, a snake, a cancer, a hydra-headed monster, a great blot, a device of Satan, a hideous untruth etc”.<sup>395</sup> There is no doubt that he wanted to remove this social evil. But he wanted to accomplish this within the Hindu framework, without dismantling the basic Hindu social frame. Gandhiji's objective was to unify different sections of Hindu community as well as other communities. Gandhiji's strategy was fighting the British Empire with moral force and he was convinced that unless we concede equal rights and human dignity to the untouchables on the same moral grounds, our arguments with the British will carry no weight. He said, "The slave owner is more hurt than the slave. We shall be unfit to gain *Swaraj* so long as we will keep in bondage a fifth of the population of Hindustan".<sup>396</sup> He further wrote, "A Hindu lover of *Swaraj* will as assiduously work for the amelioration of the lot of the 'depressed' classes ... treat them the rights that we claim for ourselves."<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> *Ibid*, p.215.

<sup>395</sup> Eleanor Zelliot, *Gandhi and Ambedkar: A study in Leadership*. Pune, 1983 p.7.

<sup>396</sup> *Young India*, 24 November, 1920. Navajeevan Trust, Ahamadebad, 1981, p.3.

<sup>397</sup> *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, hereafter CWMG, Ahamadabad, 1967, Vol. II, p. 648.

Gandhiji viewed the attainment of *Swaraj*<sup>398</sup> and removal of untouchability as simply inalienable questions. He observed, "For me....there is no *Swaraj* without the removal of untouchability. But without *Swaraj* there will be neither communal unity nor removal of untouchability".<sup>399</sup> Along with wearing of '*Khadi*' and steps to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability also figured as one of the pre-conditions for attaining *Swaraj*. The repeated statements of linking the struggle for *Swaraj* with the removal of untouchability make it clear that Gandhiji had taken the problem of untouchability as an integral part of his political strategy.

Gandhiji also made touching appeals to caste Hindus to shed their arrogance and to accept the *Harijans* as equals. He said, "*Varnashrama* is not a religion of superiority and inferiority. No son of God can consider another as inferior to himself. He must consider everyman as his brother. It is the cardinal principle of every religion."<sup>400</sup> He even preferred to be reborn as an *Adi-sudra* and not of the other four varnas.<sup>401</sup> Analysing the Hindu scriptures

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<sup>398</sup> Literally the word *swaraj* means self rule. But Gandhiji gave it the content of an integral revolution, that encompasses all spheres of life. At the individual level *swaraj* is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self purification and growing Swadeshi or Self reliance. Politically *swaraj* is self government which means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. In other words, it is sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Economically, *poorna swaraj* means full economic freedom for the toiling millions. For Gandhiji, *swaraj* meant freedom for the meanest of his country men. For details see *Young India*, August 6, 1925, p. 276, June 28, 1928, p. 772. *Harijan* March 25, 1939, Garland Publishing, USA, p. 64.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. XII p.129.

<sup>400</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. II p. 871.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid*, p.650.

he wrote, "I have failed to find a single warrant for the existence of untouchability....in all those books which we call Hindu Shastras. But.... if I find that Hinduism really countenanced untouchability I should have no hesitation in renouncing Hinduism itself".<sup>402</sup> He was convinced that *Harijans* were at the bottom of the hierarchy not because of some inherent defects but simply because they have been kept down by the so called higher castes.<sup>403</sup> Also he was convinced that given full opportunity the *Harijans* also can equal others in different fields.<sup>404</sup>

Gandhiji disapproved legal enactment as a way to solve the problem of untouchability and believed in appealing to the conscience of the caste Hindus.<sup>405</sup> He also could not accept the use of force for this purpose.<sup>406</sup> He had not an iota of doubt in his mind that untouchability can be removed only by rousing the conscience of *savarnas* against it and was fully convinced that this can be achieved by '*Satyagraha*'. The *satyagraha* for this purpose should be undertaken by the caste Hindus and not by the untouchables.<sup>407</sup> Gandhiji believed more in the theory of the change of heart rather than the economic and educational advancement of the untouchables as a means for the removal of untouchability<sup>408</sup>. He felt that even to accelerate educational and economic

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<sup>402</sup> *Young India*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1927, p. 353.

<sup>403</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. L VI p.269.

<sup>404</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. LVI p.338.

<sup>405</sup> *Young India*, 30 June 1929, p.236.

<sup>406</sup> *Harijan*, 23 September 1939, Garland Publishing, USA, p.280.

<sup>407</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. XIII p.129.

<sup>408</sup> *CWMG*, Vol. L III, p.307.



advancement temple entry was the starting point.<sup>409</sup> Thus, for the removal of untouchability, he discarded the ways that are generally suggested like legal enactment, use of force or undertaking *Satyagraha* by the untouchables. It was the responsibility of the caste Hindus to remove it, to undertake *Satyagrahas* to convert the heart of those who practice untouchability. The depressed classes were to wait patiently until the hearts of the *savarnas* were changed.<sup>410</sup>

Gandhiji also did not accept inter dining and inter marriage to be effective means of removing untouchability. To him dining and marrying are the matters of personal concern.<sup>411</sup> But this attitude changed in the course of time and Gandhiji began considering inter-dining and inter-marriage as essential weapons for the eradication of untouchability.<sup>412</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi's role was two fold, one of a politician and the other of a social reformer. For the attainment of his political goal, Gandhi tried to bring different sections of people together. He, therefore, could not afford to injure the religious sentiments of any section. This caution was invariably reflected in his stand on social questions like those of abolition of untouchability.<sup>413</sup> At the same time he had an invincible courage to state

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<sup>409</sup> *Ibid*, p.275.

<sup>410</sup> Gandhi M.K. *Untouchability*, p.8.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid* p.12.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid* p.12.

<sup>413</sup> Eleanor Zelliot, *op. cit.*, p.5.

boldly to the caste Hindus that unless they do justice to the *Harijans*, their claim to *Swarajya* will not be realised.

Gandhiji insisted that untouchability was essentially and exclusively a problem for caste Hindu and not for the untouchables who were merely their helpless victims. He also viewed it as a 'sin', a gross violation of the human spirit. Since it had been practiced in the name of Hindu religion, the latter had to be 'thoroughly cleansed' of this 'abominable blot'. The struggle against untouchability was therefore not an ordinary political or economic campaign intended to secure social justice, but religious and spiritual struggle. Thus Gandhiji took a religious view of untouchability and made its eradication an exclusively Hindu responsibility. Such an attitude had the great demerit of treating the *Harijans* as passive objects helplessly waiting for their masters to get off their backs. As Bhikhu Pareeksh pointed out, "Gandhiji spoke for them, but did not allow ... them to speak for themselves... his love kept them almost just as dumb as had the centuries of humiliation."<sup>414</sup>

By a skilful combination of moral, religious and political appeals and personal example, Gandhiji mobilised the Hindu masses, stirred their conscience, awakened their sense of responsibility and created a powerful body of public opinion for anti-untouchability programme.<sup>415</sup> Unlike many national leaders, who vigorously championed the cause of *Harijans* but

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<sup>414</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *op. cit.*, p.243.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid* p.241.

studiously avoided close personal contact with them, Gandhiji lived in *Bhangi*<sup>416</sup> colonies and shared his meals with them.<sup>417</sup> These sincere expressions of compassion and personal commitment gave *Harijans* a measure of dignity and self confidence and the courage to stand up for their rights. At the same time Gandhi's definition of untouchability as of differential cleanliness laid emphasis on the fact that upper caste Hindus had to inculcate habits of cleanliness among their less fortunate brethren.

The nationalists of Malabar, mostly from caste Hindus, found that the local scenario was slightly different from what Gandhiji had conceived at the national level. Though they generally agreed with the theoretical framework drawn by Mahatma Gandhi on untouchability, the regional specificities developed in Kerala following the activities of the Christian missionaries and reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi, Vagbhatananda and Sivananda Paramahansa forced them to adopt more radical attitude towards social issues. Another factor which provoked the nationalists of Malabar to adopt dynamic action plan for achieving social justice was the hostility towards *savarna* dominated nationalist movements from the *avarna* elites especially the *Tiyas*. As noted earlier the *avarna* elites of Malabar viewed the national movement as a *savarna* conspiracy to deny them the benefits which they enjoyed under colonial regime. Here the bulk

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<sup>416</sup> *Bhangi's* were the outcastes whose traditional occupations were cleaning latrines and handling deadbodies, both human and animal.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid* p.234.

of *Tiya* elites who suffered humiliation at the hands of the *savarnas* viewed the colonial government as more humane to them than the caste prejudiced *savarnas*. Many *avarnas* also viewed religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam as more sympathetic and liberating to their degraded position than the Hindu religion. There was also acute competition between the rising class of *Tiya* elites and the *savarnas* for Govt. jobs, representation in the councils,<sup>418</sup> equal treatment in the educational institutions and hostels<sup>419</sup> and the like.

In between these two influential sections, the depressed communities like *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Nayadies* and others remained as mere 'poem of pity', having no voice of their own; their grievances articulated mostly through the *savarna* nationalist elite or the *Tiya* elites.

The nationalists of Malabar closely watched Gandhi's rise to national politics and the strategy and tactics he employed in galvanising the teeming millions. They also began raising their voice for tenants and other economically impoverished sections of the society.<sup>420</sup> This new trend in Malabar politics reached a high water mark at the fifth district conference of the Indian National Congress held at Manjeri in 1920.

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<sup>418</sup> *Tiyya* representation to Governor of Madras, *Mitavadi* November 1917 also see *Madras Legislative Council Debates*.

<sup>419</sup> Law/Education department File No.1333 dated 16.9.21 KRA Calicut.

<sup>420</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Op.cit* pp.314-15.

The resolutions passed at the Manjeri conference rejected the Montague Chelmsford reforms, demanded self rule, and supported the Khilafat issue. It also passed resolution demanding legislation to regulate land lord-tenant relationship through safeguarding the interests of the tenants. Such resolutions clearly articulate the attitude of the majority of the delegates towards national issues.<sup>421</sup> The first Kerala Provincial Political Conference held at Ottappalam in April 1921 also endorsed the same stand in a vigorous way. The authorities became alarmed at the popular enthusiasm and the growing sense of fraternity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Without any provocation police assaulted P. Ramunni Menon and a few other workers. The Government plan was a dual policy by which they wanted to suppress the people by a reign of terror on the one hand, and on the other to provoke the people to outrages so that they could be suppressed on that ground. The divisive strategy of the Government was also visible in the arrest of Yakub Hassan, K. Madhavan Nair, U. Gopala Menon and Moideen Koya. The same strategy eventually paved the way for the Malabar Rebellion of 1921-22.

Official reports of the colonial government say that in the course of the Malabar Rebellion nearly 2337 people were killed and 1652 wounded while 45404 surrendered or captured.<sup>422</sup> The rebellion caused untold miseries to the people of Malabar belonging to all communities. The scenario presented the

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<sup>421</sup> P.K.K. Menon, *History of Freedom Movement in Kerala*, Vo. II, Thiruvananthapuram, Reprint, 2001, pp.97-100.

<sup>422</sup> *Home Poli 1923 File No. 1929/R*, NAI, New Delhi.

picture of acute suffering. On the one side there was the huge mass of refugees estimated about 25000 ranging from high caste *Nambudiris* to lower caste groups.<sup>423</sup> They were in fact uprooted from their home villages and came to relief camps. It was a mixed assortment of men and women whose houses were burnt, their wealth and earnings looted and women molested. They comprised also destitute women and children whose protectors were killed by the rebels.<sup>424</sup> The condition of the *Mappila* population in the rebel areas was also equally pitiable.

Relief camps were opened in various places of Malabar to help the refugees and riot victims. Relief camps were opened by *Arya Samaj*,<sup>425</sup> the Servants of India Society<sup>426</sup> and the Indian National Congress at various places in Calicut and Trichur. The inmates of the relief camps were provided with essential amenities and a sense of security. Much more than places for food and shelter, they turned out to be the centre of community life in Malabar.<sup>427</sup> This community life made it impossible to practice untouchability and unapproachability. The social reformers of the time pointed

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<sup>423</sup> John Ochahthuruth, *op.cit.*, p.37.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>425</sup> See Chapter III, *Supra*.

<sup>426</sup> The activities of the Servants of India Society began in Malabar in the course of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921.

<sup>427</sup> Jyothirmani Vatakkayil, *The Activities of the Servants of India Society in Kerala: A study of the DMRT movement*, unpublished Ph.D Thesis Calicut University December 2006, p. 155.

out the meaninglessness of these practices through citing the life of the refugees.<sup>428</sup>

Political work in Malabar faced a set-back due to the rebellion of 1921. There was suspicion and hatred from the side of the Government and the *Savarna* Hindus who fell victim to the calamities. Even the utterly humbled *Mappilas* also viewed any form of political activity with suspicion and distrust. At the national level also the withdrawal of the Non Co-Operation Movement by Gandhiji created certain extent of political despondency. The campaign against untouchability and the movement for social justice received unprecedented momentum during this period. Against this background the Kerala Provincial Conference was held at Palghat in 1923. It passed a resolution urging its members not to practice untouchability.<sup>429</sup> An inter caste dining was also organised in which people belonging to *Cheruma* caste to *Nambudiris* dined together.<sup>430</sup> It was a new episode in the social history of Kerala in the sense that people belonging to *Cheruma*, *Nayadi*, *Nambudiri* and other communities came together and mingled with each other. Similar activities in other parts of Malabar reduced the taboos of untouchability to a great extent. The *mishrabhojanam* organised in the course of the conference

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<sup>428</sup> Sivananda Paramahansa, *Keralanacharanm*, Mal., 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Badagara, 2005 p.22.

<sup>429</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 8, 1923. Also see John Ochanthuruthu, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>430</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 10, 1923, Also see K.P. Keshavan Menon, *Kazhinja Kalam*, Mal., Calicut, 1969, p.156., C.K. Moosath, *Kelappan Enna Mahamanushyan*, Mal., Kottayam, 1982 p.75.

provoked the orthodox *Brahmins* of Kalpathi to excommunicate T. R. Krishna Swamy Iyer.<sup>431</sup>

The success of the Kerala Provincial Conference at Palghat enabled the nationalist workers of Kerala to pursue the issues relating to social injustice vigorously. The Kerala delegates brought the matter of social inequality into the forum of the Indian National Congress Session at Kakinada in 1923. T.K. Madhavan, a close associate of Narayana Guru, moved a resolution at the Kakinada session which stated that temple entry was the birthright of all Hindus.<sup>432</sup> The Kakinada Congress decided to pursue vigorously the eradication of untouchability and gave necessary directions to the provincial committee.

The decade following the Kakinada Congress witnessed intense campaigns for asserting the human rights of the depressed communities. It include opening of temple roads and temples; accessibility to roads, ferries, schools, post offices and other public places; establishment of separate schools, colonies and ashramas; digging of wells, tanks and other public amenities; organization of co-operative societies; campaign against alcoholism; providing soaps, oil and cloth and teaching them of cleanliness;

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<sup>431</sup> Shantiniketan Krishnan Nair, "*Sabari Ashrama Sthapakan T.R. Krishna Swami*", Mal., *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, Sabari Ashramam, Palghat, 1992. p.6.

<sup>432</sup> Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and communism in South India: Malabar 1900-1948*, OUP, 1994, p.81. Also see *Mathrubhumi*, January 19, 1924.



and initiating them to Pan Indian Hinduism (*savarna*) through *bhajana* and prayers and the like.

The KPCC meeting held on 12 January 1924 decided to organise separate groups under local congress committees to work for the eradication of untouchability and unapproachability.<sup>433</sup> Since untouchability was viewed as the biggest hurdle towards freedom and the unity of the Hindu community, detailed programmes were chalked out to eradicate the same. This include combined meeting of caste Hindus and polluting castes, opening of schools including night schools for depressed classes; teaching them lessons of cleanliness through providing soap, oil and cloths; taking them to *bhajana* after bath and above all taking oath not to practice untouchability.<sup>434</sup> The veteran congress leader K. Madhavan Nair was nominated as the chairman of the committee for the eradication of untouchability.<sup>435</sup> K. Kelappan acted as the secretary of the committee.<sup>436</sup> This committee cordinated the work for the eradication of untouchability in Kerala.

### **Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25) – The Role of Nationalists of Malabar**

The congress leaders of Malabar also took an active part in the Vaikom *Satyagraha*. K.P. Keshava Menon, K. Kelappan and Kurur Nilakandan Namboodiripad played the leading role along with T.K. Madhavan, the

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<sup>433</sup> *Mathrubhumi* Jan 15, 1924.

<sup>434</sup> *Mathrubhumi* February 7, 1924, March 18, 1924, March 22, 1924.

<sup>435</sup> John Ochanthuruthu, *op. cit.*, p.47.

<sup>436</sup> *Mathrubhumi* 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1924.

*Ezhava* leader from Travancore. Volunteers from Calicut, Payyoli, Kannur and other places poured into Vaikom in the native state of Travancore. Similarly money was collected from all over Malabar to finance the movement.<sup>437</sup> Gandhiji had been following the events with great interest and had sent good will telegrams to the organisers. With the arrest of all the upper caste Congress leaders, George Joseph, a Syrian Christian, assumed charge of the *Satyagraha*. Gandhiji immediately wrote to George Joseph, specifying that Vaikom *Satyagraha* was a Hindu affair and he 'should let the Hindus do the work.'<sup>438</sup> He also disallowed the involvement of non Hindu Congress leaders like George Joseph, Sebastian and Muhammed Abdul Rahiman in the Vaikom struggle.<sup>439</sup>

Most of the nationalists of Malabar disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi's stand on Vaikom *Satyagraha*. *Mathrubhoomi*, the nationalist newspaper of Malabar, through editorials, exhorted all people-irrespective of religion, caste and creed-to co-operate with the *Satyagraha*.<sup>440</sup> The Congressmen of Kerala viewed Vaikom *Satyagraha* as a national problem and a milestone in the progress of the society towards achieving social equality and justice. In spite of the directives of Mahatma Gandhi, people belonging to different religions, castes and creeds extended support to the movement. Muslims, Christians

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<sup>437</sup> *Mathrubhumi* 5<sup>th</sup> April 1924, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1924.

<sup>438</sup> CWMG, Vol.XXIII p. 392 Gandhiji clarified that the congress resolution at Nagpur called upon only the Hindu members to remove the curse of untouchability.

<sup>439</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 20, 1924.

<sup>440</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 6, 1927, May 17, 1924, June 17, 1924.

and people of different castes among Hindus like *Nairs*, *Tiyas*, *Mukkuvas* and *Pulayas* co-operated with the *Vaikom Satyagraha* in different capacities.<sup>441</sup> The *Mappilas* of *Kannur* and *Ponnani* contributed money to the *Vaikom Satyagraha* fund.<sup>442</sup> *Narayana Guru's* directive to the people “to enter not only the roads prohibited for the untouchables but also the temples” influenced the people.<sup>443</sup>

The people who co-operated with the *Vaikom Satyagraha* viewed untouchability not as a *savarna* Hindu problem but as a social problem affecting all sections of the people. This awareness contributed to the progressive transformation of the society.

After series of discussions the *KPCC* finally decided to continue the *Vaikom Satyagraha* as per the directives of *Mahatma Gandhi*. It reconstituted the committee with only Hindu members<sup>444</sup> and continued the *Satyagraha*.

The *Vaikom Satyagraha* was withdrawn on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1925 because of the intervention of *Mahatma Gandhi*.<sup>445</sup> The roads around the temple were opened to *avarnas* except the one leading to the *Sanketham*.<sup>446</sup> Though the success of the movement was partial, it instilled courage and confidence among the people.

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<sup>441</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 24, 1924.

<sup>442</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June 28, 1924.

<sup>443</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June 10, 1924.

<sup>444</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June, 24, 1924.

<sup>445</sup> *A.K. Pillai, Op.cit*, p. 367.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid*, p. 367.

The political activists of Malabar were aware of the limitations of Vaikom *Satyagraha* in respect of its goal and achievements. The stiff opposition to the *Satyagraha* from the *Sanatanists* and equally uncompromising attitude of the *avarana* elites provoked them to take up the issue of untouchability more vigorously. The fiery eloquence of *avarana* leaders like Sahodaran Ayyappan to use all the resources to destroy the caste ridden Hinduism<sup>447</sup> provoked them to organise constructive activities for ensuring social equality and justice.

### **Constructive Activities for the upliftment of the depressed classes**

Nationalists of Malabar followed the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi in mitigating the evils of casteism and untouchability. The constructive activities undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi at the national level was translated into action in Malabar also. Here, the local bodies under their control were utilised to provide benefits to the depressed classes. Accordingly large number of *Adidravida*<sup>448</sup> schools were opened by the local bodies under the control of the nationalists. Efforts were also made to appoint *Adidravidas* as teachers. Along with this, *Adidravida* committees were formed all over Malabar under the supervision of the Congressmen.<sup>449</sup> The *Adidravida* women

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<sup>447</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June 11, 1925.

<sup>448</sup> The self conscious depressed communities of South India demanded using the term *Adidravida* denoting their pure past. It was argued that being the original inhabitants of the land they were the preservers of the original *Adidravida* civilization. For details see *MLC debates*, Vol. IV, pp. 2047-2051.

<sup>449</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 20, 1927. The subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* published reported of the *Adidravida* upliftment activities undertaken by

were encouraged to remove the ornaments made of terracota beads.<sup>450</sup> Efforts were also made to organise the *Adidraida* Co-operative Societies

Imparting education to the depressed classes was another benevolent measure adopted by the political activists of Malabar. Prominent Congress leaders like Kelappan and T.R. Krishna Swamy Iyer opened residential schools and colonies for the untouchables. Krishna Swamy Iyer established the *Sabari Ashram* at Akathethara near Olavakode in 1923. This *ashramam* became the abode of children belonging to all communities.<sup>451</sup> Though children belonging to all communities were admitted, preference was given to the children of depressed classes. The community life practiced in the *ashramam* weakened the notions of caste hierarchy and pollution.

In the day to day activities of the *ashramam* Krishna Swamy Iyer was assisted by persons like Swami Anand Thirth, R.V. Sharma, Krishna Menon, U. Kelu Monon and poet Kunhiraman Nair. National leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Malavya Nariman, Sen Gupta and others visited the *Sabari Ashram* and praised its activities.<sup>452</sup>

Kelappan established a *Panchama* school and an *Adidraida* colony at Pavur near Moodadi. Later this school and the colony at Pavur were handed

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nationalists. See for details *Mathrubhumi* 1927-30.

<sup>450</sup> *Mathrubhumi* 5<sup>th</sup> April 1927, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1927, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1927.

<sup>451</sup> Swami Anand Thirth, 'Sabari' Ashramam Smaranakal' in the *Suvarna Jubilee Smaranika, Kerala Harijan Sevak Sangh*, Calicut 1985 pp.14-16. *Mathrubhumi* October 27, 1923.

<sup>452</sup> *Visitors Diary*, Sabari Ashramam, Also in *CWVG*, Vol. XXX, pp. 188-193.

over to the Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust. Kelappan also founded the *Sradhananda Vidyalayam* at Nallambrakunnu. The place has been renamed as Pakkanarpuram. The *Sradhananda Vidyalayam* and the *Gandhi Sadanam* constructed at Pakkanarpuram has been hailed as a landmark in Kelappan's experiments in *Harijan* education.<sup>453</sup> The school gave midday meals to the students. On account of this; children from other communities also attended the school.<sup>454</sup> The children were also given training in performing arts like Dramas. The depressed class children of this school performed dramas like "Balagopalan" at the venue of Congress meetings.<sup>455</sup>

*Savarna* Congressmen lived along with *Pulaya* and other depressed class inmates in the *ashrams* and hostels established by them. Instead of occasional and specified *mishrabhojanam* at public places, inter dining became the regular feature of these institutions. This had tremendous impact on the society. Co-education, co-living and co-dining with different sections of people undermined the influence of caste and its allied institutions – *untouchability* and *unapproachability*.

The nationalists of Malabar were also keen to utilise the limited opportunities thrown open by the colonial government in respect of the education, housing and economic improvement of the depressed classes. In

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<sup>453</sup> M.P. Manmadhan, *Kelappan*, Mal., Kottayam, 1984 pp. 120-220.

<sup>454</sup> C.K. Moosath, "The Role of Kelappan in Harijan Activities" in *Smaranika*, H.S.S. *Suvarna Jubilee*, Calicut, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>455</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1927.

this context it should be noted that the depressed class leaders in the Madras Legislative Council took every opportunity to raise the grievances of their fellowmen in Malabar.<sup>456</sup> Detailed analysis of the Council proceedings confirm the fact that the *savarna* dominated bureaucracy took every step to block the progress of the depressed classes. The fiery eloquence of the depressed class leaders also forced the colonial government to introduce some measures for their upliftment.

The grievances of the 'wretched of the earth' in Malabar were taken up seriously by their fellowmen in the Madras Legislative Council. The restrictions imposed on the untouchable communities in the educational institutions and hostels attached to them, in public places like roads and ferries, Government offices and the like were hotly debated in the Council. Similarly the snails progress in the allotment of *purampoke* land in Malabar, failure to appoint depressed classes in the Government service, the slow progress in the establishment of co-operative societies etc were also seriously debated.<sup>457</sup> The Muslim and Christian members in the Council also took up these issues and clarifications were sought.<sup>458</sup> The sympathetic attitude taken by the leaders of these communities towards the grievances of the depressed classes and the vociferous attitude taken by depressed class leaders in the Madras Legislative Council and their attempt to forge alliance with the

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<sup>456</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol 1A p. 715, pp. 1020-21; Vol II, p. 531; Vol IV, p. 2051.

<sup>457</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. XII, p. 2242.

<sup>458</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. V p. 2142.

*Adidravida* organisations in Malabar created problems for the *savarna* nationalists. Along with this the claim of the colonial masters and the elites of the depressed classes that the perpetuation of British rule was beneficial to the polluting castes made the nationalist position precarious. Such a situation provoked the nationalists of Malabar to utilise all the opportunities to improve the condition of depressed classes.

The political compulsions of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century forced the colonial government to entrust the labour department (started in 1919) to look after the problems of the depressed class. The activity of the labour department was extended to Malabar in the year 1925. The commissioner of labour was entrusted with the ameliorative work among the depressed classes like organising co-operative societies, purchase of house sites, establishing schools, providing free grants etc along with supervising labour.<sup>459</sup>

Labour schools and *Adidravida* co-operative societies were opened in various parts of Malabar. Along with establishing schools, Government also issued circulars to the schools under public management to admit untouchable classes to these institutions. Orders were issued to the effect that government grants will be reduced or even stopped to those schools which fail to admit depressed classes.<sup>460</sup> These orders gave Congressmen enough scope for

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<sup>459</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. XIII p.2752.

<sup>460</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. XVII pp. 1088-91.



extending their activities in the direction of *Harijan* upliftment. Throughout Malabar the Congressmen took untouchables to the schools. In many places they have to encounter the opposition of *savarnas* and *avarna* communities like *Tiyas* and *Mukkuvas* and even *Mappilas*. Kalliassery was the best example where Kelappan had to stay for many days for enrolling untouchables in the board elementary school.<sup>461</sup> The opposition to depressed class enrolment in the schools has been graphically described in the contemporary press in detail.<sup>462</sup> In many places the depressed class children were brutally assaulted, their cloths were torn to pieces, books, slates and other belongings were destroyed. Similarly when the depressed class children were admitted to schools the children belonging to both caste Hindu and *Tiya* communities left the institution.<sup>463</sup>

Attempts were also made to practice social ostracism against those who sympathised with the depressed classes. The *savarnas* of Kizhur near Payyoli denied food and shelter to the Headmaster who admitted *Harijan* boys in the Kizhur Higher Elementary School.<sup>464</sup> Even *Vannattimattu* (the dress for ritual purification) was denied to the school teachers who admitted depressed classes into the schools.<sup>465</sup> The opposition from orthodox casteists failed to stem the tide of reform. On the other hand it strengthened the

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<sup>461</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 29 November 1924 to 15 January, 1925.

<sup>462</sup> *Native News paper Reports*, hereafter *NNPR*, 1924-1929, (TNA, Chennai); *Mathrubumi*, 1923-1947.

<sup>463</sup> For details see various issues of *Mathrubhoomi*, 1923-1939.

<sup>464</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 19 November 1927.

<sup>465</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, February 19, 1935.

determination of the progressive milieu to work for socio-religious equality in the Malabar society. The decisions arrived at the meeting of the Gurujana Sabha held at Payyoli and Badagara clearly reveal the attitude of the progressive sections in this respect. These meetings passed resolutions favouring the admission of *Adidravida* children in all the schools. More than that, it was also decided not to admit those students who boycotted the schools in opposition to *Harijan* admission in other schools.<sup>466</sup> It is to be noted that such action oriented programmes contributed substantially to the progressive transformation of the society.

The earnest work of the political activists of Malabar gradually yielded the result. The administrative measures of the Government<sup>467</sup> also helped them to implement their policy towards the untouchables. As a result by 1935 *Harijans* got admission in all the Municipal schools of Malabar. Out of the 929 board schools they got admission in 926 schools. But the total number of depressed class children studying in these schools was only 3158. In the aided schools only 263 depressed class pupils studied during 1936.<sup>468</sup> Meanwhile the depressed classes association formed in various parts of the district also began campaign for enrolling their children in the schools. The labour schools or the *Adidravida* schools opened in various parts of Malabar also played vital role in the education of depressed classes. Though majority

<sup>466</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 3 and 6 December 1927.

<sup>467</sup> G.O. No. 2652-A, Law, Education, dated 20 December 1929, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>468</sup> *MLC debates* Vol. LVI, pp.912-913.

of teachers in the labour schools belonged to the *savarna* communities; many of them were influenced by the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and had genuine interest in the welfare of depressed classes.

The growth of *Adidravida* schools in various parts of Malabar put another question to the nationalist mind. Congressmen began viewing labour schools as institutions which perpetuate mutual exclusiveness and social divide between different sections of the Hindu community.<sup>469</sup> They also found that the establishment of labour school was a new device for the clever manipulators to augment money at the expense of poor *Adidravidas*.<sup>470</sup> It was also noticed that educational activities were at a very low key in such schools. These factors provoked the nationalists to campaign for the abolition of labour schools and the enrolment of *Adidravida* children in general schools. The nationalist attitude came in tune with the policy of the colonial government which abolished the labour department as part of its policy of reducing administrative expenses. The immediate effect of this policy was the closure of labour schools. In Malabar alone 15 labour schools were closed by 1931.<sup>471</sup>

The closing of the labour schools precipitated a bitter controversy. The depressed classes' representatives in the Madras Legislative Council opposed

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<sup>469</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June 28, 1932.

<sup>470</sup> V.R. Nayanars article in *Mathrubhumi*, March 6, 1937.

<sup>471</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. LXI, p.468.

this sinister move of the Government with all their resources.<sup>472</sup> In Malabar, the *Adidravida* organisations were divided on this issue. Those *Adidravidas* who were under the tutelage of the *savarna* Congressmen supported the move. But the bitter experiences of the *Adidravidas* in general schools<sup>473</sup> forced the most articulate among them to reconsider the whole issue. The *Adidravida* leaders found that the closing of labour schools not only denied educational opportunities to the underlings but also blocked the meager job opportunities for the educated *Adidravida*.<sup>474</sup> Similarly the *Tiya* elites of Malabar also viewed the closing of special schools as a 'great injustice' shown towards the depressed classes and pleaded for the opening of more schools for them.<sup>475</sup> In spite of the bitter campaign of the *savarna* nationalists against *Adidravida* schools, the Government decided to retain such schools in districts like Malabar where caste oppression was acute.<sup>476</sup>

The nationalists of Malabar found that the *Adidravidas* were cruelly exploited by the propertied classes. Once an *Adidravida* became a debtor, he would have no means to escape from this condition. Formation of co-operative societies among *Adidravidas* was viewed as the solution to overcome their permanent indebtedness. By 1928 about 21 co-operative

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<sup>472</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. LXX, pp. 229-230.

<sup>473</sup> The memorandum submitted by the *Malabar Adidravida Mahajana Sabha*, Cannanore, complained of the 'step motherly treatment' of depressed classes in the general schools, *MLC Debates*, Vol. LXIII pp.609-11.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> *NNPR*, April to December 1932, pp.821, 886, 917.

<sup>476</sup> Report of the labour commissioner reproduced in *Mathrubhumi*, January 10, 1936 and September 25, 1936.

societies were organised in different places of Malabar.<sup>477</sup> But the working of these co-operative societies was not satisfactory.<sup>478</sup> In spite of repeated request from the *Adidravida* representatives in the Madras Legislative Council for appointing qualified *Adidravidas* as inspectors of co-operative societies, no steps were taken to appoint them.<sup>479</sup> As a result, under *savarna* tutelage, the *Adidravida* co-operative societies failed to provide lasting good to the community.

Opening of *Harijan* colonies was another area of nationalist activity during this period. Only handful of depressed classes of Malabar alone had some customary right over the land. Large majority of them lived in the land of the *janmies* under constant threat of eviction. They did not even have any land to bury the dead bodies.<sup>480</sup> Because of continuous pressure from this section of people,<sup>481</sup> the Government of Madras decided to allot *purampoke* land to them. Accordingly *Harijan* colonies were established in the *purampoke* land distributed by the government at places like Dhoni near Olavakot,<sup>482</sup> Pattambi, Manjeri, Beypore, Ezhome and Payangadi.<sup>483</sup> But only 49.20 acres of land was allotted till 1935 to the depressed class population numbering nearly 3 lakh in the district.<sup>484</sup> The distribution of land to the

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<sup>477</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. XLII pp. 127-129.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>479</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. XVIII p. 319.

<sup>480</sup> *Sub Collectors Office Records*. File No. 1658 of 9-8-25 KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>481</sup> *Mathrubhumi* December 11, 1926, May 21, 1931, June 28, 1932.

<sup>482</sup> R. Dis No. 9528.41 dated 31/3/43. KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>483</sup> *Mathrubhumi* September 12, 1929, June 12, 1931, October 27, 1931.

<sup>484</sup> *MLC debates*, Vol. LXXXII pp. 253-54.

depressed classes was least in the Malabar district compared to South Canara, Coimbatore, and Salem and Niligiri districts of Madras presidency.<sup>485</sup> It also brings to light the simple fact that the output was low in Malabar even after hectic campaign organised by nationalists.

Besides the above noted government sponsored colonies, the nationalists of Malabar also opened *Harijan* colonies at places like Pavurkunnu, Nallambrakunnu, Akathethara etc. The labour department spent money to construct huts, dig wells, and purchase agricultural implements.<sup>486</sup> Nationalist leaders including the secretary of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* visited these *Harijan* colonies and submitted proposals of improving the working of these colonies.<sup>487</sup>

How far the colony life improved the condition of the depressed classes is a matter of debate. Instead of mingling with the people of different castes and creeds, the separation of the untouchables to the colonies resulted in the seclusion of this strata of the society. It was in no way beneficial to the growth of social equality.

Along with the campaign for establishing *Harijan* colonies, earnest attempts were also made to take the untouchables to the houses of *savarnas*. This had immense significance in the Malabar context where untouchability

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<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>486</sup> D. Dis No. 9528/41 dated 31/3/43, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>487</sup> A.V. Thakkars notes about *Nayadi* colony of Olavakkot in *Ibid.*

and pollution rules were observed most meticulously in the houses than elsewhere. V.T. Bhattathiripad proudly announced in a conference at Trithala that he had a *Harijan* boy named Kadangan in his house.<sup>488</sup> Similarly the diaries of A.C. Kannan Nair<sup>489</sup> and V.P. Krishnan Nair<sup>490</sup> also had references about taking *Harijans* to their respective *tarawads*. Infact, accommodating *Harijans* as household servants was propagated as a measure to wipe out pollution rules. It was not treating *Harijans* as equals but only as servants which also had little impact in improving the social status of these people.

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<sup>488</sup> *Mathrubhumi* November 20, 1932.

<sup>489</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, *A.C. Kannan Nair : Oru Padhanam*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1985.

<sup>490</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, ed., *V.P. Krishnan Nair Smaranika*, Ajannur, 1991, pp. 25-28.

## **Popularisation of new dress code and cleanliness**

Food habits, articles of clothing and housing are considered as the three fundamental material expressions of collective social identities derived from religion and social systems. Nicholas B. Dirks argues that 'cloths in India [as in England] were important markers of hierarchy and difference'.<sup>491</sup> In the Malabar society also dietary habits, clothing and housing in fact revealed the inequality prevailed in the society. This has been attested by the colonial ethnographers and indigenous writers.<sup>492</sup>

Attempts to change and even struggle against the existing restrictions on food, clothing and housing were initiated by the reformers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The insistence on common white cloth and the uniform pattern of wearing it by the Siddha Samajists confirm this. The cropping of the hair instead of different types of *kuduma*'s and the westernised dress style of the colonial elites are the other examples of challenges against hierarchy and difference in dress and costumes. But the constructive programmes launched during the Gandhian era changed the scenario dramatically.

Gandhiji's advocacy of a simple and pure life style influenced the political activists of Malabar. From the very beginning the Gandhian Congressmen took pain to popularise *Khadi*. This is clear from the first issue

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<sup>491</sup> Nocholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, New Delhi, 2002 p.31.

<sup>492</sup> See Chapter I. *Supra*.



of Mathrubhumi newspaper which carried the slogan, '*Khadi*-cure for poverty, friend of independence, and sign of self respect'.<sup>493</sup> White, clean and carrying imitations of equality, *Khadi* had united different sections of people. The sense of self respect and feeling of equality made it attractive to the people. The social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru and Swami Satyavrithan also supported the wearing of *Khadi* as it would alleviate the poverty of the people.<sup>494</sup>

Congressmen moved to the *Harijan* cheries and gave instructions to them to throw away the dirty rags and wear clean *Khadi* cloths. The use of *Khadi* by the people from *Nambudiris* at the top to *Pulayas* at the bottom, from *janmies* to tenants, from rich to poor, from *Yajmanan* to servants, had a leveling influence in the society. The *panchama* students in the schools opened by the nationalists were also given *Khadi* cloth.<sup>495</sup>

But the imitations of equality through the new dress code (*Khadi*) also invited strong opposition not only from *savarnas* but also from polluting castes like *Tiyas* and non Hindus (especially *Mappilas*) in different parts of Malabar.<sup>496</sup> Reports of destruction of umbrellas made of cloth, applying cashew fruit juice on the white cloth worn by depressed classes etc. are

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<sup>493</sup> *Mathrubhumi* 17 March 1923.

<sup>494</sup> *Mathrubhumi* March 31, 1925.

<sup>495</sup> *Mathrubhumi* October 27, 1923.

<sup>496</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 15, 1924; January, and 19, 1929. Subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* also have large number of reports of destruction of umbrella, cloth and even ornaments used by depressed classes.

plenty.<sup>497</sup> Physical assault was reported from all over Malabar against the use of clean and fashionable dress and costumes by the depressed classes.

The nationalists of Malabar also encouraged the *Adidravidas* to lead a life of cleanliness. Gandhiji's definition of the issue of untouchability as one of differential cleanliness laid emphasis on the fact that the nationalists had to inculcate habits of purity among the depressed classes. The issue of cleanliness distinguished the 'high' from the 'low' and all out efforts were made to uplift the downtrodden from their unclean background. The campaign against alcoholism, propagation of vegetarianism, wearing of simple, clean *Khadi* cloths, taking of daily bath with oil and soap, cleaning the surroundings of *Harijan* cheries etc were the major activities undertaken by the nationalists. Though Malabar is gifted with plenty of rain and provision for clean water facilities, we have large number of reports which highlight the grievances of *Adidravidas* for clean water facilities.<sup>498</sup> This forced the government to issue circular to the effect that all wells dug out of public funds (or maintained out of public funds) should be open to all communities.<sup>499</sup> The *Adidravida* conferences held in various localities passed resolutions requesting the Government and the political leadership of the Congress to sanction money for digging wells in their colonies. The authorities responded

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<sup>497</sup> Interview with P. Gopalan of Thayil, K. Vasudevan and Mumminiyan Balan of Morazha from 22-12-2007 to 25. 12.2007.

<sup>498</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1923-1947; *MLC debates*, 1921-1939.

<sup>499</sup> *MLC debates* Vol. XLVIII, p.244.

positively and funds were allotted for digging wells in almost all taluks of Malabar.<sup>500</sup>

Another problem which confronted the nationalist milieu of Malabar was the *savarna* perception of *Mungikuli* (taking bath through dipping the entire body in a tank or river) as the yardstick of cleanliness and the popular belief that the depressed classes have an aversion to take regular bath. The hygienic aspect of *Mungikuli* has been thoroughly contested by the westernised elites.<sup>501</sup> Sree Narayana Guru's preference of 'artesian' well; in the premises of the Jagannath Temple as the alternative for temple tank perfectly matched with the new perceptions of hygiene articulated by the *Tiya* elites.<sup>502</sup> The dirt, filth including human excretions contaminated the water in the temple ponds which made it highly unhygienic during hot season.<sup>503</sup> The inaccessibility to temple ponds coupled with the new perception of hygiene forced the *Tiyas* to dig wells and collect water. They also had the know how and the resources to dig wells. The depressed classes, on the other hand, lived on the outskirts of paddy fields. They were attached to the paddy fields and were forced to work for long hours. They had neither the social, economic and cultural capital to open avenues of fresh water resources or to use the available sources. At the sametime it is to be noted that the nationalists

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<sup>500</sup> *MLC debates* Vol. III p.273.

<sup>501</sup> Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswathivijayam*, reprint Kottayam, 2004, pp 51-52.

<sup>502</sup> *Mitavadi*, August, 1915.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, *Wescoat spectator* March 13, 1915 in *NNPR*, February-April, TNA, Chennai, 1915 p.575. Also see Potheri Kunhambu, *op.cit.*, pp. 51-52.

spent a small amount of money for providing drinking water facilities to the depressed classes.<sup>504</sup> The nationalists of Malabar moved to the *cheries* of the depressed classes and began imparting them lessons of cleanliness. Oil, soap and clean cloths were distributed among them. On special occasions like Gandhi Jayanthi, Congress volunteers moved to the *Harijan* residences and undertook cleaning activities in the surroundings.<sup>505</sup> They were given clean white *Khadi* cloth and taken to bhajana and other religious practices of *savarna* Hindus.

Another area which received the attention of the nationalist elites was the campaign against alcoholism. Though the campaign was undertaken to the entire society, the focus of attention was on the depressed classes. Temperance leagues were organised under the banner of local Congress committee and the *Pulaya* and *Cheruma* labourers were given daily instructions on the evils of alcoholism. Door to door campaign against alcoholism was undertaken. Excessive drinking was viewed as one of the reasons for the social and economic backwardness of the depressed classes. In the *Adidravida* conferences organised under nationalist leadership, pledges were taken not to consume any variety of alcohol.<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Annual Report of the Malabar HSS, 1933-1934 in *Mathrubhumi*, December 30, 1934.

<sup>505</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1923-1947.

<sup>506</sup> *Mathrubumi*, 1923-1947.

Reforming the food habits of the depressed classes was another area of nationalist social activity. Adoption of vegetarianism was an important agenda of reform activities of Sree Narayana Guru, Shivayogi, Sivananda Paramahansa and Vagbhatananda.<sup>507</sup> As part of the nationalist campaign for inculcating habits of cleanliness, the depressed classes were advised not to eat carrions.<sup>508</sup> In the *Harijan* residential schools opened by nationalists and in the *mishrabhojanams* organised under nationalist initiative; vegetarian meals were supplied. The insistence on vegetarianism in the *mishrabhojanams* had double effect. On the one side it enabled the *savarna* congress leaders to take the untouchables to the Hindu fold. It also enabled them to inculcate the traits of social equality. Adoption of vegetarianism was also viewed as the mark of the perfect beings<sup>509</sup>. In the reformist and the *savarna* nationalist discourse those who practice non vegetarianism were viewed as outside select circle of perfection.<sup>510</sup>

### **Temple Entry Movements and the search for Social Justice**

The nationalists of Malabar took up the issue of temple entry to untouchables as part of their strategy of bringing different sections of people together. They found that the exclusion of sizeable section of the 'Hindu'

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<sup>507</sup> For details see Chapter III. *Supra*.

<sup>508</sup> Various issues of *Mathrubhumi*, 1923-1947.

<sup>509</sup> Vijayan Kannampilly, "Food as health, ethics and social marker" in *Seminar* No. 566, Rameshraj Trust, New Delhi, October, 2006. p.51.

<sup>510</sup> Vagbhatananda, *Vagbhatanandante Sampoorana Krithikal*, Calicut, 1988, pp. 821-914; *Mathrubhumi*, May 4, 1932.

community from the temples was the greatest hindrance to religious solidarity and national unity at a time when they were fighting the British imperialism with all the resources. Some of them were also concerned with the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries and Muslim preachers. The reports of large scale conversions of untouchables to Christianity and Islam and the talk of mass conversions to other religions from the leaders of the depressed classes provoked them to take up the issue seriously. Though the Gandhians were influenced by the religious and political significance of the movement; those who opposed idol worship<sup>511</sup> and temple practices<sup>512</sup> also co-operated with the temple entry agitations. Many people, including atheists, co-operated with the movement because they perceived it as the avenue for promoting human dignity, equality and social justice.

The question of temple entry for the untouchable communities received the attention of the nationalists even before the launching of the Vaikom *Satyagraha*.<sup>513</sup> But it was not taken up seriously during those days because sizeable sections of Congressmen were against raising religious issues in the Congress meetings. But the situation changed substantially after the Vaikom *Satyagraha* and Kalpathy agitations. Besides, the *avarnas* like *Tiyas* consolidated their community around caste shrines and began exhorting their fellowmen to stop paying homage at the *savarna* temples in an

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<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, Also see editorial written in *Atmavidya Kahalam*, August 5, 1931.

<sup>512</sup> Krishna Pillai's article in *Mathrubhumi*, December, 31, 1931.

<sup>513</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 26 February, 1924.

undignified manner. Similarly, the depressed classes also began raising their voice for the redressal of their social and economic grievances. Temple entry was not a serious issue in the depressed class discourse either at the national level or in Malabar. The challenges faced by the Hindu community from within and out side and the political exigencies of the time forced the *savarna* nationalists to take up the question of temple entry for the untouchables.

The third Provincial Political Conference held at Calicut in 1927 and the fourth conference held at Payyannur in May 1928 passed resolutions condemning untouchability and exhorted the Hindus to open temples to all believers irrespective of caste and creed.<sup>514</sup> The fifth Political Conference held at Badagara in May 1931 went a step further and decided to organise propaganda work in favour of temple entry for all Hindus.<sup>515</sup> The conference passed a resolution which requested the *savarnas* and the *Devaswam* authorities to open all temples to all Hindus irrespective of caste.<sup>516</sup> Kelappan met Gandhiji and the Congress leaders at Bombay and apprised them of the need for launching temple entry movement in Kerala.<sup>517</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1931, the KPCC passed a formal resolution, sponsored by U. Gopala Menon on the

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<sup>514</sup> *Mathrubhumi* April 21, 1927, May 29, 1928.

<sup>515</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 5, 1931.

<sup>516</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Op.cit* p. 407.

<sup>517</sup> P.K.K. Menon, *Op.cit* p. 316.

question of temple entry.<sup>518</sup> The meeting also decided to launch the temple entry *Satyagraha* at Guruvayur temple from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1931 onwards.

The temple entry campaign was inaugurated on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1931. Leaders like Kelappan, Madhavanar, Moyarath Sankaran, A.K. Gopalan, P. Keshavan Nair and P. Krishna Panikker addressed several meetings in the Ponnani taluk.<sup>519</sup> Public meetings were organised throughout Malabar in which the speakers stressed the need to eradicate the evils of untouchability.

A *Jatha* of sixteen volunteers, led by poet T.S. Tirumumbu began from Kannur in the north to Guruvayur on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1931.<sup>520</sup> A.K. Gopalan was the captain of the *Jatha*. The volunteers ranged from the lowliest *Harijans* to the highest caste *Nambudiris*.<sup>521</sup> The march stirred the entire country and aroused anti-caste sentiments. Guruvayur Temple Entry *Satyagraha* was started on 1 November 1931. The day was also observed as all Kerala Temple Entry Day with a programme of prayers, processions, meetings and fund collections. The popular response was tremendous. Many all India leaders visited Malabar. Money and volunteers poured in from every where. The youth were especially attracted and were in the forefront of the struggle. The campaign against untouchability gained much popularity. Many religious

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<sup>518</sup> *Ibid* p.316.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid* p.317, Also see A.K. Gopalan, *Ente Jeevithakatha*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p.36.

<sup>520</sup> T.S. Tirumumbu, *Smaranakal, Kavithakal* compiled by K.K.N. Kurup, Trichur, 1989, pp.78-79.

<sup>521</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *Op.cit* p. 38.



devotees transferred their offerings they would have made to the temple to the *Satyagraha* camp, feeling that the camp was more sacred than the temple.<sup>522</sup>

The temple authorities also made arrangements. They put up barbed wire all around the temple and organised gangs of watchmen to keep the *Satyagrahies* out and to threaten them with beatings.

The volunteers woke up early in the morning, took bath, applied sandalwood paste on their foreheads and then proceeded for *Satyagraha*. An *avarana* volunteer and a *savarna* volunteer posted at each gate, chanted *sankeerthanam* and tried to enter the temple; each batch of volunteers stood at the gate continuously for three hours. Their entry was blocked by guards appointed by temple authorities and a strong contingent of police headed by the superintendent of police closely watched the entire activities.<sup>523</sup> In the first few days there was perfect peace as the *Satyagrahies* were totally committed to non-violent agitation. But very soon, the situation changed as the temple servants and local reactionaries began using force against the peaceful and non-violent *Satyagrahies* while the police stood by. The use of force to disperse the *Satyagrahies* began with the attack on A.K. Gopalan, the volunteer captain of the *Satyagraha* camp on November 8, 1931.<sup>524</sup> This was

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<sup>522</sup> *Ibid* p. 42, *Mathrubhumi* November 19, and 24, 1931.

<sup>523</sup> P.K.K. Menon, *op.cit.*, p. 319, T.S. Tirumumbu, *op.cit.*, pp. 80-91.

<sup>524</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 10, 1931.

followed by merciless attack on Unnikrishnan, a *Harijan* boy of 12 years on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1931.<sup>525</sup> P. Krishna Pillai was also brutally assaulted.<sup>526</sup>

The merciless attack on *Satyagraha* volunteers enraged the public. They removed the barbed fence by force. The authorities now realised that though the *Satyagrahis* might be peaceful and non-violent, the public would not be in a mood to tolerate such violent excesses. It was also noticed that people belonging to different castes took bath at the western pond of the temple. The *Sanatanist* complaint to the authorities viewed it as "the work of *Tiyas, Pulayas, Cherumas* and *Nayadies*; the illiterate, uncivilized and unscrupulous".<sup>527</sup> The high voltage of agitation and the forceful involvement of large sections of people cutting across caste and community identities forced the *Zamorin* to close the temple on 1 January 1932 to all worshippers. Kelappans persuasion to the *Zamorin* to remove the 'stain on Hinduism' by helping the depressed classes to worship the deity fell on deaf ears.<sup>528</sup>

The temple was reopened on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1932 and the *Satyagraha* was also renewed. Meanwhile the temple entry committee constituted by the KPCC was dissolved on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1932 as the later body itself had been

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<sup>525</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 6, 1931.

<sup>526</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 22 and 30, 1931.

<sup>527</sup> *Madras Government Secret USS File No. 813* dated 6 February 1933, TNA, Chennai, Memorial from *savarna* Hindus December 30, 1931

<sup>528</sup> A.K. Pillai, *Op.cit* p,412, *Mathrubhumi*, January 27, 1932

declared to be unlawful. A special committee was now formed under the leadership of Smt. P.M. Kamalavathi to organise the *Satyagraha*.<sup>529</sup>

The temple entry *Satyagraha* took a new turn in September 1932 following Gandhiji's decision to fast unto death against the Government policy of establishing separate electorate for the depressed classes. Kelappan, the director of the *Satyagraha*, announced his decision to fast unto death before the Guruvayur temple in case the untouchables would continue to be shut out of it. He started the fast on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1932, the very next day on which Gandhiji commenced his fast against the Communal Award of 1932. Though Mahatma Gandhi ended his fast on 26 September following the signing of the Poona pact and the governments acceptance of the same, Kelappans fast continued. Once again the campaign against untouchability and the agitation for the opening of temples to untouchables received national attention. Caste Hindus from Kerala as well as the rest of India made appeals to the *Zamorin*, the trustee of the temple, to open it to all Hindus and thus save the life of Kelappan. But such fervent appeals invoked little response from *Zamorin* and the *Sanatanists*. The *Nambudiri* Youth League and the *Yogakshema Sabha* passed resolutions favouring the opening of temples to all Hindus including *Adidravidas*.<sup>530</sup> The all Kerala *Savarna* Conference held at Guruvayur on 29thn September 1932 resolved to conduct fast within the

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<sup>529</sup> P.K.K. Menon, *Op.cit* p. 321.

<sup>530</sup> *Unni Nambudiri*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1931 and 8<sup>th</sup> January 1932.

temple to force a change of stand of the *Zamorin*.<sup>531</sup> An action committee was also formed with V.T. Bhattatiripad and K.A. Damodara Menon as secretaries. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1932 a batch of twenty four *savarna* volunteers started their fast within the temple and soon the number rose to fifty.<sup>532</sup>

Gandhiji made repeated appeals to Kelappan to break the fast, at least temporarily, with an assurance that he would himself, if necessary, undertake the task of getting the temple opened.<sup>533</sup> Finally, Kelappan broke his fast on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1932. The *Satyagraha* was also suspended.

A *Jatha* led by A.K. Gopalan toured the whole of Kerala on foot, carrying on propaganda and addressing massive meetings everywhere. Before it was disbanded, the *Jatha* had covered nearly 1000 miles and addressed over 500 meetings.<sup>534</sup> Its impact on society was tremendous. In many places people belonging to all castes and creeds came together to receive the *Jatha*. A.K. Gopalan, the captain of the *Jatha* wrote his experiences in the following words: "People from *Nambudiris* at the top to *Nayadis* at the bottom met together, dined together; took untouchables to the *Savarna* houses and even took *Varam* feast together".<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> C.K. Moosath, *op.cit* pp, 127-129.

<sup>532</sup> P.K.K. Menon, *op.cit* p.325, *Mathrubhumi* 2 October, 1932.

<sup>533</sup> CWMG, Vol. LI, pp.150, 162 and 177.

<sup>534</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op.cit* p. 62.

<sup>535</sup> A.K. Gopalan article in *Mathrubhumi* dated January 18, 1933.

Towards the end of November 1932 Gandhiji had decided that the temple entry issue at Guruvaryur should be settled through a referendum among the *savarnas* of Ponnani taluk. The referendum began 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1932. Seventy seven percentages of those who registered their votes supported the temple entry for all sections of the Hindu community.<sup>536</sup>

The temple entry *Satyagraha* launched under the leadership of Congressmen was an important episode in the history of the struggle for social justice in Kerala. Close analysis of the events leading to the Guruvayur *Satyagraha* and after reveal the varying perceptions of the people towards social and religious inequalities.

The Congressmen of Malabar followed the directives of Mahatma Gandhi and viewed the campaign for temple entry as an effort of *savarnas* to expiate the sins they had committed to the untouchables. Accordingly they viewed the temple entry campaign as a purely *savarna* affair in which untouchables and non-hindus had practically no role. When the committee for temple entry campaign was constituted, a proposal was put forward

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<sup>536</sup> Out of the 65000 savarna population of Ponnani Taluk, the estimated number of adults would be around 30000. The volunteers visited 27465 savarnas of whom only 20,163 recorded their opinion. Of them 15,568 persons were in favour of temple entry. This indicates the fact that out of the 30000 adult savarna population only 15,568 (nearly half of the savarna population) gave consent to temple entry for polluting castes even after hectic campaign organised by A.V.Thakkar, Smt. Urmila Devi, Kasturba Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari, Mannath Padmanabhan and many other notable leaders. For details see P.K.K. Menon, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-330. Also see *Mathrubhumi*, Nov. 27, 1933 to January 1, 1934.

demanding the inclusion of the president of the KPCC in his official capacity as a member. But this proposal was not accepted on the ground that non-Hindus also can become KPCC president.<sup>537</sup> Similarly, the support extended by the Sikh community was also not accepted.<sup>538</sup> So the whole work was planned in such a manner viewing the involvement of non-Hindus in the campaign as a 'dangerous interference' on Hindu religious customs and practices.<sup>539</sup>

Another notable aspect of the temple entry agitation was the attempt on the part of enlightened *Nairs* to utilise the movement for redressing their religious grievances vis a vis the *Brahmins*. The *Nairs* had no right to enter the *Mukha Mandapa* of the temple, to offer prayers through ringing the bells, or taking *varam* feast from temples which were the exclusive privilege of *Brahmins*. Similarly the *prasadam* was not given to their hand. On the other hand it was thrown on the stone slabs from where the *Nairs* had to collect it. Another disability suffered by the community was that in the temples the *Nair* women had to take off their breast cloth.<sup>540</sup> These were symbols of religious inferiority of the *Nairs*. Similarly, the offsprings of the *sambandam* relations between *Nair* women and *Nambudiris* had no right even to touch their *Brahmin* father, whose very touch would pollute the later. The rising

<sup>537</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, October 20, 1931.

<sup>538</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 18 and 20 November 1931.

<sup>539</sup> *Mathrubhumi* January 10, 1931 and January 4, 1933.

<sup>540</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April, 12, 1924; December 5, 1925. The struggle for social equality enabled the *Nair* women to boycott those temples where the officiating priest demanded the removal of breast cloth. *Mathrubhumi*, October 13, 1932.

generations of *Nairs* were not ready to swallow these injustices imposed upon them by the *Brahminical* hierarchy. Krishna Pillai's bold attempt of ringing the temple bell and the cannibalistic reaction of orthodox sections received the attention of the progressive sections in the *Nair* community all over Malabar. The response of Krishna Pillai that "Let the bold *Nair* ring the bell and let the cringing *Nair* living on crumbs beat on his back"<sup>541</sup> was inspiring to all those who have self respect . Bell ringing soon became a regular feature in Guruvayur temple and every morning *Nairs* entered the temple through eastern gate reserved for *Brahmin's* and rang the temple bell. Once inside they demanded to be fed along with *pattars*.<sup>542</sup> Offering prayers with bell ringing soon spread to the whole of Kerala.<sup>543</sup> The devotees also began questioning the propriety of throwing away *prasadam* to the stone slab and began demanding the same by hand. In other words spasmodic attempts to claim privileges and to remove disabilities connected with temples spread to various places.<sup>544</sup> These agitations contributed to improving the dignity and self respect of intermediate castes of *Nairs*.

The *avarnas* and depressed classes closely watched the developments in Guruvayur with mixed response. Though *Tiya* leaders like P. Achuthan co-

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<sup>541</sup> T.V. Krishnan, *Keral's First Communist*, Communist Party Publication, 1971, p.21.

<sup>542</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 9 and 10 April, 1932.

<sup>543</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, October 29, 1931; Subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* carry reports of assertion of dignity by *Nair* Youth all over Kerala.

<sup>544</sup> *Fortnightly Reports*, hereafter *FNR*, second half of November 1931, First half of December 1931. TNA, Chennai.

operated with the movement, sizeable section of the community viewed it as an attempt on the part of *savarna* Congressmen to mobilise support for the nationalist movement. The South Malabar *Tiya Samajam* conference held at Manjeri unanimously passed a resolution exhorting the community to boycott the caste Hindu temples and to keep up the self respect of the community.<sup>545</sup> C. Krishnan, another prominent *Tiya* leader of Malabar even argued that “Hinduism is not only an alien religion but also an enemy religion which blocks the self respect and progress of the *Tiya* Community”.<sup>546</sup> The *Tiya* conferences also requested the community to purify their own religious practices and admit the depressed classes into their shrines. As a result important *Tiya* temples were thrown open to the depressed classes.<sup>547</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain the views of the depressed classes because great bulks of them were not politically minded and incapable of grasping political ideas.<sup>548</sup> Most of their organisations and meetings were proxy affairs controlled by *savarna* Congressmen. Though some of them co-operated with the temple entry agitations under the tutelage of Congress volunteers, the community as such was not enthusiastic to it. Though resolutions supporting temple entry were passed in the *Adidraida* conferences, the stress was on the redressal of social and economic grievances.<sup>549</sup> Attempts were also made to

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<sup>545</sup> *Mathrubhumi* November 6, 1931; *The Hindu*, November, 1931.

<sup>546</sup> *Mathrubhumi* January 18, 1932.

<sup>547</sup> *Mathrubhumi* September 27 and 28, 1932.

<sup>548</sup> *Madras Government Secret USS File No.804* dated 16.12.1936, TNA, Chennai. District Collectors letter to chief secretary, Madras.

<sup>549</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, February 3, 1932.



link the issue of temple entry with the rights of depressed classes to use roads and other public amenities.

The depressed classes were also sceptical about the majority opinion for temple entry expressed through referendum. Ambedkar argued that even after referendum majority of the *savarnas* were against admitting depressed classes to temples. He also stated that the referendum was conducted with putting *Mahatma's* life at stake. So naturally the price of *Mahatma's* life should be reduced from the result.<sup>550</sup> Government reports say that "the signing (in favour of temple entry) is reported to have depended on the person asking for signature; people who refused to sign in the first instance signed readily when approached by principal congress organisers.....personalities appear as usual to count far more than convictions.....In the absence of leaders, little enthusiasm is exhibited."<sup>551</sup>

The conservative *savarnas-Sanatanists*-were adamant in denying temple entry to the depressed classes. They convened meetings, passed resolutions and organised propaganda work justifying their stand. The special conference of the All India *Varnashrama Swarajya Sangham* held at Guruvayur from 27 to 29 December 1932 viewed the attempt of certain class of politicians to bring about temple entry by threats as starvation or suicide or similar other ways are nothing short of coercion both morally and legally.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>550</sup> *Mathrubhumi* February 15, 1933.

<sup>551</sup> *FNR* for the first half of January 1933.

<sup>552</sup> *Public G.O.*, MS, 93 dated 24.1.1933, TNA, Chennai.

It was also pointed out that opposition to such efforts was the "bounden duty of every true Hindu for the protection of *Sanadhana Dharma*.<sup>553</sup> The meeting also decided to raise a national fund for the protection of Hindu temples and for preventing temple entry at Guruvayur or at any other place.<sup>554</sup> Decision was also taken to organise volunteers (*Dharmaveers*) for the protection of temples.<sup>555</sup> The *Sanatanists* also disapproved the referendum saying that it was "one sided, unlawful, and taken with the co-operation on party lines".<sup>556</sup> The *Sanatanist* journal '*Kalpadruma*' published series of articles denouncing the temple entry campaign.<sup>557</sup> At the same time they approved the introduction of economic measures for the upliftment of the depressed classes.<sup>558</sup>

Eventhough the Guruvayur temple was not opened immediately; the *Satyagraha* was a great success in broader terms. As A.K. Gopalan has recorded in his autobiography, "the movement had created an impetus for social change throughout the country. It led to a transformation everywhere".<sup>559</sup> The colonial authorities argued that "unreality and insincerity"<sup>560</sup> dominated the whole campaign: They also viewed it as "a

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<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> *FNR* for the second half of January 1933.

<sup>558</sup> Public G.O., MS, 93 dated 24.1.1993, TNA, Chennai.

<sup>559</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op.cit* p.50.

<sup>560</sup> Letter of Malabar Distict Magistrate dated 3.10.1932 in *Madras Government Secret USS File No.804* dated 16.12.2932, TNA, Chennai.

smoke screen to conceal the failure of the Civil Disobedience Movement".<sup>561</sup> Beneath these scathing criticisms, they were also forced to acknowledge its positive impact on the society. It was stated that the movement galvanized the efforts to "remove disabilities connected with the temples and every caste is trying to improve its position"<sup>562</sup>and "claim privileges which are not admitted to them".<sup>563</sup> As in the case of the Vaikom *Satyagraha*, the people irrespective of caste, community and religion co-operated with the Guruvayur *Satyagraha* also. This has been attested by A.K. Gopalan in the course of the temple entry *Jathas*. It was a deviation from the Gandhian perception of involvement of non-Hindus as a 'dangerous interference' on Hindu religion, customs and practices. The co-operation and support of people belonging to different castes, communities and religions<sup>564</sup> in such agitations contributed to the progressive transformation of Kerala society.

Guruvayur *Satyagraha* succeeded in creating the broadest possible unity, imparting mass education and mobilising the people on a very wide scale on the question of social injustices like untouchability. As EMS Nambudiripad was to write years later: "The Guruvayur temple *Satyagraha* was an event that thrilled thousands of young men like me and gave inspiration to a vast majority of the people to fight for legitimate rights with self respect.... It was the very same youth who gave this bold lead, who

<sup>561</sup> Letter of District Collect dated 10.12.1932 in the above file.

<sup>562</sup> *FNR* first half of December 1931.

<sup>563</sup> *FNR* second half of November 1931.

<sup>564</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op.cit* p.57, *Mathrubhumi* December 2, 1932.

subsequently became founder leaders of the worker peasant organisation that were free from the malice of religious or communal consideration".<sup>565</sup>

The rising generation of political activists were not satisfied with the Gandhian strategy of 'change of heart' to open the temples to the depressed classes. Gandhiji put forward compromise proposals for opening the temples to untouchables like setting aside certain hours for depressed classes to worship and the remaining time exclusively for *Sanatanists*.<sup>566</sup> This was vehemently opposed by the people of Kerala who had strong tradition of struggles for securing social justice. They viewed the demarcation of time as insulting to the self respect of the polluting castes.<sup>567</sup> Resolutions were passed at various places in Malabar condemning Gandhiji's compromise proposal. The pressure from below forced Kelappan to inform Gandhiji that division of time between polluting castes and *savarnas* was unacceptable to the people of Malabar.

Though the vast literature dealing with Guruvayur *Satyagraha* characterised it as a peaceful non violent agitation under Gandhian principles, the attitude of the common man was not strictly so. This has been attested with several incidents which took place in the course of the *Satyagraha* and immediately after that. Though people outwardly professed non violence

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<sup>565</sup> EMS Nambudiripad, *How I became a Communist, Thiruvananthapuram*, 1976 p.123.

<sup>566</sup> *Mathrubumi* January 3, 1933.

<sup>567</sup> *Mathrubumi*, January 11, 1933.

because of the insistence of Kelappan; they have no hesitation to use force against the suppression of the dominant classes. The forceful entry to the temple pond and the removal of fences were the early examples.<sup>568</sup> When A.K. Gopalan and other *Satyagrahies* were assaulted, people retorted with same vengeance at the appropriate moment.<sup>569</sup> Similarly the forceful ringing of temple bells and claiming *prasadam* by hand were also not in tune with the Gandhian strategy. The use of militancy which has been characterised as an essential aspect of the subaltern consciousness and strategy of struggle<sup>570</sup> worked in Malabar also. Such violent incursions into the sites of social injustice instilled courage and confidence in the minds of the people. It also provoked the dominant classes to create institutions to streamline the agitations of the people. The *Harijan Sevak Sangh* formed under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi was the institution which carried the work of *savarna* nationalists in Malabar.

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<sup>568</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 29, 1931 to February 16, 1932.

<sup>569</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 2, 1932.

<sup>570</sup> Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. I, New Delhi, OUP, 1982, pp. 1-7.

### ***Harijan Sevak Sangh and its activities in Malabar***

The suspension of the Guruvayur *Satyagraha* without achieving the objective precipitated problems within the nationalist movement. Radical sections became disillusioned over the strategy and tactics employed by the Gandhians in achieving social justice. *Savarnas* were equally disturbed by the growing military on the part of the people for achieving social justice. The constant cry for religious conversion and the bitter criticism from the lower castes against the religious practices of Hindus; militant stand taken by Amedkar at the national level and the polluting castes like *Tiyas* at the regional level; increasing activities of the Christian missionaries among the depressed classes-all these factors provoked the *savarna* nationalists to pursue policies for improving the condition of depressed classes. At the same time utmost care and precaution was taken to avoid the dilution of the *savarna* support base. This was important in the contest of the Government of India Act of 1935 and the Congress decision to contest the elections scheduled to be held in 1937. Congress was eager to retain its hold over the *savarna* voters against the threat of other political outfits. At the same time Gandhiji and the *savarna* Congressmen wanted to retain the depressed classes under the Hindu fold.

The *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (HSS) was formed in 1932 to channalise the activities of Congressmen in the *Harijan* uplift and to check the growth of

militancy in the struggle for social justice. Malabar branch of the HSS was formed in April 1933 with head quarters at Calicut, under instructions from Gandhiji and A.V. Thakkar. K. Kelappan was its first president and P. Shankunny Nambiar, the secretary Kelappan resigned his post on 4 April 1934 and Kongattil Raman Menon became the president.<sup>571</sup> When Raman Menon resigned for joining the Minsitry, V.R. Nayanar assumed charge. The Sabari Ashramam of Palghat, Pakkanarpuram Gandhi Sadanam at Nallambrakunnu, Balikasadanam at Putiyara and the Kalappaji Mandiram Hostel at Guruvayur were brought under its control.<sup>572</sup>

Gandhiji toured Malabar from 10 to 16 January 1934 to co-ordinate the activities of the HSS in this region. In his speeches he exhorted the people to wipe out the shame of untouchability which would perish Hinduism.<sup>573</sup> He also pleaded the people to do their duty to the depressed classes.<sup>574</sup> In his hurried tour of Malabar, he was able to collect nearly 14000 rupees for the noble cause of *Harijan* upliftment. Politics was completely eschewed from his speeches, the burden of which was that Malabar was the blackest spot on the map of India in regard to untouchability and that people should purge themselves of it.

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<sup>571</sup> *Annual Report of the Malabar Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1933-34 in Mathrubhumi, December 30, 1934.*

<sup>572</sup> C.K. Moosath, 'The Role of Kelappan in Harijan Activities' in the *Suvarna Jubilee Souvnirer, Kerala Harijan Sevak Sangh, Calicut, 1985. p. 10.*

<sup>573</sup> Gandhi's speeches at Palghat and Guruvayur in *CWMG Vol. LVI, pp.460-61, 466.*

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid. p. 471.*

Gandhiji's *Harijan* tour of 1934 gave a new fillip to the activities for the upliftment of the untouchables. The work concentrated mainly in organising new educational institutions for *Harijans* at places like Palghat, Ezhimala, Avala, Chundampatta, Cheruppa, Thenkurussi, Palayad and Ezhome besides managing the already existing institutions. The *Harijan* boys were given financial assistance in the form of scholarship. They were also supplied with slates, books and dress materials. About 135 students were admitted to general schools.<sup>575</sup>

The HSS also undertook cleaning work in the *Harijan* colonies. Medical care was given to about 138 *Harijans*. Campaign work was organised against the evils of alcoholism. Small amount of money was also utilised for repairing wells and providing drinking water facilities.<sup>576</sup>

*Harijan Sevak Sangh* also organised *jathas* in various parts of Malabar for securing admission to the depressed classes in the temples. In April 1935 the Temple Entry Conference was convened at Calicut. The conference decided to observe 20 April 1935 as the Temple Entry Day throughout Malabar. Another meeting was held on 18 July 1937 and decided to convene a Temple Entry Conference at Guruvayur in September 1937.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> *Annual Report of the Malabar HSS, 1933-34 in Mathrubhumi* December 30, 1934.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>577</sup> *FNR* of second half of July 1937, TNA, Chennai.



The annual reports of the HSS in Malabar highlight the limitations of its activities.<sup>578</sup> It expected financial assistance from wealthy *savarnas*, but got only very little. Paucity of funds forced the *Sangh* to minimise its activities among the depressed classes.

Another serious limitation of the HSS was its organisational structure. It was a purely *savarna* organisation formed to undertake upliftment work among the depressed classes. But the tradition of Malabar was different. Here the campaign against untouchability was organised with the active involvement of polluting and depressed class leaders. It should be noted that leaders of lower castes like C. Krishnan, E. Kannan, K Sumughan and many others co-operated with the *savarna* nationalists in the campaign against social evils. But the HSS was organised as strictly a *savarna* affair for the upliftment of the depressed classes. The radicals among the nationalists-who were the back bone of the Guruvayur *Satyagraha*-also lost faith in the activities of the HSS. As a result it failed to arouse popular interest in its activities.<sup>579</sup>

The leaders from the depressed classes increasingly became dissatisfied with the activities of the HSS. The nationalist campaign against labour schools and for the admission of depressed classes in general schools

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<sup>578</sup> See for details, *Reports of Malabar HSS*, 1933-34 to 1938-39 in *Mathrubhumi* December 30, 1934, October 13, 1936; March 16, 1937 July, 1938 and October 6, 1939.

<sup>579</sup> For details see *FNR* from 1933 to 1939, TNA, Chennai.

adversely affected the down trodden groups. As a result, large numbers of labour schools were closed in Malabar. As the reports of the HSS indicate only a small number of depressed class children got admission in general schools. From this it is clear that the campaign for the closing of labour schools and enrollment of the depressed classes in general schools adversely affected the educational prospects of the underlings in the society.

The *Harijan* members who co-operated with the activities of the HSS became disillusioned.<sup>580</sup> They found that the reports of *Harijan* upliftment activities were 'constructed' without doing the actual work. In the initial days, the plan of the HSS was to recruit equal number of *savarna* and *Harijan pracharaks* to work among the depressed classes.<sup>581</sup> But in Malabar 8 out of 9 '*Harijan* workers' were *savarnas*.<sup>582</sup> Many of them send fake reports without doing any concrete work. This forced the depressed class leaders to view the HSS as an organisation for accommodating jobless *savarnas*.<sup>583</sup> The *Harijan* conference held at Kalliassery even introduced a resolution which stated that the work of Malabar HSS was not beneficial to the *Harijans*. The resolution also requested the *Harijans* to disassociate with the HSS.<sup>584</sup> Though the resolution was not passed because of the objection of the Chairman, the

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<sup>580</sup> *FNR* of second half of March 1933.

<sup>581</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, May 13, 1933.

<sup>582</sup> K. Sumughan's, (*Adidraida*), article in *Mathrubhumi*, June 19, 1934.

<sup>583</sup> K. Sumughan's article in *Mathrubhumi*, May 18, 1933 and May 29, 1934.

<sup>584</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, June 19, 1934.

debate over it clearly revealed the attitude of the depressed classes to the H.S.S.

The reports of the HSS also stated that no serious efforts were undertaken to improve the economic condition of the depressed classes. The reason for this was attributed to the failure to mobilise money. Central assistance was cut short and the voluntary contribution from the *savarna* benefactors was not up to the expectations. Any how, the failure to undertake concrete economic programmes disillusioned both the depressed class leaders and the radicals with in the nationalist movement. Both sections began viewing the ameliorative work of HSS as smoke screen to mask the contradictions in the society. At the same time it should be noted that through prolonged campaign the HSS succeeded in undermining the moral basis of untouchability. But it failed to address the economic and political problems faced by the depressed classes. Gradually the enthusiasm of the people towards the activities of the HSS weakened. This has been attested by the Government reports<sup>585</sup> and the statement of depressed class leaders and radical sections.<sup>586</sup> The failure to take up the economic grievances of the depressed classes alienated them from the activities of the HSS. The depressed classes awakened from their age long sufferings, were not willing to wait for the 'change of heart' of the *savarnas*. Unlike the *Savarnas* who

<sup>585</sup> *FNR* of second half of July 1933, First half of August 1933, second half of August 1933. The reports say that the interest in the anti-untouchability movement has almost entirely evaporated.

<sup>586</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1933-1939.

considered temple entry as the starting point of eradicating social evils, depressed classes gave more attention to the agitations for their entry into schools, public places and institutions. The difference in the attitude of the *savarnas* and the depressed classes forced the later to distance themselves from the trivial demands and programmes of the former and to co-operate with those movements which addressed the economic, social and educational aspirations of the lower strata of the society. Those who synthesized the anti-caste ideology of the reform movements with the political and social ethos of the nationalist movement also formed their own organisations to campaign against social evils. Such organisations played a vital role in the socio-cultural transformation of the society through their systematic work.

### **Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust (DMRT)**

The Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust began its activities in Malabar immediately after the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. It was the brainchild of G.K. Devdhar; one of the founder members of the Servants of India Society (SIS). The SIS was founded by Gopalakrishna Gokhale in 1905 to bring together and cultivate a creative, selfless and thinking band of public workers who could work with a missionary zeal to the cause of the country.<sup>587</sup> Its activities in Kerala began with relief work undertaken for the victims of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. But in course of time they extended their activities to other equally important areas like education, rural reconstruction

<sup>587</sup> B.R. Nanda, *Gokhale: A political Biography*, Delhi 1966 p. 156.

and social reform. The various works of the SIS in Malabar was undertaken under the banner of an organisation known as Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust (DMRT) which was registered at Calicut in 1923.<sup>588</sup> As mentioned in the constitution, the members of the SIS and DMRT regarded all Indians as brothers and worked for the advancement of all, without distinction of caste and creed.<sup>589</sup> Its work was quite non-sectarian, secularist and democratic in letter and spirit.

The establishment of DMRT was a turning point in the social reform and reconstruction activities in Malabar. As elsewhere in India the SIS and the DMRT stood for strengthening public life of the country, promoting relations of cordial goodwill and co-operation among different communities, education of backward classes and the elevation of the depressed classes. The DMRT workers became convinced that the prevalence of social evils was mainly due to the educational backwardness of the people. The fight against such evils should be effective only through providing education to the people. With this intention the DMRT started day and night schools in places like Tanoor, Nediyruppu, Panakkad, Panamanna, Wandoor, Melmuri and Feroke and took up the administration of the *Harijan* residential school at

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<sup>588</sup> T.M. Vijayan, "Eradication of untouchability – The Role of "DMRT workers" in Charles Dias, ed., *Dr. K.J. John Felicitation Volume*, Cochin 2006, p.451.

<sup>589</sup> Constitution of the Servants of India Society reproduced in the annexure of Jyothirmani Vatakkayil; *The Activities of Servants of India Society in Kerala: A study of the DMRT Movement*, Unpublished Ph.D Theis, Calicut University 2006.

Gopalapuram near Quilandy. It also prepared a scheme for rural adult education which has been appreciated by the Madras government.<sup>590</sup> The scheme also envisaged steps for providing training in various handicrafts.<sup>591</sup>

Admission to these educational institutions was open to all but priority was given to the children of backward castes and Muslims. The *Harijan* children in the schools at Nediyruppu and Gopalapuram were given midday meals. Untouchability and pollution were not observed in these schools.<sup>592</sup> It is worthwhile to note that children belonging to all castes and religions mingled together. Such mingling reduced the taboos of untouchability and segregation to a great extent.

The DMRT workers opened their institutions to people belonging to all castes and religions. Their selfless service to the victims of Malabar rebellion including the destitute *Mappilas* and systematic campaign against social evils like untouchability instilled courage and confidence among the lower orders of the society. Ameliorative work among people belonging to different castes and religions paved the way for the secularisation of the society.<sup>593</sup> This emphasis on secular values in relief works and reform activities contributed substantially to the social transformation of Malabar. The activities of the DMRT also encouraged the people to synthesise the anti-caste ideology of

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<sup>590</sup> *MLC Debates* Vol. XXXIV p.121.

<sup>591</sup> *MLC Debates* Vol. XXXVI p.328.

<sup>592</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 2, 1930.

<sup>593</sup> V.R. Narayanan article in *Mathrubhumi*, December 25, 1940.

reform movements with the spirit of nationalism. This new awareness encouraged them to form local level organisations to campaign against social evils at the grass root level.

### **Local level organisations**

The efforts of the nationalists to wipe out social evils like untouchability and segregation of depressed classes through the 'change of heart' of the *savarnas* invited criticism from sizeable section of social activists in Malabar. The campaign unleashed by the ideologues of anti-casteism forced the people who imbibed such ideologies to establish their own organisations to fight against all forms of evils. As a result local level organisations sprouted in various places of Malabar to fight against social and religious injustices. The institutions and movements thus originated co-operated with the nationalist movement and utilised the space created by this wider political forum. At the same time these organizations developed their own strategies to contain social evils. The activities of the *Anachara dhwamsana Sabha* at Calicut, the *Jatinashini Sabha* at Kannur and the *Samudaya Parishkarana Sabha* at Palghat are the notable example in this respect.

The *Anachara Dhwamsana Sabha* of Calicut formed in January 1927 worked for the removal of obnoxious practices and social evils. The meeting of the Sabha held at Kallayi passed resolutions against the practice of

untouchability and requested the *Tiyas* to open their temples to castes below them. It also decided to organise campaign against animal sacrifices and the singing of levid songs.<sup>594</sup> The sabha organised public meetings at places like Tiruvannur and Kannancheri to ensure freedom of travel to *Adidravidas* through public roads. In such meetings leading political activists like P, Ramunni Menon and Mohammed Abdul Rahiman attended.<sup>595</sup> The *Anachara Dwamsana Sabha* also organised campaigns against the demand of the *savarnas* of Guruvayur to transfer the polluting caste official of their locality.<sup>596</sup> Propaganda work was undertaken questioning the rationale of accomodating Pulaya converts to Christianity and Islam and denying the same right to the lower caste officials of the Hindu community.<sup>597</sup>

The *Samudaya Parishkarana Sangham* of Palghat organised campaigns for the eradication of evil customs and practices. The evils associated with caste system were questioned. The *Sangham* chalked out various programmes for protecting the human rights of all sections including the untouchables.<sup>598</sup>

The *Jati Nashini Sabha* of Kannur was another local level organisation formed to promote social and religious equality among the people. As the name indicate, destruction of caste system and the hierarchy associated with it

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<sup>594</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 22, 1927.

<sup>595</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, August 11, 1928.

<sup>596</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 16, 1932.

<sup>597</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 9, 1932.

<sup>598</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, February 8, 1930.



was the main objective of the *Sabha*. It organised *mishravivaham* (intercaste marriage) as an effective measure to combat caste system and untouchability. Intercaste marriage between a *Nair* youth and an *Adidravida* woman was solemnised at the Sundareswara Temple, Kannur under the auspices of the *Sabha*.<sup>599</sup> In the succeeding years large numbers of intercaste marriages were organised.<sup>600</sup> Wide publicity was given to such events and the newly wedded couples were given reception at various places. As part of these receptions *mishrabhojanams* were also arranged.

*Jati Nashini Sabha* put forward radical programmes for the eradication of caste system and untouchability. It include giving up specific caste titles, symbols and practices; stoppage of the practice of recording caste surnames in marriages and official records; and organising propaganda work to spread the message of Sree Narayana Guru that "don't ask, speak or think about caste."<sup>601</sup>

Units of the *Jati Nashini Sabha* were organised in different parts of Malabar. In the meetings held at places like Payyannur, Kannur, Tellicherry and Palghat resolutions were passed exhorting the people to uproot casteism.<sup>602</sup> The *Sabha* thought that destruction of caste system was essential for the elimination of disunity and dissatisfaction among the people and for the promotion of human brotherhood.

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<sup>599</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 30, 1933.

<sup>600</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi*, May 5, 1934; November 13, 1934; June 19, 1937; September 17, 1937, March 23, 1940.

<sup>601</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 4, 1936; March 13m 1936.

<sup>602</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 2, 1936, March 23, 1940.

Swami Anand Thirth was the guiding force behind the activities of the *Jati Nashini Sabha*. Besides organising the work of the *Sabha*, Swami Anand Thirth also undertook multitude of other activities for promoting social justice and humaneness among the people.

### **Swami anand Thirth and the Struggle for Social Justice**

Swami Anand Thirth's original name was Ananda Shenoy. Sree Narayana Guru gave him the name Anand Thirth.<sup>603</sup> He was born to a respectable family of middle class parents on 2 January 1905 at Thalassery. Anand Shenoy completed his education from Government Brennen High School and College and took his postgraduate degree from Presidency College, Madras. His life long mission for the upliftment of the depressed classes began with joining the Sabari Ashrmam at Olavakkode in the year 1926.<sup>604</sup> From this time onwards he devoted his entire life for the struggle against the restrictions imposed society by the caste system and for the material, moral, educational and spiritual upliftment of the depressed classes. In this mission he was influenced by the ideology of Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi. He synthesised the teachings of both Gandhiji and Narayana Guru and at the same time developed his own strategies. It was an

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<sup>603</sup> A.M. Abraham Ayrukuzhiel, *Swami Anand Thirth: Untouchability, Gandhian Solution on Trial*, Translated by K.C. Varghese, Taliparamba, 1986, p.27.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.* p.19.

amalgamation of the teachings of these great men and at the same time an advancement from it.

Swami Anand Thirth co-operated with the *Arya Samaj* in their struggle for opening the Kalpathy road to the polluting castes.<sup>605</sup> He fought relentlessly for establishing the right of untouchables to use public spaces like streets, ferries, tea shops, *vayanasalas*, barbar shops and the like. In this effort he suffered insult and physical attack not only from caste hindus but also from *avarna* communities like *Tiyas* at several places.<sup>606</sup> In many places he found that even Congressmen wearing *Khadi* were obstructing the movement of the depressed classes. This forced him to realise that large number of Congressmen were not willing to share the benefits of socio-religious equality with the untouchables. This alienated Swami Anand Thirth from politics. So he decided to devote his entire life to the cause of the untouchables.

Swami Anand Thirth disagreed with the views of Mahatma Gandhi, Malavya and other Hindu leaders in tackling the injustices associated with untouchability. Gandhiji defended *Varnashrama Dharma* and caste system as based on 'scientific principles', discovered by Hindu sages after years of 'research' and 'experiment' and a great monument to Hindu ingenuity and

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<sup>605</sup> Kunhiraman Kattampally 'Swami Anand Thirth' in the *Golden Jubilee Souvenir, Kerala Harijan Sevan Sangh*, p.20.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid* p.21.; A.M. Abraham Ayrukuzhiel, *op. cit.*, also See V.K. Kunhiraman, *Swami Ananda Thirthan*, Thalassery, 1971.

wisdom.<sup>607</sup> Anand Thirth questioned these arguments in the following words: "What is needed today is to demolish the *varna* system and to create an atmosphere in which anyone can do any work as he like. *Varna* system is the mother of *Jati* hierarchy. We should question the rationale of the *varanasrama* system upheld by Mahatma Gandhi and others. Infact the belief in the caste system upheld by people like Malavya is more harmful. The opposition to *mishrabhojanam* by such people encourage even the nationalists to deny admission to *Harijans* in tea shops and public places.....*The sacred thread of the savara threatens the lower castes more than the lathi of the police*" (Italics mine).<sup>608</sup> This article shows the difference in the attitude of Swami Anand Thirth with other *savarana* nationalists including Gandhiji and Malavya. The scating criticism against *varna* system was definitely an advancement from the Gandhian discourse on untouchability. Unlike Gandhiji, he viewed the existence of hierarchical caste system as the reason for the perpetuation of untouchability and unapprochability.<sup>609</sup> So he wanted to treat the disease at the root of the problem itself.

Swami Anand Thirth criticised the attitude of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (HSS) and the nature of the work undertaken by them. He believed that the HSS was approaching the issues of the *Harijans* in a superficial way without knowing the basic problems of the community. It was more concerned with

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<sup>607</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Op.cit* p.226.

<sup>608</sup> Swami Anand Thirth's article in *Mathrubhumi*, September 26, 1933.

<sup>609</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 3, December 7 and 31, 1932.

propaganda work among *savarnas* for a change of heart; inculcating habits of cleanliness among *Harijans*, teaching them of *savarna* mode of worship with some efforts in providing education and establishing colonies. Anand Thirth viewed such remedies as simply treating the patient without examining all the symptoms. To him what the *Harijan* needed was recognising their self respect and self confidence. Their right to have an equal share in public space was more important than practising *savarna* mode of worship and temple entry. He made fervent appeals to the *Harijan sevaks* to move into the interior of Malabar in the attire of depressed classes so that they can learn the gravity of the problem.<sup>610</sup> Such an appeal was made from his own experiences. Swami Anand Thirth moved to the villages of Malabar in the company of untouchables in their physical attire and demanded equal treatment in tea shops, barbar shops, *vayanasalas*, public roads, ferries and the like. In many places Anand Thirth and his fellow men were welcomed with abusive words and even physical assault and injury.<sup>611</sup> Unlike many reformers and *Harijan* sympathizers of the time, his effort was to extend the crusade against untouchability to all the available public spaces. Though he suffered insult, humiliation and injury in this noble mission, the consistent campaign ultimately yielded positive result.

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<sup>610</sup> Swami Ananda Thirths article in *Mathrubhumi*, December 14, 1935.

<sup>611</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi*, 1931-1947.

Anand Thirth also took *Harijans* to shrines and festivals more than any other activist of the time. It was part of his many sided activity of opening the public spaces to untouchables. Taking *Harijans* to shrines and festivals was only one of the means to ensure their place in the civil society. To him temple entry was not an end in itself. It was only a means to achieve the noble objective of acquiring social justice to the underlings in the society.

Swami Anand Thirth strived hard to enroll depressed class children in the general schools. He viewed special schools (labour schools) as institutions which perpetuate mutual exclusiveness. This awareness forced him to campaign consistently for the mixed education of *savarna* and polluting caste children. His field experiences convinced him that most of the *Adidravida* school managers are promoting their vested interest. As a member of the Labour Advisory Committee of the Malabar district he conducted detailed studies on each and every *Adidravida* school and sent reports to the authorities and published his findings in the newspapers. His on the spot verifications convinced him that the *Adidravida* school managers are simply retaining records and rallying pupils at the time of inspection only.<sup>612</sup> The benefit derived by *Adidravidas* from such schools was meagre. The critical study of the activities of the board schools also convinced him of the step motherly attitude taken towards the depressed class. The survey

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<sup>612</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, March 19, 1939; February 23, 1941.

conducted by him in the year 1939 brought to notice that in Chirakkal taluk alone *Adidravidas* were not admitted to atleast 21 board schools.<sup>613</sup>

The foul play in running the labour schools and the firm conviction that general schools are beneficial to the secularisation of society, Swami Anand Thirth decided to organise a campaign for the closure of such schools. In this matter he came into conflict with the depressed class leaders. The representatives of the depressed classes in the Madras Legislative Council like V.I. Muni Swami Pillai and R. Sreenivasan opposed the fusion of labour schools with general schools. They used the forum of the Council to argue strongly for the retention of labour schools.<sup>614</sup> In Malabar also the educated among the depressed classes with the support of Christian Missionaries organised campaigns for the sustenance of labour schools.<sup>615</sup> The *Adidravida* leaders repeatedly highlighted the difficulties of their pupils getting admission in general schools.<sup>616</sup> They argued that in many places the closure of the labour schools curtailed the educational opportunity of the depressed classes. To overcome this criticism, Swami Anand Thirth organised consistent campaign for admitting *Adidravidas* into the general schools. As a member of the Labour Advisory Council he visited the schools and persuaded the

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<sup>613</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, May 31, 1939.

<sup>614</sup> *MLC Debates* Vol. LXX p.25, pp. 229-30.

<sup>615</sup> Malabar *Adidravida Jana Sabha* resolution No.2 in *Mathubhumi* June 28, 1932. The same problem has been discussed in the various issues of *Mathrubhumi*, daily. See *Mathrubhumi*, July 22, 1932; September,1, 1934; March 21, 1936; July 28, 1939 and August 4, 1939.

<sup>616</sup> Memorandum subitted by *Adidravida Jana Sabha*, Malabar District, Kannur dated 26 June 1932 reproduced in *MLC debates* Vol. LXIII, pp. 609-611.

authorities to admit *Harijans* in such schools. When persuasion failed he had no hesitation to use the administrative and constitutional safeguards for ensuring justice to the socially deprived sections.

Besides enrolling *Harijans* in schools, Anand Thirth also worked consistently for providing job opportunities to the under privileged sections. He believed that appointing *Harijans* as school teachers, police officials and in other government offices will boost the morale of that community.<sup>617</sup> Through critical survey of official documents and statistics, Swami Anand Thirth pointed out that even in labour schools, the employment opportunities given to the *Adidravidas* was abysmally low.<sup>618</sup> To overcome this lacunae he suggested the appointment of untrained *Adidravidas* as teachers.<sup>619</sup> In spite of such efforts only a small section of the educated *Adidravidas* got appointment in the government services.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, August 19, 1939.

<sup>618</sup> The memorandum submitted by the Malabar labour advisory committee point out that in Malabar out of 140 labour school teachers only 30 belongs to the *Adidravida* community. It was also pointed out that, the percentage of *Adidravida* teachers in labour school was least in Malabar compared to other districts in the Madras presidency; *Mathrubhumi* August 19, 1939. *Mathrubhumi* also report that by 1933 only six *Adidravida* peons and one clerk were appointed in the Malabar Government Service – *Mathrubhumi*, September 14, 1933.

<sup>619</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1939-1941.

<sup>620</sup> *MLC Debates* 1934-1939, *MLA debates* 1937-1947, The statement tabled in the Madras Legislative Council it was stated that only 2 constables belonging to *Adidravida* community were posted in the Malabar District till 1935. *MLC debates* Vol. LXXIV p.256. Similarly the first *Adidravida* Sub Inspector was selected for training only in 1941, *Mathrubhumi*, September 2, 1941.



Swami Anand Thirth organised *Mishrabhojanam* and *mishravivaham* as effective measures for overcoming the social inequalities. Under his initiative intercaste marriages were organised in different parts of the Malabar district. Reception was arranged to the newly wedded couples in different places. *Mishrabhojanams* were organized as part of the reception.

Swami Anand Thirth organized series of meetings in different parts of Malabar in which the people were exhorted to give up caste titles, surnames, symbols and practices etc. He viewed such activities as positive measures to wipe out casteism.<sup>621</sup> Such campaigns encouraged the people to avoid caste suffixes from their names. As a result large sections of people were identified through their names than caste surnames.

Anand Thirth also organised residential institutions for the moral and educational advancement of the depressed classes. He founded the Sree Narayana Vidyalaya at Payyannur in 1931 for imparting education to the *Harijan* children. *Harijan* hostels were also established at Payyangadi, Kannur and Kalliassery. The inmates of these hostels were sent to the neighbouring schools. They were also given training in handicrafts, besides spiritual and secular education.<sup>622</sup> In such efforts Anand Thirtha was assisted by political activists like P. Krishna Pillai, Vishnu Bharateeyan, A.K. Gopalan, Keraleeyan, K.P. Gopalan, T.C. Narayanan Nambiar and others.

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<sup>621</sup> *Mathrubhumi* January 4, 1936; March 13, 1936.

<sup>622</sup> *Mathrubhumi* July 29, 1934.

Most of them suffered insult and injury for their involvement in the *Harijan* upliftment activities.<sup>623</sup>

Swami Anand Thirth utilised all the avenues for the upliftment of the depressed classes. At the same time he failed to chalk out concrete economic programmes for the upliftment of the downtrodden sections. The depressed classes of Malabar were the agricultural labourers and slaves attached to soil. Their inability to stand before the caste Hindus and even polluting castes like *Tiyas* and *Muslim* landlords was mainly due to their pathetic economic condition. As a member of the Labour Advisory Council, Swami Anand Thirth tried to high light some of their economic grievances. But his focus of attention was the social disabilities of untouchable classes. The depressed classes gradually realised that without liberating themselves from the utter poverty and economic misery, they won't get social status. This awareness forced them to demand forcefully the implementation of radical socio-economic programmes. To achieve this they tried to utilise all the institutions and forces working in Malabar. At the same time, the depressed classes also chalked out their own strategies independently of the existing institutions and movements. Thus autonomous sphere of the depressed classes developed in Malabar through highlighting their social and economic grievances.

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<sup>623</sup> For details see A.M. Abraham Ayrुकuzhiel *Op.cit* pp.34-38; E.M. Ashraf, *Swami Ananda Theertha*, Mal., Mangad, 2003 pp.29-30 also see *Mathrubhumi* August 10, 1933, August 16, 1933, May 29, 1934.

## CHAPTER V

### LEFTIST MOVEMENT IN MALABAR AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the switch over to the constructive programmes like popularization of *Khadi* and ameliorative work among depressed classes disillusioned the rising generation of political activists in Malabar.<sup>624</sup> The experiences of the Civil Disobedience Movement forced them to raise doubts about the success of a movement led by the educated middle class.<sup>625</sup> While in jail, the younger generation of the Congress felt that a new programme of action, new techniques and new leadership were necessary to carry the movement. They became increasingly convinced that "Gandhism had proved a failure".<sup>626</sup> Their contacts with Bengali revolutionaries, admiration to the radical stand of Jawaharlal Nehru and the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union-all these prepared the background for the growth of Leftist politics in Malabar. EMS Nambuthiripad wrote that "the seeds of the Left wing Congress that was later on formed in Kerala and the Congress Socialist Movement were laid in Kannur Jail".<sup>627</sup> The quest for alternatives brought them closer to socialism.

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<sup>624</sup> *Fortnightly report* hereafter *FNR* for the second half of May 1933, TNA, Chennai.

<sup>625</sup> A.K. Pillai's article in *Mathrubhumi*, 12 October, 1933.

<sup>626</sup> A.K.Gopalan, *In the cause of the people*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 151.

<sup>627</sup> EMS Nambuthiripad, *How I Became a Communist*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1976, p. 135.

It was against this background that the Kerala Congress Socialist Party was formed on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1934 with C.K. Govindan Nair as president and P. Krishna Pillai as Secretary.<sup>628</sup> The Congress Socialist Party began organizing the peasantry and the working class of Malabar around their own 'class demands'. The large scale mobilization of different sections of the society enabled the Congress Socialists to exert hegemonic control over the Congress and the national movement.<sup>629</sup> In December 1939, the Congress Socialist Party unit in Malabar was transformed into the unit of the Communist Party of India.

The Left wing nationalists of Malabar adopted new strategies to mobilise the people against socio-religious injustices. So many restrictions were imposed on the lower orders of society not only in religious matters but also in other sphere of life. In food, dress, language and other day to day activities of life hierarchy and difference were exclusively maintained.

In social and religious practice even the *Nairs* had to suffer many disabilities.<sup>630</sup> The ideology of nationalism and the spirit of social equality forced the radical nationalists to challenge the social disabilities of various sections of the society. Krishna Pillai took the lead in challenging such

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<sup>628</sup> P. Krishna Pillai, *Adimathathinethire*, Mal., Chinta Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, pp. 179-185.

<sup>629</sup> K. Gopalankutty, "Radical movements in 20th century Malabar", P.J. Cherian, ed., *Perspectives in Kerala History*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 549.

<sup>630</sup> For details See Chapters I and IV. *Supra*.

damning practices. He entered the Guruvayur temple and rang the bell.<sup>631</sup> Forceful entry into contested sites soon becomes a Pan-Kerala movement. The radical group gave leadership to these agitations. In an article written in *Mathrubhumi*, Krishna Pillai stated that he had entered the temple to challenge those customs which deny basic rights to the people. He also called upon the people to burn those holy books which deny justice to the lower orders of the society. He viewed temples as centres of superstition, corruption, meaningless rituals, cruelty and violence and called upon the people either to reform the temples or to boycott it.<sup>632</sup> The position taken by Krishna Pillai at Guruvayur and similar stand taken by Moyarath Sankaran, Vizhnu Bharateeyan and Keraleeyan in North Malabar and other lesser known political activists in different parts of Malabar was clearly a deviation from the strategy adopted by Gandhian nationalists all over India.

The radicals viewed the question of temple entry as of lesser importance compared to the anti-imperialist struggle. Krishna Pillai himself stated that he had stopped the picketing of the Guruvayur temple because it was unwise to spare his time and energy for such trivial demands as temple entry. On the other hand he wanted to launch the anti-imperialist struggle through mobilizing people cutting across caste and community affiliations<sup>633</sup>.

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<sup>631</sup> *Mathrubhumi* December 31, 1931.

<sup>632</sup> Krishna Pillai's Article in *Ibid.*

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, Similar views were expressed by CSP leaders like A.K.Pillai, A.K.Gopalan, N.C.Shekhar, K.P. Gopalan, K.Damodaran, Vishnu Bharateeyan, Keraleeyan, EMS Nambudiripad and a host of others.

The Congress Socialists adopted a critical attitude towards the efforts of the Gandhian nationalists to concentrate the attention of the people on the issue of temple entry. This provoked them to oppose the resolution demanding temple entry for the depressed classes. They argued that through focusing attention on issues like temple entry and cleanliness, the *savarna* nationalists are ignoring the cruel exploitation of the lower orders by the nexus of dominant class of *savarnas* and the imperialist forces<sup>634</sup>. The opposition of CSP workers towards passing temple entry resolutions forced *Mathrubhumi*, the mouthpiece of Gandhian nationalists, to write series of editorials criticizing their attitude.

### **New Strategies - Use of Popular Military**

The radicals among Congress men in Malabar found that the campaign to effect change of heart' of the *savarnas* produced no substantial result.<sup>635</sup> The alternative course of action they experimented in Malabar was the effective use of popular militancy. It is to be noted that inspite of the strict warning given by Kelappan against the use of force, people assaulted those orthodox casteists who had beaten A.K. Gopalan and P. Krishana Pillai in the course of the Guruvayur *Satyagraha*<sup>636</sup>. The *Sanatanist* effort to organize

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<sup>634</sup> *Mathrubhumi* April 7, June 10 and 20, October 23 and 24, 1936 May 26, 1937

<sup>635</sup> The radicals criticized the attitude of those *savarnas* who even in the satyagraha camp boast of their higher caste status and the rhetoric that they practice caste rules (including *theedal* and *thodeel*) in the *satyagraha* camp also. For details see K.P. Gopalan's article in *Atmavidya Kahalam*, May, 14, 1930.

<sup>636</sup> *Mathrubhumi* January 11 to 14, 1932

black flag demonstrations against Mahatma Gandhi and disrupt his meetings was also successfully resisted with force<sup>637</sup>. Such instances convinced the radicals of the effectiveness of popular militancy to check social injustices and reactionary offensives. It also forced the Congress Socialists to rely on the power of people than pleading for the change of heart. The opposition to the passing of temple entry resolutions should be analyzed against this background. To the Leftists the proper course of action was mobilizing the people against the many sided injustices perpetuated by the nexus of landowning *savarnas* and the British imperialism.

### **Demand for Executive and Legal Action**

Besides mobilizing the people, Leftists also campaigned for the strict enactment of laws to contain social disabilities like *theendal*. EMS Nambudiripad categorized the Malabar peasantry in to five sections. He says that about 43 percentage of the people of Malabar were agricultural labourers. They suffer from social disabilities like *theendal*. He had advocated for the strict enactment of laws to punish the practice of untouchability<sup>638</sup>. Unlike the Gandhian concept of 'change of heart' the emphasis here was on executive and legal action to redress the grievances of the polluting castes.

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<sup>637</sup> *Mathrubhumi* January 11 to 14, 1934; *FNR* for the first half of January 1934, TNA, Chennai

<sup>638</sup> "Malabarile Krishikkar", Article written by EMS Nambudiripad, *Mathrubhumi* June 2, 1935

The Leftist influence in the KPCC enabled them to chalk out radical programmes to fight social and religious injustices. In the KPCC meeting held on 30 September 1935 Krishna Pillai put forward the following programmes as part of the electoral campaign. It includes the ban on untouchability, equality of all communities before law, treating agrarian slavery an offence<sup>639</sup> etc.

The CSP was less critical towards the Nasik declaration of Ambedkar in which he boldly stated that he will not die as an untouchable. Ambedkar hinted about the change of religion to escape the stigma of untouchability. Similar resolutions were passed in the *Adidravida* conferences in Malabar also.<sup>640</sup> CSP leaders like A.K.Pillai argued that the Nasik declaration of Ambedkar had shaken the *savarna* mind more than the fasting of Mahatma Gandhi and the persuasive eloquence of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*.<sup>641</sup> This was a deviation from the stand taken by *savarna* nationalists who visited the houses of *Adidravidas* and advised them not to pay any attention to Dr. Ambedkar and should not abandon the Hindu religion<sup>642</sup>. The Congress Socialists argued that the present condition of the untouchables was deplorable and the change of religion was not more devastating. In other words they took a rather indifferent attitude to conversion or the threat of religion conversion.

<sup>639</sup> *Mathrubhumi* October 2, 1935.

<sup>640</sup> *Mathrubhumi* October 16, 1935, September 20, 1936.

<sup>641</sup> A.K.Pillai's letter to Mahatma Gandhi, *Mathrubhumi* October 25, 1935.

<sup>642</sup> *FNR* for the first half of November 1935.



The Congress Socialists adopted a critical attitude towards the activities of *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. The emphasis on vegetarianism, cleanliness and the campaign for the 'change of heart' of *savarnas* to achieve temple entry were viewed as trivial measures deviating the attention of the people from the anti-imperialist struggle<sup>643</sup>. It was also argued that through the above mentioned activities the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* was playing the role of Hindu Mission<sup>644</sup>. Attempt was also made by the Left to distance from the activities *Harijan Sevak Sangh* since the latter was viewed as an organization working in the direction of achieving Hindu solidarity.

The Leftists criticized the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* for its failure to address the economic grievances of the depressed classes. They argued that the fancy name '*Harijan*' was used by the *savarna* nationalists to hide the real economic and social grievances suffered by the depressed classes. Likewise the attempt on the part of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* to confine their ameliorative work among those depressed classes who adhere to the 'Hindu' social frame work was also criticized<sup>645</sup>.

The attempt on the part of communal organizations like Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League, *Tiya Samajam* etc to divide people on caste and communal lines was criticized by the Congress Socialists and Communists. E.M.S. Nambudiripad pointed out that the leadership of the caste and

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<sup>643</sup> *Mathrubhumi* April 7, June 10, 1936.

<sup>644</sup> A.K. Pilla's speech at CSP meeting, Tellichery, *Mathrubhumi* June 17, 1936.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*

community organizations are struggling to protect the interest of the upper sections of respective communities<sup>646</sup>. To counter this, the Socialists in the Congress took initiative in organizing the poor people belonging to all communities based on their specific class demands. EMS argued that the root cause of untouchability was the pathetic economic condition of the depressed classes<sup>647</sup>. It was also argued that mobilizing depressed communities around their specific class demands was the solution to eliminate untouchability and social injustice.

### **Class Organisations and the Search for Social Justice**

CSP formed the class organizations of peasants and workers throughout Malabar. The Kottayam Taluk Political Conference of the CSP called for total change in the social, political and economic conditions as essential for checking the suppression of the depressed communities. The conference invoked the depressed classes to launch a multifaceted struggle against the dominant communities and the British Government which support them<sup>648</sup>. Thus the struggle for socio-economic justice was linked with the anti-imperialist struggle.

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<sup>646</sup> E.M.S. Nambudiripad, "Keralathile Samudaya Sanghagal" in *Mathrubhoomi* July 25, 1936

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, Similar views were aired by K. Damodaran, Vishnubharateeyan, K.P. Gopalan, K.A. Keraleeyan and many others, For details see *Mathrubhumi* 1934-1940

<sup>648</sup> Resolution passed at the Kottayam Taluk Conference of the CSP, *Mathrubhumi* March 25, 1936

## **Karshaka Sangham Activities**

*Karshaka Sangham* organized under the leadership of CSP was an effective organization in the struggle against social injustice. The reform movement and the nationalist movement succeeded to a great extent in ensuring social justice to the people in the colonial urban centres of Malabar. Colonial modernity also helped to weaken the sites of social injustice in the towns. The usual epitaph from westernised educated nationalists was that the social scenario of rural Malabar was filled with all sorts of injustices including untouchability. *Karshaka Sangham* began its activities against this background. Its activities began at first in the villages of North Malabar<sup>649</sup>. From North Malabar its activities spread to the whole district and Kasargod taluk of South Canara District<sup>650</sup>. *Karshaka Sangham* meeting held at Parassinikkadavu on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1936 exhorted the peasantry to give up the dress, usages and customs denoting hierarchy and difference<sup>651</sup>. In Malabar mans difference towards those ranked higher than himself was demonstrated in explicit acknowledgements of his own inferiority. In any conversation he had to debase himself by stigmatizing whatever he had. Convention required him to refer to his own food not simply as rice but as "stony gritty rice", his

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<sup>649</sup> For details see V. M. Vishnu Bhateeyan, *Adimakalengane Udamakalaye*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, K.K.N. Kurup, ed., *Keraleeyante Leghanangal*, Mal., Kozhikode, 1997, A.K.Gopalan, *Ente Jeevithakadha*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1980.

<sup>650</sup> Aromalunni, *Agnipadhengalilude (Reminiscence of E.P. Gopalan)*, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1990

<sup>651</sup> Vishnu Bharateeyan, op cit, *Mathrubhumi* November 4, 1936.

money as nothing more than 'copper cash', his house as a 'dung heap', his rice gruel as '*karikkadi*' (It becomes '*Amruthetu*' when it was eaten by Thampuran or Lord). The *Karshaka Sangham* conference exhorted the peasantry to invert this kind of non-reciprocal power semantics in the deliberations. The directive to drop the customary titles and usages when addressed to the landlords and the peasants' use of the new language was nothing but open demonstration of their will to challenge the existing power relations in Malabar. The conference also directed the peasantry to launch organized struggles to achieve social justice<sup>652</sup>. Similar resolutions were passed by *Karshaka Sangham* conferences all over Malabar and Kasargod taluk of South Canara District<sup>653</sup>. The *Karshaka Sangham* meeting held at Valancherry (Malappuram) organized *jatha* against the brutal assault of a *Harijan* agricultural labourer by the *savarna* landlord<sup>654</sup>. Similarly more than 100 peasants organized a *jatha* against Karakkattidam Nayanar at Bakkalam and forced him to refund the penalty collected against alleged polluting of a *chira* (pond)<sup>655</sup>. Similar agitations were organised in different parts of Malabar. *Karshaka Sangham* through such campaigns built up counter hegemony in the villages of Malabar. Through its activities *Karshaka Sangham* instilled confidence and courage among weaker sections including the polluting and depressed classes.

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<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>653</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1936 to 1938.

<sup>654</sup> *Mathrubhumi* August 27, 1937, Aromalunni, *op cit.* pp116-118.

<sup>655</sup> *Mathrubhumi* December 19, 1937.

Large number of peasants attended the *jathas* organized by the *Karshaka Sangham* in various parts of Malabar. The participants in the *jathas* were given food and drink on the way by the people of different localities. Thus people belonging to different castes and religions took food and water together. These inter-caste dining of large sections of people under the banner of *Karshaka Sangham* played a significant role in demolishing the barricade of caste system, the practice of pollution and untouchability.

The year long campaign under the leadership of the *Karshaka Sangham* against the customs and usages which debased the lower orders of the society produced remarkable results. Most of the landlords of Malabar were upper caste Hindus. Their arrogant and contemptuous attitude to the lower orders of the society forced the *Karshaka Sangham* to deny the services of traditional ritual and functional groups to them. The *Karshakasangam* of Chirakkal taluk and Kasargod taluk subjected the *janmies* to social ostracism. The services of barbers and washermen were denied to them<sup>656</sup>. *Vannathimattu* (the purificatory dress given by the washermen community) was essential to relieve the people from *pula* (impurity) associated with birth, death etc. Traditionally the *janmies* and the *Karanavar* of respective communities used these weapons against peasants to ensure their docility<sup>657</sup>.

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<sup>656</sup> *FNR* for the first half of December 1938, TNA, Chennai, *Mathrubhumi*, January 12 and 15, 1939. *Prabhatam* January 16, 1939.

<sup>657</sup> For details see Chapter IV.

Now the same weapon was used by the peasantry. This reversal of power relations was achieved through the class organization of peasantry.

*Karshaka Sangham* also fought for the cause of landless labourers. Fixity of tenure to the homesteads of the agricultural workers was the vital demand put forward by the *Karshaka Sangham*. Chirakkal taluk conference of the peasantry demanded the enactment of a *Karshaka Thozhilali Raksha Bill* for protecting the interest of landless labourers<sup>658</sup>. In Malabar majority of agricultural labourers were the depressed classes. The Leftists also formed an *Adima Thozhilali Sanghatana* (organisation of slave labourers) and began conscious efforts to redress their grievances.<sup>659</sup> Through raising their vital social and economic demands the Congress Socialists succeeded in mobilizing them. Fixity of tenure for homesteads was the most important demand put forward by the depressed classes of Malabar. The attempt on the part of the leftist organization to identify themselves with the demands of the depressed classes benefited both. The depressed classes joined the rank of the Leftist organizations in large numbers. Hitherto they remained as silent spectators to the activities of those who spoke for them. Now they made their entry into the public space through the class organizations. This broadened the mass base of the Leftist organizations.

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<sup>658</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 10, 1938.

<sup>659</sup> *Prabhatam*, November 14, 1938

The class wise mobilization of peasantry, agricultural workers including depressed classes and other weaker sections had its impact on the socio-political landscape of Malabar. The hitherto dumb millions-the depressed classes (including their women) - began to take an active role in the political activities like processions and agitations. *Deshabhimani*, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, published series of reports on the involvement of *Harijan* women in the struggle against landlordism, imperialism and social injustice.<sup>660</sup> The members from the depressed classes also became martyrs for the larger cause of the peasantry and agricultural workers<sup>661</sup>.

### **Labour and the Struggle for Social Justice**

The workers of Malabar were also organized under the leadership of the Congress Socialist Party. From 1935 onwards militant trade unions were formed in and around Kozhikode. The tile factory workers and spinning mill workers were the first sections to be organized. Later the soap workers union, the press workers union, the cart load workers union, the beedi workers union, and the umbrella workers union were formed<sup>662</sup>. The formation of trade unions caused great uneasiness to the authority. This is clear from the report send by the District Collector to the higher authorities. It says: "Socialists in

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<sup>660</sup> *Deshabhimani*, May 16 and August 1, 1943.

<sup>661</sup> A.K. Gopalan noticed that in the M S P firing against peasant *jatha* in chirakkal, an *Adidravida* named Pokkan was killed. He was the first martyr in Payyannur Farka in the year 1948. See A.K.Gopalan, Note No. 26, pp 318-19.

<sup>662</sup> P. Narayanan Nair, *Aranooottantilude*, Kottayam, 1973 p.168.

Malabar have been very active in organizing unions among all sorts and conditions of workers- barbers, boatmen, motor employees and municipal scavengers, as well as industrial workers. The scavengers in Tellicherry Municipality have presented certain demands to the commissioner and have threatened to strike if their demands are not complied with. In this and in other recent cases, the demands of the workers appear to have been framed by professional agitators..."<sup>663</sup>. Trade union activity in Malabar intensified with the formation of All Kerala Workers Union in May 1935. P. Krishna Pillai was elected as its secretary<sup>664</sup>.

The workers organized strikes for the betterment of their economic conditions. They also raised political and social issues along with their 'economic demands'. They organized a hartal against the new constitution on 1 April 1937 along with other radical sections<sup>665</sup>. Similarly 'May Day'; 'Andaman Day', 'Anti-Repression Day' and other important political struggles were organized with the active involvement of the working class.

Besides economic and political demands, social issues also received their attention. While organizing the workers, the Congress Socialist leaders like A.K.Gopalan realized that workers belong to the lower strata of the caste

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<sup>663</sup> *FNR* for the first half of September 1937.

<sup>664</sup> Andalat, ed., *Sakhakkale Munnottu*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1978 pp 30-33.

<sup>665</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 26 and 26 March 1937.



hierarchy. They suffer not only the economic oppression but also social oppression due to their lower caste status<sup>666</sup>.

The labour in the factories was drawn from different castes and communities. They mingled with each other and shared their fortunes and misfortunes with one another. This type of identification with the feelings and sorrows of the fellow being contributed to the growth of collective consciousness among the working class. It enabled the labour organizations to adopt critical attitude towards social evils including untouchability. The stand taken by the members of Chovva *Tozhilali Yavajana Vayanasala*, Kannur is worth mentioning in this context. The caste panchayat of Kizhutali near Kannur decided to expel a *Tiya* who had married a *Harijan* woman. The working class and youth of Chovva protested against the decision of the *Tiya* caste panchayat and expressed their deep concern over the involvement of village Congress president in the *Jati* panchayat which took such an unworthy decision<sup>667</sup>.

### **Youth Organisations and Social Issues**

The youth organizations of Malabar also campaigned for social equality and justice. *Abhinava Bharata Yuvajana Sangham* started at Karivellur in 1935 under the initiative of A. V. Kunhambu was the most active youth organization in North Malabar. By 1938 the *Yuvajana Sangham*

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<sup>666</sup> A.K. Gopalan, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>667</sup> *Mathrubhumi* September 6, 1940.

had branches in 8 villages in Chirakkal<sup>668</sup>. The *Yuvajana Sangham* members did constructive works like repairing roads, cleaning wells and canals and also cleaning the houses of the poor. The depressed classes joined their rank and shared refreshments along with people belonging to other castes<sup>669</sup>. *Yuvajana Sangham* correctly assessed the changing attitude of the people towards social evils like pollution and untouchability. The *Yuvajana Sangham* conference held at Kodakkad on January 14 and 15, 1939 arranged interdining of thousands of people<sup>670</sup>. Even women belonging to *savarna* communities, took food along with women of lower caste<sup>671</sup>.

The *pattini jatha's* organized by CSP leaders like A.K. Gopalan and Sardar Chandroth Kunhiraman *Nair* also played an important role in the march towards social justice. People belonging to depressed communities participated in the jathas.<sup>672</sup> The *Adidravida* conferences held at places like Calicut and Kannur extended their support to the hunger marches organised by Leftists.<sup>673</sup> This signalled the beginning of a new era in the social history of Malabar. The *Adidravidas* of Malabar began identifying themselves with the class organisations which addressed not only political and economic issues but also the problems of marginality.

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<sup>668</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1938.

<sup>669</sup> *Mathrubhumi* November 20, 1937.

<sup>670</sup> C. Krishnan Nair, "*Kasargod jillayile rashtreeyamunnetam-30 kalil*" in *AKG Smaranika*, C P M Kasargod District Committee.

<sup>671</sup> Anil Kumar A.V. "Yuvak Sanghavum Streekalum", in *Kodakkade, 1939-2004, Kodakkadu Sammelana 65- am Varsheeka Souvenir*, Kodakkade, 2004.

<sup>672</sup> *Mathrubhumi* July 9, 1936.

<sup>673</sup> *Mathrubhumi* July 9, 1936, August 18, 1936.

## **The Aided School Teacher Union and the Struggle for Social Equality**

The aided primary school teachers organized by the Congress Socialist Party were another section which campaigned for social justice. Most of the primary schools in Malabar were run by private individuals as business concerns with the motive of making profit. Though there were efforts at unionization among the teachers during the Civil Disobedience Movement, the teachers movement gained ground only after the formation of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party and along with the movements of the workers and the peasants<sup>674</sup>. Regular union activities began in 1934 with the establishment of the teachers union at Kalliasseri in 1934. This was followed by the teachers meeting in Karivellur. Units of the teachers union were formed in Kottayam, Kurumbranad and Valluvanad taluks. It was decided to form a teachers association for the whole of Malabar and a conference was convened at Talassery in February 1935<sup>675</sup>. By December, unionization had developed well and a conference of Malabar Aided School Teachers Union was convened at Kozhikode<sup>676</sup>. By the time the Second Annual Conference of the Union was convened in 1936, it had units in all the taluk except Wayanad<sup>677</sup>.

The Aided School Teachers Union raised their specific demands like raising their pay on par with that of the local board teachers, fixity of tenure to

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<sup>674</sup> K. Gopalan Kutty. *op. cit.*, p. 561.

<sup>675</sup> P.K. Nambiar, ed., *Keralthile Adhyapaka Prasthanam*, Thiruvananthapuram 1982 p.86.

<sup>676</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 12 December, 1935.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1936.

all those who had completed one year training and 25% representation for teachers in the District Education Council, the introduction of a service register, the sanction of the District Education Council and the Government for all disciplinary action, the extension of provident fund and leave benefits to aided school teachers and the abolition of the system of private management etc. The union also extended support to the struggles of other sections of the society like workers and the peasants<sup>678</sup>. Many of the teachers served as office bearers of the village Congress committees and Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee.<sup>679</sup> Most of them were attracted to socialism and acted as initiators and organizers of the peasant movement<sup>680</sup>.

The aided school teachers of Malabar also cooperated with the progressive sections in questioning the rationale of obsolete customs and practices. The missionary reports of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century itself testified the role of teachers in bringing depressed classes to the schools<sup>681</sup>. This tradition of social work among the depressed classes continued during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The teachers meetings held at places like Badagara and Payyoli even decided not to admit those students who left the

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<sup>678</sup> Vallathol Kumara Menon, *Adhyapaka Prasthanam Uttara Keralathil* Thiruvananthapuram, 1976 p.33.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 30-31.

<sup>680</sup> Various articles in *Adhyapakalokam*, Special edition, Thiruvananthapuram, 1982.

<sup>681</sup> *BGEM Report*, 1896

school on account of the admission of depressed class children, to any other school<sup>682</sup>.

The teaching community of Malabar suffered a lot for extending their sympathies to the depressed classes. In many places they were denied food and shelter by the orthodox sections. The orthodox Hindus even denied the services of washer women (*Vannathimattu*) to those teachers who extended a helping hand to the depressed classes<sup>683</sup>. The unionization among the teachers enabled them to overcome such threats. It also enabled them to extend their work among all sections of people irrespective of caste and community.

### **Malabar Temple Entry Act, 1938 - Different Perceptions**

The congress ministry under C. Rajagopalachari was formed on 14 July, 1937 in which K. Raman Menon from Malabar was included. The ministry implemented ameliorative measures for the depressed classes like provision for educational facilities, maintenance of hostels and boarding homes, construction of wells, pathways, burial grounds etc for depressed classes<sup>684</sup>. The depressed class leader E. Kannan joined hands with M.C. Rajah in the Madras Legislative Council and urged the government to enact laws for admitting the polluting and depressed classes to the temples and thus to work for the eradication of untouchability<sup>685</sup>.

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<sup>682</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 3 and 6 December, 1927.

<sup>683</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, February 19, 1935.

<sup>684</sup> *MLC Debates* Vol. 3 No. 5 March 1938 p. 297.

<sup>685</sup> Madras Legislative Assembly, hereafter *MLA Debates* Vol. III, pp 800-801.

The people of Malabar - who had the glorious saga of struggle for securing the admission of depressed classes to temples - became impatient over the lukewarm attitude of the Congress ministry on the issue of temple entry. They also revived the temple entry campaign. By this time the CSP got upper hand in Malabar politics through their classwise mobilisation of the people. To strengthen their political and social hegemony, the Congress Socialists made conscious effort to synthesize the anti-caste ideology of the reform movements with the anti-imperialist struggle. When Congress got power in the Madras presidency they began systematic effort to build popular pressure to compel the Congress ministry to enact laws for redressing the social and religious grievances of the people.

The pressure from below forced the nationalists to convene a Temple Entry Conference at Guruvayur on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1937. The conference passed resolution threatening the resumption of *Satyagraha* if adequate action was not taken by the Government within six months<sup>686</sup>. K. Kelappan, the President of the Malabar District Board was authorized to take necessary action in this regard. Meanwhile M.C. Rajah, the leader of the depressed classes in the Madras Assembly introduced two bills viz 1) Removal of Civil Disabilities Bill designed to remove all civil disabilities of *Harijans* and 2) Opening of all temples in the Madras presidency to *Harijans*. Government approved the first bill and opposed the second. Government opposed it as

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<sup>686</sup> *FNR* for the first half of November 1937.

they had decided themselves to introduce a bill on this subject at the November session of the legislature.<sup>687</sup> The assurance of the Congress ministry forced the depressed class members to support the Government and vote against the bill. Out of the 30 *Harijan* members in the house 27 including E. Kannan from Malabar opposed Mr. Rajah's bill and hence it was defeated. At the same time pressure intensified in Malabar. Meetings convened in various parts of Malabar by different organizations criticized the lukewarm attitude of the Congress ministry<sup>688</sup>. It was pointed out that the delay in opening temples to the excluded communities created discontent among the people of Malabar. The crux of the demand was ensuring equal rights to all Hindus including depressed classes in all the Hindu temples<sup>689</sup>. E. Kannan, the *Adidravida* member from Malabar declared that he would resign from legislature and resort to *Satyagraha* inside Fort St. George if the Government fail to enact laws for the opening of temples to all sections of the Hindu community<sup>690</sup>.

The pressure from Malabar and the success of the Temple Entry Proclamation of Travancore forced Prime Minister Rajagopalachari to announce his decision to introduce a bill to remove the disabilities of certain

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<sup>687</sup> *FNR* for the second half of August 1938.

<sup>688</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi* May 13, 18, 21, June 11, 14 and 15, 1938 .

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>690</sup> *Mathrubhumi* April 27, 1938; *Prabhatam*, August 22, 1938.

classes of Hindus in regard to entry in the temples of Malabar<sup>691</sup>. The draft bill was published in the Gazette which had the following provisions;

1. This Act may be called the Malabar Temple Entry Act, 1938.
2. It extends to the whole of the District of Malabar
3. The decision of opening a temple to excluded castes should be based on the referendum of Hindu voters (other than those belonging to excluded castes)
4. Voters means those Hindu voters (other than the excluded castes) on the electoral roll of the district board as well as those of the municipality or the municipalities relating to the revenue taluk in which the temple situate.
5. A requisition in writing signed by not less than fifty voters requesting the trustees to throw open the temple to excluded castes should be published.
6. The trustees of a temple should also publish a notice to the effect that they propose to make an order throwing the temple open to persons belonging to excluded castes.
7. Objections to such a proposal should be intimated to the trustees within one month signed by at least fifty voters.
8. If written objection against opening of temple to excluded castes came, then the matter shall be referred to the opinion of voters.

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<sup>691</sup> *Fort St. George Gazette*, No. 14 dated August 30, 1938 pp 155-161.



9. Temple means a place, which is used as a place public worship by the Hindu community except the excluded castes and have an annual income of not less than Rs. 5000<sup>692</sup>.

The proposed Malabar Temple Entry Bill, 1938 created mixed reaction among the people of Malabar. Each and every section of the Hindu community and the secular organizations responded to it on the basis of the theoretical and ideological positions upheld by them in the course of time. Organizations and institutions like Provincial Congress Committee and Taluk Congress Committees, Congress Socialist Party, Malabar *SNDP Yogam*, *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, *Sanatanists*, Municipal Councils, Malabar District Board and the like put forward arguments in favour of the bill, against the enactment of such a bill and amendments to it<sup>693</sup>.

The *Sanatanists* demanded the withdrawal of the bill. They opposed it on the following grounds.

- i. Temples are the private property of the *Janmies* and the upper caste people. Any attempt to open the temple to polluting castes is an infringement on the right of acquiring and maintaining private property.

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<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>693</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi* August 31, 1938 to December 15, 1938.

- ii. The rules regarding admission to temples has been laid down by the ancient *rhishis* through the *smrithis*, *sruthis* and *sastras*
- iii. The admission of *avarnas* in the temples would destroy its sanctity.
- iv. The opening of temples to excluded castes would result in the exclusion of orthodox *savarnas* from rituals and ceremonies associated with it.
- v. The opening of temples to polluting castes would create schism and conflict within the Hindu community<sup>694</sup>.

The *Sanatanists* convened large number of meetings and passed resolutions opposing the bill<sup>695</sup>. They also submitted a petition with the signature of more than 25000 *savarnas* demanding the withdrawal of the bill<sup>696</sup>.

The *savarna* nationalists and their organization the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* had mixed response to the bill. Since they believed in the 'change of heart' of the *savarnas*, they supported the referendum. At the same time it was pointed out that only 14 percentage of the *savarnas* alone have voting right in the district board elections. The chief defect pointed out by the *savarna* nationalists was the restriction of voting right to a small section of

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<sup>694</sup> *Mathrubhumi* November 5 and 19, 1938; February 28, 1939.

<sup>695</sup> *FNR* for the first half of August 1939, TNA, Chennai.

<sup>696</sup> *MLA debates*, vol III 28/11/38 to 12-12-38 p.463.

the caste Hindus. So their demand was the extension of voting right to all adult members of the *savarna* community<sup>697</sup>. Other amendments proposed by the *savarna* nationalists were incorporation of Kasargod taluk and Gudallore under the preview of the bill; inclusion of all temples with an annual income of Rs. 1000 under the jurisdiction of the bill and opening of temple to excluded castes mandatory if the result of the referendum favour it<sup>698</sup>. The *savarna* nationalists organized *jatha* from Taliparamba in the north to Guruvayur in South Malabar to canvas support of caste Hindus to the Malabar Temple Entry Bill, 1938.<sup>699</sup>

The *Tiya* leaders who co operated with the nationalist movement viewed the bill as totally disappointing and unsatisfactory. They put forward amendments like extension of voting right to all Hindus irrespective of their caste status, removal of the income ceiling to bring all temples under the purview of referendum, incorporation of the *avarna* shrines also under the bill, opening of temple mandatory if the referendum favours etc<sup>700</sup>.

Regarding the attitude of the depressed classes to the Malabar Temple Entry Bill- 1938, not much data is available. This may be due to the following reasons. Firstly, the depressed classes were more concerned with getting admission to schools, path ways, markets and other public places.

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<sup>697</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 1, 1938 and October 18, 1938.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>699</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 30, 1938.

<sup>700</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 30, 1938.

Temple entry was not a priority issue in the life world of the depressed communities. They considered the opening of public places and redressing the economic grievances as more important than conversion to the *savarna* mode of worship. Another important aspect is that in the Gandhian discourse on untouchability it was the *savarnas* who spoke for them. The class wise mobilization of the workers, peasants and agricultural labourers under the Congress Socialists in Malabar absorbed the depressed classes to its fold. This may be another reason for the non availability of depressed class response on the issue.

The Kerala Provincial Congress Working Committee met on November 21, 1938 congratulated the Rajaji ministry for its intention to pilot the Malabar Temple Entry Bill-1938. It also exhorted the Congress workers to be vigilant on the *Sanatanist* propaganda and called upon the entire people to organize wide campaign against the sinister move of the reactionaries. Another significant move on the part of the K.P.C.C. was its rejection of the referendum clause in the bill. A resolution for the withdrawal of the referendum clause was passed with twenty three members supporting it and six members opposing<sup>701</sup>.

The Kerala Congress Socialist Party also congratulated the Madras Ministry for its decision to introduce the Malabar Temple Entry Bill-1938. It requested the Congress ministry to incorporate the suggestions put forward by

<sup>701</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 22, 1938.

enlightened sections of Malabar society especially the objection to the referendum clause. It warned the Congressmen of Malabar that if the reactionaries succeed in rallying people against the bill; it would ultimately result in sabotaging the progressive legislations of the Congress ministry. The Socialists also made fervent appeal to all progressive forces, who have strong objections to some of the provisions of the bill; to organize propaganda against the forces of reaction and their natural ally, imperialism<sup>702</sup>.

The Malabar Temple Entry Act, 1938 was presented in the Madras Assembly on December 1, 1938. It was referred to the select committee with the support of 106 members. Only two members opposed it<sup>703</sup>. The bill was passed by the Madras Legislative Assembly on December 8 and the Legislative Council passed it on December 13, 1938. It received the assent of the Governor on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1939<sup>704</sup>.

Nationalists of Malabar organized campaign for the implementation of the provisions of the Malabar Temple Entry Act. They organized series of *jathas* to ensure the support of the *savarnas* in the referendum to open the temples<sup>705</sup>. The Congress Socialists on the other hand relied on their class organizations like *Karshaka Sangham* to muster support for the referendum in favour of opening temples to excluded castes<sup>706</sup>. Unlike the *Harijan Sevak*

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<sup>702</sup> P. Krishna Pillai's article in *Mathrubhumi*, November 23, 1938.

<sup>703</sup> *MLA Debates*, vol VIII 28. 11. 38 E 12. 12. 38.

<sup>704</sup> G.O. No. 42, Law Department, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1939, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>705</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, March 10, and May 4, 1939.

<sup>706</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, March 28 and 30, 1939.

*Sangh* which emphasized the religious significance of the act, the Socialists highlighted its social significance<sup>707</sup>.

The campaign for and against the opening of temples to excluded castes continued for several months. The provision of referendum proved to be the greatest advantage to the reactionaries. As noted earlier the voting right was restricted to a small segment of the *savarna* population. This enabled the *Sanatanists* to influence their constituency easily. The result of the campaign for the 'change of heart' of the *savarnas* was not encouraging. The disappointment of those who believed in 'rousing the conscience of the *Savarnas*' was articulated by V.R. Nayanar, the president of the Malabar *Harijan Sevak Sangh* in the following words. "It is shameful to the entire Malayalees that not a single temple was opened in Malabar even after eight years of Temple entry campaign where as many temples were opened in Tamilnadu with out much agitation as it took place in Malabar".<sup>708</sup>

In spite of the hectic campaign organized by *Harijan Sevak Sangh* towards rousing the conscience of the *Savarnas*, the Malabar Temple Entry Act-1938 strengthened only the forces of reaction. The *Sanatanist* propaganda gained ground for the time being. The press, which published series of reports on the earnest effort of *savarnas* to open temples to excluded castes in the days of Guruvayur *Satyagraha* and Poona pact, kept assiduous

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<sup>707</sup> P. Narayanan Nair in *Mathrubhumi*, March 28, 1939.

<sup>708</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, August 19, 1939.

silence on temple entry through referendum. Only one case was reported from Malabar in which the *savarnas* submitted memorandum with the signature of fifty voters demanding the trustees to open temples to excluded castes<sup>709</sup>. Another attempt was reported in which forty eight *savarnas* including K.T. Chathu Nambiar of the Koodali family made a request to open the Tiruvangad Sri Ramaswamy Temple to all Hindus<sup>710</sup>. At the same time request on the part of the *uralar* of Azhikode Siva temple to open it to all Hindus was turned down by the Government as the trustees failed to fulfil the provisions of the Act<sup>711</sup>. The hollowness of persuasion can be gauged from the statement tabled by Madras Government in the floor of the Legislative Assembly which says that 'so far twelve temples have been thrown open to *Harijan* worshippers; but none in Malabar'.<sup>712</sup> The *Sanatanists* went beyond the shutting down of temples to excluded castes. They intensified their atrocities on depressed classes<sup>713</sup>. The police flouted law and denied justice to the underlings in the society<sup>714</sup>. The outburst of violence against the *Harijans* forced V.R. Nayanar, president of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*, to lament that the now a days the assault on *Harijans* increased in Malabar<sup>715</sup>. The *Sangh* also realized that the *Harijans* were not in a position to approach courts mainly because of their

<sup>709</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, August 3, 1939.

<sup>710</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, October 9, 1945.

<sup>711</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, October 24, 1939 and May 1, 1941.

<sup>712</sup> *MLA debates* Vol. II, 22/7/ 1946 to 11.9.46 p. 507.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*, 1939-1941.

<sup>714</sup> G.O.No. 1805, confidential, public general, Misc., dated 25.10.1939, KRA Kozhikode.

<sup>715</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, August 3, 1940, February 23 1946.

poverty and also due to their failure to produce the witness to the court. To overcome this *Sangh* decided to form vigilance committees in all important localities<sup>716</sup>. In spite of such earnest efforts, unabated violence against depressed classes continued in Malabar. The depressed classes who fell victim to repeated torture and humiliation slipped away from the benevolent gestures of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and rallied behind the class organizations promoted by the Communists.

The *Tiyas* and other polluting castes of Malabar realized that their struggle for social justice and equality achieved little progress with the enactment of the Malabar Temple Entry Act-1938. So they began chalking out new strategies to achieve social and religious equality with the dominant sections in the society. The agitations organized by the workers and peasants of Malabar under their class organisations against the use of debased languages and customs instilled courage and confidence in their mind. Large scale involvement of the people belonging to different castes and communities in the public protests and meetings; the mass *mishrabhojanams* organized in the course of these agitations etc. pushed the struggle for social justice to new heights. The struggle for social and religious equality achieved precision and coherence with the transformation of the Kerala Congress Socialist party to the Kerala unit of the Community Party of India in

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<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*



December 1939. The Communists gave all encouragement and help to the lower orders of the society in their struggle for socio-religious equality.

### **New Dimensions**

The Communist strategy of mobilizing the peasants and workers against the customs, traditions and the language denoting hierarchy and difference attracted the lower caste organizations to their hold. This is clear from the resolutions passed by the Malabar S N D P *yogam* which requested the lower castes to rally behind those political organizations striving for socio-economic equality<sup>717</sup>. The *Yogam* realized that the provisions of the Malabar Temple Entry Act 1938 - especially the referendum clause-put obstacle in the path of unconditional admission of all Hindus to the temples. Malabar SNDP *Yogam* demanded the Madras Government to enact laws to treat the practice of untouchability a punishable offence.<sup>718</sup> It convened an All Party Temple Entry Conference in November 1946. The conference decided to launch *Satyagraha* and other forms of struggle from 1 January, 1947 if the government fail to enact laws for the unconditional admission of polluting castes to temples<sup>719</sup>. An action committee was also formed to implement the decision. The Temple Entry Action Committee selected Guruvayur temple, Tiruvangad temple in Kottayam taluk, Tirkkangod temple in Valluvanad, Kottakkkal temple in Eranad and Kalpathy temple in Palghat as the centres

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<sup>717</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 2, 1946.

<sup>718</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, July 25, 1946.

<sup>719</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 3, 1946.

for launching *satyagraha*. It was also decided to organize a rally and public meeting at Guruvayur on 1 January, 1947<sup>720</sup>. Communist leaders like K.P. Gopalan and C.H. Kanaran guided the activities of the malabar S N D P yogam during this period.

The polluting castes of Malabar with the support of the Communists devised new strategies to push the struggle for socio-religious equality to the *Sreekovil* of the temples. Forceful entry in to temples and tanks became the new technique of agitation. The *Ezhavas* of Palghat, who had the glorious tradition of struggle for the freedom to use public roads in *Kalpathy* in the 1920's; took the lead in this struggle<sup>721</sup>. Alathur R. Krishnan recorded that he gave leadership to the people to enter more than 75 temples in the Palghat region<sup>722</sup>. Forceful entry to temples soon spread to Calicut, Quilandy, Badagara, Meppayur, Thalassery and other places of Malabar<sup>723</sup>. Most of the temple entry agitations were organized by the *Karshaka Sangham* with the support of the working class<sup>724</sup>. Women also participated in the agitations<sup>725</sup>.

Large scale involvement of the people in the temple entry agitations organized by the Communists forced the Congress ministry in Madras to

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<sup>720</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 25, 1946; January 2; 1946.

<sup>721</sup> For details See *Mathrubhumi*, 1939-1947.

<sup>722</sup> Alathur R. Krishnan, *Veezhumalayude Thazhvarayilninnu*, Autobiography-Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1993 pp 31-38.

<sup>723</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi* 1946-1947 *Vikasana rekhakal*, vol 125-132 C. H. M. Koya Library, Calicut University.

<sup>724</sup> *Vikasana Rekha*, Meppayur, Grama Panchayat p-14; Alathur R-Krishnan, *op cit.* p. 38.

<sup>725</sup> *Vikasana Rekha*, Arikkulam Grama Panchayat, p.9.

introduce the Madras Temple Entry Bill. It was passed by the Assembly on 1 April, 1947. The bill got the assent of the Governor on 15 May and was implemented from 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1947. The Madras Temple Entry Act guaranteed equal rights to all Hindus (including the hither to excluded communities) in all the temples. Government also published an extra ordinary Gazette which stated that any obstruction of *Harijans* while entering the temples will be treated as punishable offence<sup>726</sup>. At the same time Government permitted the temple authorities to frame rules regarding the rites and rituals in the temples<sup>727</sup>.

The sustained struggle of the people of Malabar for temple entry yielded the result by 2 June, 1947<sup>728</sup>. On that day dozens of temples were opened to the untouchable communities. At the same time in many places the adamant caste Hindus shut down the doors of the temples and retreated to their abodes<sup>729</sup>. In most of the temples notice boards' displaying the procedures of temples rites was put up. The notice emphasized that only the *Brahmins* have the right of offering prayer with bell ringing and the privilege of receiving '*prasadam*' by hand<sup>730</sup>.

The custodians of those temples which were not opened to the polluting castes went to the court and pleaded for maintaining their shrine as

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<sup>726</sup> *Mathrubhumi* May 31, 1947.

<sup>727</sup> *Mathrubhumi* February I, 1947.

<sup>728</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June 3 to August 13, 1947.

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>730</sup> *Mathrubhumi* June 5, 1947.

private property. Large number of such appeals were rejected by the court.<sup>731</sup>  
But in some cases the verdict went in favour of the petitioners<sup>732</sup>.

The response of the *avarna* communities to the temple entry celebrations was lukewarm<sup>733</sup>. Majority of them abstained from the processions and other celebrations. They viewed the struggle for temple entry as a struggle for securing their social rights rather than the practice of religious rites.

The diehard *Sanatanists* also boycotted those temples which were opened to the polluting and depressed classes. They even organized the *varam* feast in their residences (manakal)<sup>734</sup>. The lack of interest on the part of the *avarnas* in the temple rites and the withdrawal of the *savarnas* from the temple premises for the time being benefited those socio-political institutions which enriched the secular and democratic traditions of modern Kerala.

From the above analysis it is clear that the attitude of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party and the later Communist Party to the issues of caste system, untouchability and other social injustices differed from that of the

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<sup>731</sup> G O No. 598, misc., dated 11/9/48; G O No.869, misc., dated 11/12/48.  
G O No. 504, misc., dated 6.08.48; G O No.657, misc., dated 5/10/48.  
G O No.917, misc., dated 29.12.48; G O No.895, misc., dated 20.12.48.  
G O No.369, misc., dated 21/6/48; G O No.358, misc., dated 17/6/48.  
G O No.77, misc., dated 13/12/47; G O No.621, misc., dated 20/9/48.  
G O No.401, misc., dated 29/6/48; G O No.220, misc., dated 14/4/48.  
G O No.47, misc., 28/11/47.

<sup>732</sup> G O No.172, misc., dated 24.4.48; G O No.42, misc., dated 28.11.47.  
G O No.376, misc., dated 23.06.48; G O No.479, misc., dated 2.7.48.

<sup>733</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, June 3, 1947.

<sup>734</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 2 June 1947 to 15 August 1947.

Gandhian nationalists and the elites from the *avarana* communities. The K.C.S.P. and the Communist Party believed in the class wise mobilization of the people - the working class, peasantry and other weaker sections of the society through their class demands. At the same time they put heavy emphasis on 'economic demands' than socio-political and cultural issues.

The Leftists cooperated with the Gandhian nationalists in all the socio-political agitations. They viewed such agitations as a forum to mobilize the people to action. At the same time they were critical towards the attitude of rightwing Congress who put more emphasis on achieving religious consolidation than social equality. The Left also adopted a critical attitude towards the programmes and policies adopted by Gandhians in tackling issues like caste oppression, untouchability etc. The policy of persuasion to 'rouse the conscience of the caste Hindus' to achieve the 'change of the heart' was unappealing to the Leftists. On the other hand they pushed the socio-cultural struggles along with political agitations to new heights crossing the boundary of persuasion and non-violence preached by Gandhiji. Unlike the Gandhians, the Leftists also made use of popular militancy, wherever necessary, to promote the idea of social justice.

The Left also differed from the *avarana* elites on the ways and means of securing social justice. They lauded the critical attitude taken by the *avarana* elites towards caste system, untouchability and the like. At the same time they

criticised the pro-British attitude taken by those who worked in the caste organizations. This double edged policy yielded positive results. The *Tiya* elites and their organization, the Malabar SNDP *yogam* in course of time co-operated with the Left forces in their struggle against imperialism and also in the struggle for social equality and justice.

The Leftists also found that both the *avarana* elites and the right wing nationalists have no clear economic programme to relieve the miseries of the downtrodden sections including peasantry, working class and the depressed classes. So the strategy of the Left was to synthesize the anti-imperialist political stand of the nationalist movement with the radical anti-caste ideology of the *avarana* elites. To this amalgamation the Left infused the economic demands of the oppressed sections and built up the class organization of peasants and workers.

The temple entry agitations under the guidance of the Communist class organizations produced lasting impact on the political, social and cultural life of Kerala. Politically, it forced the Congress ministry in Madras to enact the Madras Temple Entry Act without the provision of referendum. It is to be noted that the provision of referendum, with limited voting right incorporated in the Malabar Temple Entry Act 1938, enabled the *Sanatanists* to sabotage it. This made the radical sections to realize that no temple will be opened through the provision of referendum. They mobilised people belonging to all

castes and communities and began entering the *savarna* temples forcefully. The Congressmen realized that their hold on the people was shrinking day by day. Such a change in the political scenario forced the Madras Government to enact the bill.

Socially, the Temple Entry agitations filled the people with courage and confidence. In the traditional society *avarnas* and depressed classes distanced themselves from the temples not only because of *savarna* oppression but also due to the fear that polluting the *savarnas* and their temples would invite the wrath of God. The ideological apparatus of the *Brahmin* hierarchy also cultivated the belief that the *savarnas* and their Gods polluted by untouchables would cause havoc to them.<sup>735</sup> This myth was exploded by P. Krishna Pillai in the course of the Guruvayur *Satyagraha*.<sup>736</sup> Enlightened people of Malabar who synthesized the anti-caste ideology of social reformers with the spirit of nationalism, followed his footsteps. The class organizations of peasants and workers which imbibed the ideology of socialism, nationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-landlordism and anti-casteism, popularized the doctrine of social equality. The agitations organised under the banner of class organisations enabled the people, especially the polluting and depressed classes; to question not only the exploitative mechanism of imperialism and the landlordism but also the sub human treatment which they

<sup>735</sup> Various issues of *Mathrubhumi* published reports of this fear complex. For details see *Mathrubhumi*, 1923-47. Also see P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathompatham Noottantile Keralam*, Trichur, 1988.

<sup>736</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 31, 1931.

suffered at the hands of the higher castes. The classwise mobilisation inculcated among the people the feeling of security and self confidence. This feeling enabled the bottom level people to stand on their legs and assert their demand for socio-religious equality.

Culturally, the assertion of equality with dominant sections contributed to the development of new literary and artistic traditions. It also enabled the underlings in the society to enjoy the art forms and literary and cultural traditions of the privileged sections.

In the Leftist discourse the struggle for throwing open the temples to untouchable communities was something more than redressing the religious grievances of the oppressed sections. They gave importance to the social aspect of the temple entry than its religious aspects. Progressive sections among the Kerala society irrespective of religious affiliations emphasized the importance of social transformation and co-operated with the movement against the practice of untouchability. The leadership given by George Joseph and Muhammed Abdul Rahiman in the Vaikom Satyagrahya and the financial and moral assistance given by people belonging to all castes, communities and religions to the struggles for achieving social equality confirm this. Though the Gandhian nationalists tried to confine the struggle for entry in to the temples and other contested sites as strictly a religious issue, the people of Kerala went beyond the boundary set by them and viewed



such issues as questions of marginality affecting the entire society. The Leftist perception of social justice associated with removing the restrictions imposed on large sections of people was in tune with the renaissance tradition of modern Kerala. They cleverly utilized the renaissance tradition to the struggle for social justice and worked in the direction of the secularization of Kerala Society.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POLLUTING CASTES AND THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the traditional Malabar society large majority of people, who are now designated as Hindus, were polluting castes. This has been attested by colonial administrative reports, foreign travel accounts and indigenous sources. The dividing line between the two sections of caste and non caste people-the polluted and the polluting-was drawn in such a manner in which the *Nairs* and those above them in the ritual hierarchy were treated as caste Hindus and those below including *Tiyas* and the depressed classes as polluting castes.<sup>737</sup> Even among the caste Hindus, the *Nairs* were treated as a polluting caste by the Nambudiris.<sup>738</sup> But their position either as land owners or as Kanakkars, control of power through the traditional militia and the close association with the Nambudiris enabled them to overcome the discrimination associated with pollution to a great extent. The efforts of the *Nair* elites to overcome their inferior social and ritual status reached optimum level in the course of the temple entry movements<sup>739</sup>.

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<sup>737</sup> For details see Chapter I. *Supra*.

<sup>738</sup> For details see P. Bhaskaranunni, *Pathompatham Noottantile Keralam*, Mal., Kottayam, Reprint, 2000, pp. 107-124; Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswathivijayam*, Kottayam, Reprint, 2004.

<sup>739</sup> For details see Chapter IV and V. *Supra*.

The *Tiyas* were a group of polluting caste in the Malabar society. But the opportunities thrown open by the colonial modernity and the establishment of community temples and the consecration of Hindu deities enabled the *Tiyas* to overcome the pollution problem to a great extent. Colonial modernity gave them the necessary courage and confidence to fight against the disabilities imposed by the caste system. They also launched a systematic campaign against the social disabilities imposed by the caste hierarchy. The critique of caste also enabled the *Tiyas* elites to extend their helping hand to the depressed classes in their struggle for social equality. At the same time majority of the *Tiyas* were also equally adamant in suppressing those who were lower to them in social and ritual hierarchy.

The *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Nayadies* were the depressed classes of Malabar who suffered the worst form of social segregation. The term "depressed classes" has been interpreted in various ways depending on the position and interest of the sections interpreting it. In the sixth quinquennial review of the Progress of Education in India, the classification of the backward class was in to (1) aboriginals and hill and forest tribes, and (ii) depressed classes, including under the later head "untouchables", those who are socially and vocationally despised, and criminal tribes. In a press note, dated 19 August 1915, Bombay Government classified the backward sections in to (a) depressed classes (ie untouchables) (b) aboriginal and hill tribes and (c) criminal tribes. The British Government in India accepted this

classification as sufficiently wide to cover these groups<sup>740</sup>. In Malabar the depressed classes include people like *Cherumas*, *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Nayadies* and the hill tribes like *Marathis*, *Mavilas*, *Paniyans*, *Karimbalas*, *Kurichiyas* and the like.

The classificatory mechanisms engendered by census operations and other administrative procedures played an important role to establish a new self among the depressed classes. The census reporting provided information on various depressed class groups, as there did not exist much documents regarding them. The census documentation also helped to create unified caste entity among them. Numerous terms were also used to describe them *avarnas*, outcastes, panchamas, inferior races, black and lower caste race etc. These were also highly value loaded representations.

In the colonial period the census reportage and administrative measures strengthened the caste system<sup>741</sup>. This along with the privatisation and commercialisation of land further increased the misery of the depressed classes. The new theories of Aryan-Dravidan and its interpretations by those claiming to be 'Aryans' only served to maintain status quo and its consolidation. The orientalist first and later the English educated Indians belonging to upper castes upheld these theories. It actually strengthened the

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<sup>740</sup> Board of Revenue, Ref No. 1835 dated 13.9.1916, TNA, Chennai.

<sup>741</sup> For details see Nicholas B. Dirks, "The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India" in H.L. Seneviratne, ed., *Identity, Consciousness and the past*", Delhi, OUP, 1997, pp. 120-135.

strange hold of the colonialists and the upper caste on the lower castes. The revolts of the lower caste reformers like Jyothi Rao Phule against the 'hydra headed *Brahminical* oppression<sup>742</sup> become the base for the polluting and depressed class agitations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Malabar the impact of colonial modernity and the reform movements and the missionary encounters forced the lower orders to launch the struggle for achieving social justice. Here the *Tiya* elites-who were more exposed to these influences-took the lead in the struggle. The other depressed classes had a slow start. Their autonomous movements originated only in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The *Tiyas* and the struggle for social equality**

The practice of pollution prevented the *avarna* communities including the *Tiyas* from using public places like roads and ferries, government offices and the like. They were also denied just and equal treatment in educational institutions and hostels. Being the most articulate among the polluting castes they took the lead in organising agitations against such injustices.

In places like Dharmadam, the *Tiyas* travelled through the public roads and forced the *savarnas* to keep away from the streets<sup>743</sup>. The *Tiya* magazine

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<sup>742</sup> Dhanajaya Keer, *Mahatma Jyothi Rao Phule, Father of Indian Social Revolution*, Bombay, 1964. p.120. Also see S.M. Michael, "Dalit vision of Just Society in India" in Michael, ed., *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 102-104.

<sup>743</sup> *Mitavadi*, December 1916.

'Mitavadi' exhorted the community that the practice of *theendal* depended up on the might of the people enforcing it. The force of this argument was immediately visible at Tali in Calicut. The notice board put up in the Tali *samooham* road to restrict the passage of the polluting castes including *Tiyas* was damaged repeatedly. The leadership to the Tali road agitation was given by *Mitavadi* C.Krishnan himself<sup>744</sup>. The *Tiya* elites all over Malabar took up the issue, convened meetings and passed resolutions supporting the bold action of C.Krishanan. The *Tiyas* in large numbers travelled through the so called banned road in procession. They also took *Panchamas* along with them<sup>745</sup>. These inversions of power semantics opened a new chapter in the social history of Malabar.

The *Tiya* conference held at Calicut in October 1918 decided to launch an all out struggle against untouchability and unapproachability (*thodeel* and *theendal*). The meeting also decided not to practice *theendal* towards the castes below them and to oppose the *savarna* attempts to practice the same. To implement the decisions of the meeting, they have decided to organize 'Passive Resistance League'<sup>746</sup>. The *Tiyas* of Calicut also formed an association to demand the abolition of *theendal* "if necessary by coercion"<sup>747</sup>.

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<sup>744</sup> *Mitavadi*, November 1917.

<sup>745</sup> *Mitavadi*, August to December 1917.

<sup>746</sup> *Mitavadi*, November 1918.

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid*

Palghat was another *savarna* bastion where the *Ezhavas/ Tiyas* had launched years of struggle for asserting their rights. The Palghat Municipal Council dominated by *savarnas* passed a resolution demanding the Government to withdraw the transfer of one K. Krishnan, a *Tiya* apothecary to their locality. On enquiry the District Collector found that the *Tiya* medical officer was permitted by the *Brahmins* to use the *Agraharam* streets day and night<sup>748</sup>. Government rejected the request and announced that a public officer duely appointed to any station cannot be removed from there merely on the ground put forward (low caste status)".<sup>749</sup>

The Kalpathy struggles were another milestone in the history of *avarnas* campaign for social justice. The successful agitations at Dharmadom, Tali road at Calicut and Vaikom *Satyagraha* boosted the morale of the *Ezhavas* of Palghat. The sufferings of the *avarna* communities in using the public places were brought to the forum of the Madras Legislative Council by the depressed class representatives<sup>750</sup>. Their consistent demand forced the Government to issue an order protecting the rights of polluting castes to use the public roads.<sup>751</sup>

Based on the strength of the government order the *Ezhavas* of Palghat decided to assert their right of way. But when the car festival began in

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<sup>748</sup> D.R. Friles No. 727/09 dated 7.06. 1904, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>749</sup> G O No. 946, misc., dated 23 may 1904, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>750</sup> *MLC Debates* Vol XIX pp 822-23.

<sup>751</sup> G O No. 2660 L and M dated 27.5. 1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

November 1924, the sub-divisional magistrate issued an order prohibiting the entry of polluting castes. Matters became more complicated with the publication of another order which stated that "the public have a right of access and use in respect of all highways, but it is not for them finally to decide whether a particular street or road falls within this classification"<sup>752</sup>. Government order also stated that prima facie the Kalpathy streets are open to all communities. Even then to avoid the risk of displeasure of any section, Government want the court to decide the matter ultimately thought the petition of the aggrieved parties<sup>753</sup>.

The same incidents including the prohibitory orders were repeated in November 1925 also. The *Ezhavas* struggle for entry in to the public roads in Kalpathy was supported by the progressive sections in the society. The resolution passed by the general public of Palghat recorded their emphatic protest against the prohibitory order issued by the Sub Divisional Magistrate denying entry to the polluting castes to Kalpathy streets. They warned the "government authorities and the *Brahmins* of *Kalpathy* that such unjust denial of simple and elementary civic right of walking along the public roads would lead to disastrous consequences" and "even among the lowest of the low there is keen and intense resentment against such insulting ill treatment and invidious distinction between man and man".<sup>754</sup> The meeting also exhorted

<sup>752</sup> G O No. 523 Public, Misc., dated 27.5.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>753</sup> G O No. 37, Misc., dated 9.1.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>754</sup> Resolution passed by the 'general public' of Palghat in R. Dis Nos. 9525/ 25 dated 21. 04. 1926, KRA, Kozhikode.



"all Hindus interested in the welfare of our religion and country and in the elevation of the depressed classes... to organize a powerful mission... to remove the disabilities of the depressed classes."<sup>755</sup> Similar resolutions were passed from all over Malabar.

The arrogant attitude of the *savarnas* of Palghat denying basic civil rights to the polluting castes forced the later to embrace other religions. From November 1924 to December 1925 about 70 people were converted to Aryasamaj, 14 to Christianity and 38 people to Islam<sup>756</sup>. The right of the polluting castes to enter the public road in Kalpathy was taken to the court.

### **Tiyas and Savarna Temples**

The most important result of the agitations for opening public places was the forceful entry into the contested sites by the polluting castes in the succeeding years. Notable examples are the forceful entry in to the temple tank and the temple at Chalad near Kannur<sup>757</sup>, taking bath at the *Padinjare Chira* of Guruvayur temple and the travel through the temple roads<sup>758</sup> and entry in to the Cherukunnu temple near Payyangadi<sup>759</sup>. Memorandums were submitted to the authorities requesting them not to take any action to obstruct the free movements of *Tiyas* and other polluting castes through the public

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<sup>755</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>756</sup> Ref DL/ 9525/ 25 dated 14.12.1925 in *Ibid*.

<sup>757</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, July 5, 1929; December 2, 1931 and December 6, 1931.

<sup>758</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 29 and 31, 1931.

<sup>759</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 24, 1928.

roads. The *Tiya* strategy of entering contested sites forcefully was later adopted by the Congress Socialists and Communists in a big way to instill courage and confidence among the people.

The *Tiya* elites realized that the *savarna* temples were the citadels of orthodoxy and casteism. Their initial response to the attitude of Temple authorities to block their entry in such religious centres was establishing community temples and consecrating the deities of the Hindu pantheon. Along with the construction of temples, the *Tiya* elites also made fervent appeals to the community not to make offerings in the *savarna* temples<sup>760</sup>. The *Tiya* magazine *Mitavadi* published the opinion of the all the leading *Tiyas* about the necessity of boycotting *savarna* temples. Pamphlets were also issued appealing the community not to make offerings to those temples where they were not given equal status. The pamphlets also pointed out that the offerings made to the *savarna* temples would enrich those who oppress and illtreat them<sup>761</sup>. The campaign to boycott the *savarna* temples helped the consolidation of the *Tiya* community around their shrines. It also helped to built up the dignity of the community.

Though the *Tiyas* asserted their right of way in the public places of Malabar, they were not enthusiastic to extend the same privilege to the caste

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<sup>760</sup> *Mitavadi*, 1913-1919.

<sup>761</sup> *Mitavadi*, November 1918.

below them. In many places they allied with the *savarnas* and *Mappilas* in imposing restrictions on the depressed classes.<sup>762</sup>

### ***Tiya's and the Depressed classes – Equality in shrines***

The *Tiya* campaign for the boycott of *savarna* temples and the establishment of community temples in no way improved their attitude towards the depressed classes. Those who entered *savarna* temples forcefully to destroy the vestiges of casteism and inequality in the society found that the doors of their community temples were closed to the depressed classes. This forced the progressive milieu among the *Tiyas* to wage a consistent struggle against the reactionary elements in the community. The leadership to such agitations was given by people like Murkoth Kumaran, C. Krishnan and others.

The progressive section of the *Tiya* community under the leadership of Murkoth Kumaran even sought the intervention of Sree Narayana Guru to open the Jagannatha Temple at Talassery to the *Pulayas* and other depressed classes<sup>763</sup>. Similarly, the Sreekanteswara temple at Calicut was opened to the people of the other untouchable groups only after prolonged campaign<sup>764</sup>. The Sundaeswara Temple of *Tiyas* at Kannur was opened to the other depressed

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<sup>762</sup> For details see various issues of *Mathrubhumi*, 1923 - 1947.

<sup>763</sup> Murkoth Kumaran, *Sree Narayana Guruswamikalude Jivacharithram*, Mal., Calicut, 1917 pp 275-76.

<sup>764</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, 1927 to 1931

classes only in 1932 after intensive propaganda by the progressive section in the community<sup>765</sup>.

### **Imitations of equality – bureaucracy and education**

The *Tiyas* of Malabar organized campaign against the humiliating attitude of the *savarna* dominated bureaucracy in educational institutions, hostels, Government offices and such other places. There was no caste based discrimination in British Malabar so far as the appointments in Government services and admission in Government schools were concerned. In fact the *Tiyas* of the urban centres of Malabar produced many graduates who served the colonial bureaucracy in several ways. But gradually the *Nairs* took the lead in education and there was bitter competition between the two communities for appointments. *Tiyas* submitted series of memorandums highlighting their grievances and complained against the step motherly attitude of the authorities in distributing Government jobs<sup>766</sup>.

Though the *Tiyas* got the benefit of modern education, they suffered insult and humiliation from caste Hindus even in the Government institutions. The *Tiya* pupil teachers of the Government Training School at Calicut were refused admission to the school hostel<sup>767</sup>. When complaint was raised the Government gave an evasive reply stating that hostel accommodation was

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<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>766</sup> G O No. 121 dated 23.6.1926, GO No. 1997 dated 7-12-1936 *MLC Debates* VolXX11 pp 390-97, *Mathrubhumi*, March 22, 1934.

<sup>767</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. V, p. 715.

insufficient to accommodate all the trainees<sup>768</sup>. The Director of Public Instruction stated that there is "no objection to students of different castes lodging together provided that the castes are not far removed from each other in the social scale<sup>769</sup>. The DPI further clarified that "separate dining arrangements will have to be made for each caste"<sup>770</sup>. That means "additional kitchen accommodation will be required for each additional caste which is admitted to a hostel"<sup>771</sup>.

Government further clarified its stand that hostel was different from school and it had no intention of providing common dining facilities to students belonging to different communities. But the *Tiyas* opposed the policy of maintaining caste distinctions in Government institutions and claimed the right of interdining. When their demand was rejected, the *Tiya* students boycotted their meals and offered *satyagraha*. As part of their struggle for abolishing caste distinctions in the hostel, the *Tiya* students also decided to accommodate *Panchama* teacher trainee along with them<sup>772</sup>.

In spite of such agitations, the discriminatory attitude of the authorities continued. The *Tiyas* students applied for admission to the Taliparamba Agricultural School were denied admission. The issue was hotly debated in

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<sup>768</sup> File No. 1338, Law, Education department, dated 16.9.1921, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>771</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. X, p. 11 66.

<sup>772</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXVI p.374.

the Madras Legislative Council and finally the *Tiyas* were admitted to the school. But separate hostel and kitchen facilities were provided to *Nairs* and a cosmopolitan section was set up for the polluting castes<sup>773</sup>.

The *Tiyas* also organized systematic campaign against the ill treatment of polluting caste officials in various parts of Malabar by the *savarnas*. They questioned the rationale of transferring the *Tiya* officials posted to *savarna* quarters like Kasaba region of Calicut, Kalpathy, Guruvayur and other *savarna sankethams*<sup>774</sup>. They pointed out that a *Pulaya* or *Paraya* converted to Christianity or Islam can enter any *savarna* locality but the educated *Tiya* officials have no right to enter such places. They viewed such actions as insult to the dignity and self respect of the *Tiya* community.

The *Tiya* elites also campaigned for the inversion of dress habits. Being the people throughly exposed to colonial modernity they questioned the distinctions in dress, language and even food habits based on caste and religion. From Potheri Kunhambu to Murkoth Kumaran and C.Krishnan, the *Tiya* elites unleashed a powerful campaign against the meaninglessness of women exposing the upper part of their body, use of debased and slavish language in the day to day conversations and other obnoxious practices<sup>775</sup>.

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<sup>773</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXV p. 718

<sup>774</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol XXX11 p.87, *Mathrubhumi*, April 2,1927.

<sup>775</sup> Potheri Kunhambu, *Saraswatheevijayam*, Mal., Reprint, Kottayam, 2004, pp. 47-53; *Mitavadi*, March 1914, April 1914, May 1914, July 1914.

Some of the *Tiyas* even suffered death casualties in their campaign against debased languages and dress habits<sup>776</sup>.

The *Tiya* agitations of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were an attempt to build counter hegemony against the dominant *savarna* discourses. The 'war of position' adopted by the *Tiyas* at Dharmadom, Tali, Kalpathy, Guruvayur and other innumerable sites of social injustices opened a new chapter in the history of the struggle for social justice in Malabar. In such struggles the *Tiyas* raised the sufferings of the depressed classes of Malabar vis a vis the dominant *savarna* ideology. At the same time they tried to appease the colonial Government in the struggle against their immediate enemy- the dominant *Savarna* community. Such a stand made many of the *Tiya* elites politically reactionaries and at the same time they were socially revolutionaries. In the struggle for social justice the *Tiyas* had no hesitation to use the nationalist tactics like passive resistance and *Satyagraha*.

Though the *Tiya* campaign against social injustice benefited the depressed classes of Malabar in the initial phase of their struggle; the enthusiasm for opening the public sphere to the bottom level people weakened in the course of the time. This was mainly because the sufferings of the *Tiyas* was not as acute as that of the other depressed classes- the *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Nayadies* and such other people. In fact bulk of the *Tiya*

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<sup>776</sup> For details see Mathrubhumi, October 17, 1936; The *Tiya* Youth requested for salt instead of '*Pulikkunnathe*' (souring) was assaulted and killed by the *savarna* trader.

community turned out to be oppressors of the depressed classes in Malabar. So the campaign for social justice was vigorously pursued by the depressed classes and the radical sections who imbibed the ideology of nationalism, socialism and communism.

### **The upward mobility of the Depressed classes**

In Malabar also, as elsewhere in south India, the Christian Missionaries were the first to organize the depressed classes. The colonial Government as part of their policy of divide and rule gave all encouragement to the Missionaries. This alarmed the Hindu religious reformers and the political activists. It was in this context the first Depressed class conference was held at Madras in the year 1886.

But soon a leadership emerged from among the depressed classes and the *Madras Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha* was founded in the year 1892.<sup>777</sup> The depressed classes of Malabar formed the *Malabar Adidravida Jana Sabha* in the year 1918<sup>778</sup>. It was the first organized expression of the depressed class consciousness in this region.

### **The emerging identity among the Depressed classes**

The earliest effort of the depressed classes was to establish an identity among them. To achieve this they rejected using the terms like '*Parayas*' and

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<sup>777</sup> G O No. 3543 law, General, dated 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*



'Panchamas'. They also argued that being the original inhabitants of the land they were the preservers of the original *Adidravida* civilization<sup>779</sup>. The *Adidravida* leaders presented an address to Montague in which the following demand was put forward. "The very names (*Paraya, Panchama* etc.) by which these people refer to us breathe contempt. We would therefore request the government to help us in our efforts to attain social elevation by issuing orders that here after in all Government communications, we should be designated as *Adidravidas*...."<sup>780</sup> The *Adidravida Jana Sabha* of Malabar also convened meetings which demanded the deletion of the terms like '*Panchama*' and '*Paraya*' from Government records.<sup>781</sup> It became extremely significant in the sense that the hitherto colonial, missionary and Hindu reformist discourse described them as slaves, savages, untouchables, *Panchamas* and the like. Even the Gandhian nationalists of 1920's termed their organization for the upliftment of depressed classes as *Keraleeya Patheethodharana Sangam*.<sup>782</sup> During 1927 the nationalists of Malabar formed another organization named *Kerala Anthiyajodharana Sangam*<sup>783</sup>. Its name was later changed to *Kerala Avasasamudayodharana Sangham* and still later to '*Adikeralodharana Sangham*'.<sup>784</sup> Still later with the adoption of the term '*Harijan*' by Mahatma Gandhi, it was used by *Savarna* nationalists of

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<sup>779</sup> M.C. Rajas Resolution in the *MLC Debates* vol IV pp. 2047-2051.

<sup>780</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*.

<sup>781</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. X1X p. 53.

<sup>782</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 22, 1924.

<sup>783</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 3, 1927.

<sup>784</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 20, 1927 and February 7, 1928.

Malabar as elsewhere in India. But it should be noted that the 'self conscious' depressed classes preferred the term '*Adidravida*' in the place of '*Panchama*' and '*Paraya*' in all official correspondence<sup>785</sup>. The insistence on the term '*Adidravida*' represent the development of a new self consciousness among the depressed classes quite different from the representations made by the dominant groups in the society.

### **Struggle for Material improvements**

From the very beginning the *Adidravidas* of Malabar put forward demands for redressing their economic and social grievances. The memorandum submitted by the *Malabar Adidravida Jana Sabha* in the year 1924 testify the same. The memorandum highlighted the political, social educational and economic disabilities of the community and prayed for the redressal of such grievances<sup>786</sup>. It include: 1) The introduction of communal electorates in municipal and local bodies so that the *Adidravidas* might be in a position to elect their own representatives, 2) Extension of the activities of the labour department to Malabar so that the educational, material and moral advancement of the community would get fair attention. 3) Granting occupancy right to the homesteads of *Adidravidas* so that the constant threat of eviction may be reduced.<sup>787</sup> Similarly, the *Adidravidas* of Azhikode region submitted a memorandum demanding the acquisition of land for setting up a

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<sup>785</sup> G O No. 817 Law, General, dated 25-3-1922, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>786</sup> G O No. 3543 Law, General, dated 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*

burial ground for the community<sup>788</sup>. This was extremely significant because the *Adidravidas* of Malabar faced immense difficulty in burying the dead bodies.<sup>789</sup>

The *Adidravida* conferences held in various parts of Malabar raised the question of their material welfare more important than temple entry or *savarna* mode of spiritual upliftment. They were generally landless labourers with handful of exceptions. Occupancy right to homesteads and allotment of land for cultivation were the principal demands raised in their conferences<sup>790</sup>. Freedom to travel through the public roads, admission to educational institutions, fair wages for work and fair prices for the commodities produced by them were the other demands put forward in the *Adidravida* conferences<sup>791</sup>.

Freedom to travel through the public road was an important demand in the *Adidravida* struggles. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the *Adidravidas* responded to the call of the reform movements and made futile attempts to travel through the public roads.<sup>792</sup> In this effort they suffered injuries at many places. Though the reform movements assisted them in

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<sup>788</sup> Sub Collector's Office Records-Tellichery-List II, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>789</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, June 28, 1932.

<sup>790</sup> *Mitavadi*, June 1919 *Mathrubhumi* December, 1926. Memorandum submitted by the All Malabar *Harijan Samaj* in G O No. 661, Law, dated 5.10.1948, KRA, Kozhikode. Also see memorandum submitted by Manappuram *Harijan Sangham* in G.O No. Law, 661 dated 5.10.1948, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>791</sup> Representation of *Adidravida Jana Sabha*, Malabar District, Kannur to the Home Member, Government of Madras dated 26. 06. 1932 reproduced in *MLC debates* vol. LX 111. pp. 152-153, Also see *Mathrubhumi*, June 28, 1932.

<sup>792</sup> For details see Chapter III.

registering complaints with the police, no serious follow up action was initiated<sup>793</sup>.

With the formation of the *Adidravida Jana Sabha*, the depressed classes began taking independent initiative for asserting their right in the public places. The *Adidravidas* of Chirakkal taluk emphatically stated that they were ready to face any consequence for securing the right to travel through the public places<sup>794</sup>. Prolonged struggle for nearly a decade yielded the desired result and *Adidravidas* marched through the streets in procession<sup>795</sup>. This assertion of self by the *Adidravidas* was later utilized by the nationalists to promote their political and religious agenda in respect of the upliftment of the *Harijan* community.

The depressed classes of Malabar were treated as slaves by the landowning classes. Instances of transfer of these people along with land continued up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The political activists of Malabar like Kelappan, Keraleeyan, and Vishnu Bharateeyan reported that condition of virtual slavery prevailed in Malabar. This has been admitted by the depressed class representations<sup>796</sup> and government records of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> *Mitavadi* March 1918, June 1919; *Mathrubhumi*, May 10, 1923.

<sup>794</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 30, 1924.

<sup>795</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 10, 1930 March 5, 1931, April 9, 1931. For details see the subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi*.

<sup>796</sup> The Memorandum submitted by the Manappuram *Harijan Sangham* to the Government of Madras dated 23 October 1947 refers to Harijan as their master '*Panipadu*' which means slaves. GONo. Law, 661 dated 5.10.1948, KRA, Kozhikode. The memorandum submitted by *Adidravidas* to Gandhiji in his tour of 1927 also refers to slave trade, *Mathrubhumi* October 29, 1927.

century<sup>797</sup>. Slight disobedience on the part of the depressed class was reacted with very harsh punishments by the *Janmies* like eviction from their *Kudiyirippu*, physical torture etc. Naturally in all the memorandums submitted by the depressed classes, fixity of tenure to their homesteads figured as one of the most important demand of the community. In course of time, the *Adidravidas* also began raising the demand for allotting land to them for cultivation<sup>798</sup>. Continuous pressure on the part of the community forced the Government to adopt some half hearted measures to allot land to them. Accordingly in Malabar about 4679.46 acres of land has been identified for allotment to the depressed classes. But only 49.20 acres of land was allotted till 1936<sup>799</sup>. This was the lowest in the whole District of the Madras presidency<sup>800</sup>. This was mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, caste oppression was severe in Malabar compared to other areas and the bureaucracy dominated by the upper caste was not willing to assist the depressed classes in their struggle for material improvements. Another reason for the abysmally low turn out of land distribution was that in Malabar there was not much land in the hands of the Government to distribute the same.

### **Demand for political justice – contesting strategies**

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<sup>797</sup> Recruitment File 1917-1918, KRA, Kozhikode. The report of the labour commissioner in G O No. 3543, Law, General, also confirm the same.

<sup>798</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 11, 1926; December 10, 1930 and May 21, 1931.

<sup>799</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. LXXX, pp 253-54.

<sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Adidraidas* of Malabar gradually realized that wresting political power was essential for overcoming their disabilities. The *Adidraida Jana Sabha* of Kannur demanded the introduction of communal electorates in Municipal and local bodies so that they might be in a position to elect their own representatives in such bodies<sup>801</sup>. Following the footsteps of the *Adidraida* representatives in the Madras Legislative Council, the *Adidraida* conferences held in various places of Malabar also passed resolutions demanding proper representation in the local boards, municipal councils and district boards. Continuous pressure exerted by the *Adidraida* representatives in the Madras Legislative Council forced the Government to nominate 23 depressed class members in 20 District Boards of the Madras presidency. But in the District Board of Malabar the depressed class representative was not included.<sup>802</sup> Official records say that 'no suitable candidate' was available for appointment to the Malabar District Board<sup>803</sup>. At the same time nominal representation was given to them in the municipal councils of Calicut, Kannur and Palghat<sup>804</sup>. The continuous pressure exerted by the *Adidraidas* also forced the authorities to reserve few seats for them in the Taluk Boards and the District Board of Malabar<sup>805</sup>. At the same time it should be noted that the *Adidraida* representation in civic bodies found only scanty reference in the

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<sup>801</sup> G O No. 3543, Law, General, dated 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>802</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XLI, pp 161-63.

<sup>803</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XXX, p.631.

<sup>804</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. XLI, pp. 161-63.

<sup>805</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 17, 1925, March 3, 1931 and May 21, 1931.

nationalist sponsored *Adidravida* meetings. The earliest reference to the *Adidravida* representation in the Legislative Councils and local bodies came at the 'Adi Kerala' conference held as part of the KPCC meeting held at Payyannur in May 1928. The resolution passed at the meeting stated that the right to elect the depressed class members should be given exclusively to the members of that community<sup>806</sup>.

Political compulsions forced the nationalists to adopt such a resolution. The stiff opposition to the Congress programme of boycott of Simon Commission from the *Tiya* elites of Malabar<sup>807</sup> and the depressed class leaders in the Madras presidency forced the nationalists to adopt such a resolution. It was expected that through such measures Congress would be in a position to check the flow of depressed classes to the side of the pro-British *Tiya* elites of Malabar. Congress also expected that through their ameliorative work among the depressed classes, they could command the support of the majority and there by elect their own nominees. The principle of election was emphasized by the Congress to counter the colonial Governments policy of nominating the critics of the national movement. It had the additional advantage of controlling the bitter tongue of the depressed class leaders through marshalling the *Adidravidas* under their (nationalist) control. But the socio-political developments in the succeeding years forced the Congressmen

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<sup>806</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, May 31, 1928.

<sup>807</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 26, 1928.

to deviate from the stand taken at Payyannur in respect of the pattern of representation of the depressed classes.

The inertia and lethargy on the part of the Congressmen towards the political demands of the depressed classes forced the enlightened section of the community to forge alliance with like minded people at the national level. The *Adidravida Jana Sabha* of Malabar was the only organization, which represent the few educated people among the depressed classes<sup>808</sup>. It was affiliated to the All India Depressed classes Federation. E. Kannan, the *Adidravida* leader of Malabar, also acted as the joint secretary of the Madras unit of All India Depressed Classes Federation. Following the footsteps of Ambedker, the Malabar *Adidravida Jana Sabha* passed resolutions favouring separate electorates and condemned Gandhi's stand on such issues<sup>809</sup>. The Sabha sent telegram to Ambedkar supporting his stand on the issue of separate electorate for the depressed classes<sup>810</sup>. It also requested Ambedkar not to put faith in Gandhi and the congress<sup>811</sup>.

It is true that large majority of *Adidravida* were not in a position to grasp the political developments. Even then two streams developed among them. The enlightened and educated were a tiny section among the *Adidravidas*. They formed the *Adidravida Jana Sabha* and tried to assert

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<sup>808</sup> USS File G O No.804 dated 16.12.1932, TNA, Chennai.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>810</sup> *Dr. Baba Sahib Ambedker Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 17 part one, Mumbai, 2003. Also see *Mathrubhumi*, November 24, 1931.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117, *Mathrubhumi*, November 24, 1931.



their rights through organization and wrest privileges from the dominant communities.<sup>812</sup> But in course of time sizeable section of the community was mobilized under the *Adikeraleeya Sangham* of the congress and were induced to the nationalist scheme of upliftment activities. The resolutions against Ambedkar's stand on depressed class issues were passed in the conferences of *Adikeraleeya Sangham* organized under the initiative of the *savarna* congressmen.<sup>813</sup> The articulate and self conscious *Adidravida's* remained critical to the activities of the nationalists including the work of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and the temple entry movements.

### **Depressed Classes and Education**

Education was another contested site of *Adidravida* discourse. The percentage of literacy among the community was least compared to other sections of the society. The missionaries and the reform movements made some attempts to impart education to them. Later, the nationalists started some schools for the untouchables as part of their upliftment programme. But these efforts produced only marginal result compared to the educational progress of the depressed classes in the princely states and other districts of the Madras presidency. Whatever efforts undertaken by enlightened people were stalled by the bureaucracy dominated by the upper castes. The attempt

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<sup>812</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, October 30, 1931, D.O. Letter No. 722-S dated 1/10/32 in USS File No. G.O. No. 804 dated 16/12/32.

<sup>813</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, September 24, 1932. Also see *FNR* of first half of November, 1935.

of the local bodies to enrol depressed class children in the schools, gave them assistance in the form of stipend, cloths, books and states etc were bitterly opposed by the bureaucracy and the caste Hindus on moral, economic and technical grounds<sup>814</sup>. As a result the progress of depressed class education was a very slow process as far as Malabar was concerned.

The depressed classes of Malabar had neither the social, cultural or economic capital to acquire the benefits of modern education. Their deplorable socio-economic position prevented them from recognizing the role of education in their emancipatory process. But when they recognized its immense significance, they left no stone unturned to get the benefits of education. The earliest memorandum submitted by the *Adidravida Sabha* itself requested the authorities to take steps to remove the educational disabilities of the community<sup>815</sup>. The *Adidravida* representatives in the Madras Legislative Council also took up the issue of the education of the depressed classes in malabar. As a result Government issued orders for admitting *Adidravidas* to Governmentt schools and board schools. The Government circular also stated that failure to admit depressed class pupils would result in the reduction or even abolition of subsidies given by the Government for meeting the expenses of the schools<sup>816</sup>. Constant demand on the part of the depressed classes forced the authorities to establish the labour

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<sup>814</sup> G O No. 192 Law, Education, dated 7-2-1925, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>815</sup> G O No. 3543 Law, General, dated 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>816</sup> G O No. 205, Law, Education, dated 11.2.1924.

department to undertake ameliorative work among them. The labour department began its function in Malabar in the year 1925. Under the initiative of the labour department *Adidravida* or labour schools were established in various parts of the district. Along with this enlightened sections belonging to *savarna* and polluting classes also started *Adidravida* schools. The local bodies also established some *Adidravida* schools. But it should be noticed that out of the 183 elementary schools opened by the taluk boards in Malabar during 1924-25 to 1926-27 (three years) only one was an *Adidravida* school<sup>817</sup>. There were also attempts on the part of enlightened people-who were influenced by the ideology of socio-religious reform movements and the ideology of nationalism-to admit *Adidravidas* into general schools along with the children of other communities.

The attempt on the part of *Adidravidas* to get admission in the schools was bitterly opposed by the *Savarnas*, polluting castes like *Tiyas* and even *Mappilas* in almost all parts of Malabar<sup>818</sup>. Through out Malabar these sections adopted various tactics to block the entry of *Adidravidas* into schools. Force was freely employed and when it failed, attempts were made to withdraw their children from such schools<sup>819</sup>. The *Adidravidas* had to shed a lot of blood, sweat and tear to get admission in the schools.

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<sup>817</sup> *MLC Debates*. Vol. XXXIX, pp 212-216.

<sup>818</sup> For details see *Mathrubhumi* 1923-1947. *MLC Debates*, 1921-1947

<sup>819</sup> *Mathrubhumi* , 1923-1947. *MLC Debates*, 1921-1947.

The opening of the labour schools and the hectic campaign for admitting depressed classes to the general schools gradually improved the educational prospects of the community. But the decision of the government to close the functioning of the labour department and the schools managed by it fell as a night mare to the educational progress of the depressed classes.

In 1931 the Retrenchment committee constituted by the Madras Government retrenched the labour commissioner and a member of the board revenue was given additional charge of the labour department. It was also decided to transfer the management of labour (*Adidravida*) schools to local bodies. Government also decided to close all depressed class schools eventually and to admit pupils without caste restriction to local schools<sup>820</sup>. Accordingly in Malabar alone about 15 *Adidravida* schools were closed during 1931-32<sup>821</sup>.

The closure of the labour schools precipitated a bitter controversy in the Madras presidency in general and Malabar in particular. The nationalists supported the move on the ground that separate schools for different sections would perpetuate the division and segregation in the society. But the *Adidravida* leaders found that the caste Hindus and even polluting castes like *Tiyas* and *Mukkuvas* were not willing to accommodate depressed class children in the general schools. Contemporary press has brought forward

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<sup>820</sup> Administration Report the Local Boards in the Malabar District for 1935-36, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>821</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol. LXI, p. 468.

large number of incidents where the untouchables were assaulted when they sought admission in schools. In many places the children of other communities left schools when depressed classes were enrolled<sup>822</sup>. Even in those schools where they got admission; they were not given equal or fair treatment.<sup>823</sup> This forced the depressed class leaders to demand for the retention of *Adidravida* schools.<sup>824</sup> So the retention of *Adidravida* schools was another area of contention between the self conscious *Adidravida* leaders and the nationalists who were involved in the task of *Harijan* upliftment. The *Adidravida* leaders in the Madras Legislative Council strongly argued that "unless government starts separate schools for the depressed classes, there is no chance of these classes getting required education...The untouchability will go by itself in course of time but to wait till untouchability is removed, is to keep these poor children without education"<sup>825</sup>. Similar stand was taken by *Adidravida* conferences held in different parts of Malabar. Parallel to this the nationalist sponsored *Adidravida* conferences passed resolutions recommending the abolition of labour schools and admitting *Adidravidas* in general schools.<sup>826</sup> These conferences also viewed the demand for the retention of labour schools as a sinister move on the part of *Adidravida*

<sup>822</sup> *MLC Debates*, Vol LI, p. 937.

<sup>823</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, July 22, 1932. Field survey also confirmed that in many places the *Adidravida* children were not allowed to mingle with the children of other communities. In many places they were permitted to sit only in the floor of the classroom sufficiently away from other groups to avoid pollution.

<sup>824</sup> R. Sreenivasan's statement in the Madras Legislative Council in *MLC Debates* Vol. LXX, pp 229-230.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>826</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, July 10, 1932.

teachers to protect their job. The demand of the enlightened section of the *Adidravida* community to retain separate schools was also viewed as a demand propelled by the clever Christian missionaries to bring schism within the Hindu community.

The *Adidravidas* of malabar were bitterly discriminated in the boarding and lodging facilities provided by the Government. They were not allowed to share the hostel facilities with other inmates. The *Adidravida* teacher trainee of Calicut Training school hostel was compelled to live in the distant outhouse attached to the hostel. When he complained against such ill treatment, he was seriously warned by the authorities<sup>827</sup>. Series of such incidents forced the *Adidravidas* to put pressure on the authorities to open a separate hostel for them. Accordingly the *Adidravida* hostel was opened at Calicut during 1928. But it was opened at a place which was totally unsuitable for students. Kelappan himself noticed that "to reach the hostel one has to pass through quarters occupied by fallen sisters and to ward through a standing pool of fowl water"<sup>828</sup>. When *Adidravidas* complained against the location of the hostel<sup>829</sup> the authorities replied that their aim was not to bring these pupils as "budding deputy Tahsilars"<sup>830</sup>. The statement is self explanatory. It clearly reveals the attitude of the bureaucracy towards the

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<sup>827</sup> G O No. 200, Law, Education, dated 8.2.1926, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>828</sup> Kelappans letter dated 7-7-1928 in R. Dis No. 2165 dated 15.8.28, KRA, Kozhikode; *Mathrubhumi*, July 3, 1928.

<sup>829</sup> See E. Kannans letter in the Appendix.

<sup>830</sup> RDO's letter dated 20.5.28 in R. Dis No. 2165 datd 15.8.28, KRA, Kozhikode.

problems and aspirations of the depressed classes. Similarly, when the hostel advisory committee was constituted, every effort was taken by the bureaucracy to avoid the nomination of *Adidravida* leaders of calibre like E.Kannan, President of the Malabar *Adidravida Jana Sabha*, Calicut. The quota of the *Adidravida* representative was filled with an illiterate *Adidravida* of dubious character and questionable integrity.<sup>831</sup>

### **Imitations of Social Equality**

Change of names, dress habits, costumes, food and language denoting the inferior status of the depressed classes were the other contested sites. As noted in chapter I, the colonial ethnography and indigenous writings refers in detail the slavish and inhuman character of the dress, food habits and costumes of the depressed classes. Attempts were made by reformers<sup>832</sup> and political activists<sup>833</sup> and local bodies<sup>834</sup> to improve their food habits, dress code and costumes. Such efforts produced lasting impact on the attitude of this section.

In the Malabar society the depressed classes were called with vile and base names<sup>835</sup>. Being the property of the Janmies, the right of giving name to an infant born to a depressed class woman was the exclusive privilege of the

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<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>832</sup> See Chapter III. *Supra.*

<sup>833</sup> See Chapter IV. *Supra.*

<sup>834</sup> G.O. No. 1763 Education dated 27.04.26 and G.O. No. 3828 Edn dated 3.9.26, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>835</sup> See Appendix.

landlord. In most cases the new born child was allotted a base name by the landlord in the most unceremonious way. The gradual growth of education and self respect forced the members of the depressed class communities to challenge such unjust practices. But their attempts to adopt the names usually used by the high caste people met with stiff resistance.<sup>836</sup> Even during 1940's the *Adidravida* efforts to give the Sanskrit names to their kith and kin were rewarded with cruel punishments<sup>837</sup>. The enlightened members of the community felt that adoption of Sanskrit names also has some significance in improving their social status. Accordingly E. Kannan, president of the Malabar *Adidravida Jana Sabha* made some alterations to the names of the *Adidravida* students admitted to the Calicut hostel<sup>838</sup>. Though it was objected by the *Savarna* bureaucracy, it inaugurated a new chapter in the history of the struggle for social justice. In course of time the *Adidravidas* gave up their base names and began adopting names usually used by the caste Hindus.

The *Adidravidas* also suffered untold cruelties in the struggle for changing their dress habits and ornaments. They convened meetings in various places of Malabar and exhorted the community to give up dirty rags and chains of terracotta beads. The Malabar *Adidravida Jana Sabha* meeting held at Mannur near Feroke went a step further. It encouraged the community

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<sup>836</sup> R. Dis No. 2165/28 dated, 15/8/28, KRA, Kozhikode.

<sup>837</sup> Interview with K. Vasudevan, P. Gopalan and Mumminiyan Balan from 22.12.2007 to 25.12.2007. On interview the *Adidravidas* stated that they were forced to divorce a woman having the puranic name '*Panchali*'.

<sup>838</sup> See Appendix.



to replace the ornaments made of terracota beads and brass ornaments with the items made of gold<sup>839</sup>. The *Savarnas*, the *Tiyas* and in some places the *Mappilas* reacted to such move with vengeance. The *Tiyas* of Feroke region even decided not to utilize the services of *Adidravidas* in agricultural work. The *Adidravidas* reacted to it with the establishment of their labour co-operative society<sup>840</sup>. In the Chirakkal taluk also the *Mappilas* and *Tiyas* unleashed brutal attack on the *Adidravida* women at several places for wearing gold ornaments<sup>841</sup>. The press reports indicate the fact that soon the movement of throwing away the terracota beads spread to the whole of Kerala. It was another expression of the growth of self respect and self confidence among the depressed classes. The self conscious *Adidravidas* also challenged the upper caste people, who raised their eyebrows against the removal of terracotta beads; to institute the same among their family members<sup>842</sup>.

Dress was another signifier of social status. In Malabar the popularisation of *Khadi* had tremendous impact on the society. It brought people belonging to different social status-from *Nambudiris* at the top to *Pulaya* at the bottom-to a common attire<sup>843</sup>. *Khadi* cloths had a levelling influence on the society and *Adidravidas* began wearing the clean, white

<sup>839</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, May 5, 1927.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>841</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, January 19, 1929. Subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* also highlighted atrocities on depressed class in different parts of Malabar.

<sup>842</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, May 17, 1925.

<sup>843</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, May 28, 1931.

*Khadi* cloth like other people. They also began replacing their traditional umbrellas made of cadjan leaves with the cloth umbrellas. But they had to shed a lot of blood, sweat and tears to protect their white cloths, umbrellas and their little ornaments made of precious metals. It is still in the memory of the depressed classes that even during 1940's the upper sections had torn their dresses and umbrellas to pieces. They also report that cashew fruit juice and similar materials were used by the members of dominant communities to put stain on their clean white dress<sup>844</sup>. Even then the brutal injuries and sufferings of the depressed classes ultimately yielded the result and they were able to overcome the restrictions imposed on dress habits as the mark of their social inferiority.

The *Adidravidas* of Malabar were non vegetarians. The *Savarnas* bitterly detested their habits of alcoholism and the practice of non vegetarianism. It was argued that these people had even the habit of eating the corpse of dead animals as mentioned by Abbe Dubois. This was also viewed as the reason for their impure status and was the justification for the practice of untouchability in the *savarna* nationalist discourse. The dominant discourse argued that vegetarianism is the mark of the perfect being and the non vegetarians must be placed outside the select circle of perfection.<sup>845</sup> The *Adidravida* leaders worked along with the *savarna* nationalists in the task of

<sup>844</sup> Interview with K. Vasudevan, P. Gopalan and Mumminiyan Balan from 22.12.2007 to 25.12.2007. also see various issues of *Mathrubhumi*, 1929-1939.

<sup>845</sup> Vijayan Kannampilly, "Food as health, ethics and social marker", *Seminar* No. 566, October 2006, Rameshraj Trust, New Delhi, p. 51.

eradicating evil food habits including alcoholism. The temperance campaign and the propaganda against existing dietary habits were the other attempts to bring depressed classes along with other sections.<sup>846</sup>

Religious practices was another contested terrain. Traditionally they worshipped evil spirits and propitiated them with blood<sup>847</sup>. None of them were allowed to reach near the temples and shrines of either the *Savarnas* or the *Avarnas* like *Tiyas* or *Mukkuvas*. At the same times it was customary on the part of depressed classes to offer money (*adimakassu*), Paddy (*adimanellu*) and vegetables to these shrines. Such offerings were made by these people at a specific distance on a stone slab (*adimakallu*) with out polluting the shrines<sup>848</sup>. It was humiliating to these people that they were not permitted to reach the vicinity of the shrines to which they have to offer money and other valuables.

The insult and humiliation suffered by the depressed classes forced them to adopt new strategies towards such institutions. The reformers and nationalists viewed the unclean habits of the depressed classes as the reason for their exclusion from the shrines. The remedy put forward by them was to make the depressed classes 'clean' socially, culturally, vocationally and

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<sup>846</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, December 10, 1930. Subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* have details of the campaign organised against the use of carrions and liquor.

<sup>847</sup> T.K. Gopala Panikkar, *Malabar and its Folk*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1983. pp. 152-175.

<sup>848</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November, 1, 1932; October 28, 1933.

religiously. But in many places the efforts of the reformers and *savarna* nationalists met with stiff opposition from diehard casteists.

The depressed communities of malabar were not much enthusiastic in securing admission to the temples. As noted earlier they were more concerned with improving their material and social status than temple entry. In many of their conferences, they emphatically stated that they had no intention of securing admission in the temples and houses of the upper sections of the society<sup>849</sup>. Detailed studies on the temple entry movements confirm the fact that the demand of temple entry was imposed on them by the *savarna* nationalists and Hindu revivalists<sup>850</sup> to check the flow of these sections to the fold of the Christian missionaries. But the orthodox caste Hindus bitterly resisted any move on the part of the *savarna* nationalist to open the temples to the depressed classes. When the efforts of the nationalists failed, they encouraged the depressed classes to stop the practice of paying tribute to the shrines. To this the depressed classes responded enthusiastically.

The earliest example of depressed class resistance to the payment of *adimappanam* was at Chalad near Kannur. Here the depressed classes stated that they would pay tribute only if the temple would be opened to them<sup>851</sup>. At

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<sup>849</sup> Various issues of *Mathrubhumi*, 1923-1947.

<sup>850</sup> It is to be noted that petitions and counter petitions supporting temple entry and opposing it were despatched to the Governors office from all over Malabar. But not a single representation came from the side of the depressed classes of Malabar. For details see GO No. 93, Ms., 1933, TNA, Chennai.

<sup>851</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, November 1, 1932.

Payyangadi also they refused to pay the *Tozhalpanam* to the Madayikavu on the same ground<sup>852</sup>. At *Ezhome*, they have decided to stop the practice of paying tribute in the form of paddy (*Adimanellu*) to those shrines which were closed to them<sup>853</sup>. Soon the movement spread to the length and breadth of Malabar. Repeated assault by the *Nairs* and *Tiyas* failed to break the spirit of resistance developed by the depressed classes. It was a spectacular development in the history of the struggle for social equality in Malabar. This type of inversion of power relations was later utilized by the radical movements.

From above analysis it is clear that the polluting and depressed classes of Malabar were concerned with improving their material status and social conditions compared to the *savarna* nationalist effort of improving their ritual status and initiating them to the Sanskritic mode of worship. Polluting castes like *Tiyas* adopted Sanskritic form of worship, parallel to the dominant *savarna* practices. At the same time the *Tiyas* waged an independent struggle for improving their social and educational status against the dominant groups in the society. They also imbibed the ideology of colonial modernity and utilized it to improve their status in the society. The depressed classes on the other had struggled consistently for removing the social disabilities imposed up on them. They demanded fixity of tenure to homesteads, admission to

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<sup>852</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, April 1, 1933.

<sup>853</sup> *Mathrubhumi*, October 28, 29, 31 and November 1,3,5,9, and 15, 1933.

educational institutions, freedom to use public spaces like roads, ferries, tea shops and Government offices, struggled against debased languages, names, dress, ornaments, food habits and the like. Admission to *savarna* and *Tiya* shrines never became a serious demand of the depressed classes of Malabar. But the *savarna* nationalists imposed the agenda of temple entry on the half willing depressed classes of Malabar. At the same time the forcible extraction of the wealth of the depressed classes by the custodian's of temples and kavus was bitterly resented by the community. In places like Chalad, Madayikavu, Ezhome and other places the *Adidravidas* decided that they won't pay tribute (*Adimappanam, Tozhalpanam, Adimanenelluvekkall*) unless the shrines would be opened to them. In all these places the depressed classes including women suffered brutal injuries from both *savarnas* and *Tiyas*. The spirit of resistance and the sufferings and sacrifice of the *Adidravidas* finally yielded the desired result. The refusal of *Adidravidas* to pay tribute to those shrines which were closed to them marked a new chapter in the social history of Malabar. It instilled self confidence among them. The growth of self respect and self confidence among the depressed classes was later utilized by the radical movements which emerged in Malabar in the 1930's in their effort to form the class organizations.

The depressed communities joined the ranks of the class organisations formed by the Leftists in large numbers. They entered the public space through the class organisations which highlighted the economic and social

grievances of the oppressed sections. This took the struggle for social equality and justice to new heights. The growth of class consciousness contributed to the development of new contradictions – between the haves and havenotes – in the society. Thus the identity of depressed classes merged with the larger identity of workers, peasants and landless labourers. It benefitted both the depressed classes and the radical class organisations. It also paved the way for the secularisation of the Malabar society. Thus the struggle for social justice was taken to new heights.

## CONCLUSION

Colonial hegemony over Malabar contributed to the transformation of the society parallel to the rest of the country. The economic, political and ideological interventions of the colonial forces radically altered the caste based social ensemble of Malabar. The changes initiated by colonialism drastically altered the living conditions of almost all social groups and classes. The linking of the Malabar economy with the world capitalist economy by the colonial agent adversely affected the traditional production relations. It also resulted in the upward mobility of commercial and trading elites. The *Tiyas* in the colonial urban centers competed successfully with other sections in trade and industry. They also succeeded in exploiting the opportunities thrown open by colonialism in a better manner than other groups.

The political system established by colonialism also deprived the traditional elites many of the privileges they enjoyed in the past. In the new system the English educated people were placed in a better position vis a vis the traditional elites. As noted in the first chapter the colonial rule unyoked occupation from caste. It enabled many who were treated as polluting castes to get employment in the colonial salariat. The establishment of rule of law also denied the Brahmanical hierarchy the power which they enjoyed in the traditional society. Thus the growth of cash economy, English education, rule



of law, colonial salariat, new trading and industrial establishments, new transport and communication facilities and the like paved the way for new value systems and social perceptions. The 'colonial modernity' thus emerged ushered the growth of a new social system.

The missionary intervention in the social scenario of Malabar also strengthened the process of modernization. Though the objective of the missionaries was to proselytize the people to the Christian faith, their systematic campaign against the obsolete practices in Malabar also forced the people to think about its significance in the new context.

The colonial state apparatus and the Christian missionaries questioned the rationale of the institutions and practices prevalent in the Malabar society. The white masters in Malabar also, as elsewhere, maintained a sense of superiority vis a vis the colonized. But in their administrative, social and ideological interactive process one cannot find much examples of highlighting hierarchy and difference among the colonized. Whatever difference they highlighted was the supporters and opponents of colonial penetration. This forced them to utilize the services of people including the polluting castes. Though caste difference was not taken up seriously in the new colonial administrative dispensation, the privileged groups in the traditional society sensed the danger and made an all out effort to occupy the opportunities thrown open by colonialism.

In the Malabar society the *Nairs* and the *Tiyas* were the first to grab the new opportunities. After initial hesitation, the *Nairs* took the lead in securing English education and appointment in the colonial bureaucracy. Being the traditional landed aristocracy either as *Janmies* or as *Karyakkars*, *Nairs* were in a well placed position in the society. The opportunities thrown open by colonialism further strengthened their position. Colonial modernity also enabled them to challenge successfully the limitations imposed by the higher-ups in the ritual domain.

The *Tiyas*, on the other hand, was a polluting caste. The growth of colonial economy, urban centers, trade and industrial establishments etc ushered new opportunities to the *Tiyas*. They also imbibed the benefits of western education from the missionary schools. As a result the *Tiyas* in the colonial urban centers experienced considerable upward mobility. The impact of colonial modernity and the message of Sree Narayan Guru, enabled them to challenge hierarchy and dominance prevalent in the society. Thus the *Tiya* elites became the principal agents of the struggle for social equality and justice.

The upward mobility of the depressed classes was a slow process. The cash economy developed in Malabar freed the *adiyar* class to a certain extent from their traditional moorings. Similarly, the necessities of the colonial state forced them to accommodate even the depressed classes in the military establishment in the course of the world wars against the wishes of the

dominant classes. The missionary efforts to secure new adherents to their faith forced them to open schools to the depressed classes. But the underlings in the society had not the social, economic and cultural capital to acquire modern education or the amenities thrown open by the colonial state apparatus. Naturally they entered the scene of struggle for equality and social justice at a later date.

The vicissitudes of colonialism and the equally unpleasant memories of the traditional society forced the English educated people from Malabar to identify themselves with the reformist perceptions articulated in the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The socio religious reform movements of Pan Indian character felt their presence in the Malabar soil from 1882 onwards. These reform movements filled in the minds of English educated Malayalees a sense of self respect and self confidence. The dichotomy between the colonizer/colonized forced the latter to make an introspection in to the institutions and practices of the traditional society. The missionary attack on Hinduism also forced them to look in to the problems of the society. More than that, the values and practices they cherished in the changing social scenario necessitated them to make a critical assessment on the whole issue.

The reform movements carried forward the struggle for social justice. The Theosophist's emphasis on cleanliness as the criteria for accommodating the polluting and depressed classes was acceptable to both Caste Hindu and *Tiya* elites. In other words it was in tune with the modernist perception of

cleanliness upheld by the *Tiya* elites against debarring them from temple tanks and *mungikuli*. The demand of the *Tiyas* to have right of access to the public roads was also supported by the Theosophists. The '*mishrabhojanam*' of the *savarna* and *avarna* elites organized under the aegis of Theosophical society was also welcomed. But the defense of 'Hinduism in its entirety' and the campaign for 'Home rule' were viewed with suspicion.

BrahmoSamaj went a step further. It organized '*mishravivaham*' to mitigate the evils of caste system. It also took the depressed classes to the public places. The schools opened by it gave education to at least a tiny section of the depressed class. Similarly, the ideological onslaught against nontouchism and the description of Malabar as the mad house of caste by Vivekananda forced the elites to think about the rationale of such institutions.

Arya Samaj organized hectic campaign in Kalpathy during 1920's to secure the rights of the polluting castes. The Samaj highlighted the danger of denying civic rights to the polluting and depressed classes which the converts from these castes enjoy during the last couple of decades. The attempt of the *Arya Samaj* was protecting Hinduism than ensuring justice to the underlings.

The activities of the Theosophical Society, Brahmo Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and *Arya Samaj* influenced the elite strata of the society. The insistence on cleanliness as the criteria for bringing the lower orders of the society to the mainstream attracted those who imbibed the worldview of colonial modernity. The depressed classes like *Pulayas*,

*Parayas, Nayadies* etc. were still beyond the reach of these reform movements as they had no concrete socio economic programme for the upliftment of these sections.

The reform activities initiated by intellectuals of native origin also appeared the scene at about the same time. Sree Narayana Guru's consecration of *savarna* deities in the temples and the crusade against obsolete practices including the evils of caste system contributed to the growth of community consciousness among the *Tiyas*. The message of Narayana Guru forced the rising generation of *Tiyas* to organize campaigns for admission of depressed classes in the *Tiya* temples and equal treatment to them in public places. The anti caste ideology of Sree Narayana Guru attracted people - cutting across caste and community affiliations - to the new movement for ensuring social equality and justice to all; including the depressed classes.

Brahmananda Swami Shivayogi's rejection of the entire Hindu religious practices, rituals and texts influenced the progressive milieu of the Malabar society. The agnostic philosophy of focusing 'Manavan' and the "Religions of Bliss" propounded by him also attracted the intellectuals of different castes and communities to his side. The critique of caste by Shivayogi enabled the people to challenge the hierarchy and difference prevalent in the society. The *Ananda Yogasala's* formed in various parts of Malabar became the nucleus to disseminate a new culture of social equality

and justice. These institutions became the focal point of the secular culture that was developing in Malabar.

The theoretical onslaught against casteism and untouchability by Vagbatananda also influenced the people. Vagbatananda viewed the question of temple entry not as a religious issue but as an effort of achieving social equality. Vagbatananda also worked in the direction of improving the material conditions of those who challenged the caste hierarchy. The massive *mishrabhojanams* organized under the auspicious of the *Atma Vidya Sangham* was another milestone in the struggle for social equality. The progressive minded people who cooperated with the activities of the *Atma Vidya Sangham* took the issue of social equality to the grass root level through linking it with political and economic struggles of the people.

Sivananda's critique of caste through the rational arguments of the '*Sadhuvaya Viddhi*' (poor idiot) was another intellectual attack against the edifice of the hierarchical society. The uniform pattern of dress, hairstyles and food prescribed for the *Siddhasmajists* were other novelties which shook foundations of the hierarchical caste system.

The challenges unleashed by the reform movements inspired the political activists to take up the issue more vigorously. The colonial policy of divide and rule, the policy of the *avarana* elites to align with the Government and the missionary endeavors to convert the people to Christianity posed serious challenges to the political activists of Malabar. It also forced them to

address the issues relating to caste oppression and inequality right from the inception of political activity in Malabar.

Reform movements forced the people of Malabar-irrespective of caste, community and religious affiliations-to look in to the problems of untouchability and social injustices with a non religious, secular vision. On the other hand Gandhiji and the *savarna* rationalists viewed untouchability and segregation as a Hindu problem which the Hindus alone had to address and solve within the community limits. Gandhiji approached the Vaikom and Guruvayur *Satyagraha*'s and the issue of temple entry with this vision in mind. Whereas the progressive milieu emerged in Malabar viewed the disabilities imposed up on certain classes from a secular and non religious perspective. The series of editorials published by *Mathrubhumi* newspaper and the reports of involvement of people belonging to different castes, communities and religions in the movement against social injustices confirm this. It also brings to light the displeasure of the nationalists of Malabar on the narrow and sectarian stand taken by Mahatma Gandhi on the temple entry agitations. Similarly, the compromise proposal put forward by Gandhiji viz allotting separate time for *avarnas* to worship in the temples was criticized by *avarna* elites, Congress socialists and its was also unacceptable even to the *savarna* nationalists. The co-operation extended to the temple entry movements not only by different castes but also by non Hindus especially the Muslims and Christians confirm the fact that people viewed such agitations as steps to achieve social equality and justice. They also viewed it as a

movement for the secularization of the society. Such differing perceptions - viewing the temple entry agitations as an exclusively Hindu problem versus the movement for social justice - made the *savarna* nationalist position precarious.

The dissemination of the ideology of social equality propounded by reform movements contributed to the sprouting of local level organizations in different parts of Malabar. These organizations took the struggle for social equality to the grass root level. They popularized *mishravivaham* and *mishrabhojanam* and called up on the people to fight against socio-religious evils prevalent in the society. The *Jati Nashini Sabha* of Kannur under the leadership of Swami Anand Thirth campaigned against all the vestiges of caste identity. Swami Anand Thirth also synthesized the anti-caste ideology of Sree Narayana Guru with the teachings and practices of Mahatma Gandhi and carried the struggle against caste oppression to all the contested sites.

The attempt of the *Savarna* nationalists to confine their work to the narrow limits of temple entry agitations and ameliorative work among the depressed classes and 'rousing the conscience of the *savarnas*' was bitterly contested by the rising classes. The polluting and depressed classes of Malabar were more concerned with removing discrimination from public places than initiating them in to the *savarna* mode of worship. The Leftist group emerging in Malabar also criticized the nationalist stand of giving undue emphasis to such trivial issues. They argued that focusing attention on



issues like ameliorative work among *Harijans*, temple entry and 'change of heart' of the *savarnas* would result in diverting the attention of the people from the anti-imperialist struggles. Naturally they distanced themselves from the nationalist discourse on social inequality and began organizing peasants, workers, aided school teachers, youths etc. The class organizations thus formed began concerted efforts to invert the power structure of the Malabar society. The attempts made by *Karshakasangham* to challenge the dress, usages and customs denoting hierarchy and difference are the notable example. The inversion of traditional power relations initiated by *Karshakasangham* was copied by the working class organisations, youth organizations and aided school teachers union. The class wise mobilization of the people brought the depressed classes to the arena of public/political activity. This in turn benefited both the leftist organizations and the polluting and depressed classes.

Parallel to the political initiatives to mitigate the evils of caste system and untouchability, we can also notice the growth of community and class consciousness among the polluting and depressed classes. The *Tiyas* waged a consistent struggle for opening the roads and public places at Dharmadom, Tali road at Calicut and Kalpathy and other innumerable contested sites. They also raised the demand for due share in Government jobs and fair treatment to them in educational institutions and the like. Such struggles contributed to the transformation of the society. Long years of struggle waged by the *Tiyas* in the contested sites in the long run forced them to ally

with radical organizations. This in turn contributed to the weakening of community consciousness and merging with the class organizations of peasants and workers. This is clear from the statement of Malabar SNDP Yogan which requested the lower castes to join with those forces which strive for social and economic equality. Thus the gradual transformation of the community consciousness to class consciousness contributed to the secularization of the society.

The depressed classes of Malabar entered the arena of social activity only from the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The efforts of the missionaries, reform movements and political activists to address their problems were only steps to highlight such issues in the context of evangelization, modernization, hinduisation and political struggles against the colonial masters. The disabilities of the polluting castes and depressed classes became significant in the context of the threat of conversion and the gradual growth of democratic institutions. The politics of numbers forced the enlightened and articulate *savarnas* to adopt strategies to achieve Hindu solidarity through bringing the depressed classes to the Hindu fold. Naturally the nationalist emphasis was doing ameliorative work among them and to adopt necessary steps to initiate them to the *savarna* mode of worship including temple entry. But the major concern of the depressed classes was evolving a new self among them and improving their material conditions than initiating in to the *savarna* rituals. The autonomous domain of the depressed class consciousness always highlighted problems like fixity of tenure to

homesteads, freedom to use public places like roads, ferries, teashops, hotels, government offices, freedom of education and the like.

The enlightened section among the depressed classes demanded separate electorate for them in the elected bodies. They also co-operated with Dr. Ambedker and the All India Depressed Class Federation in highlighting their grievances. But the nationalists succeeded in mobilizing a sizeable section of depressed classes through their ameliorative work. The provisions of the Poona Pact including the joint electorate of all Hindus enabled the nationalists to promote those *Harijans* who agreed to their stand. It also enabled the nationalists to restrict the demands of the depressed classes within the Hindu social framework. The enlightened and articulate among the depressed classes found that their effort to gain social equality was narrowed down to temple entry and *savarna* mode of worship. This provoked them to distance themselves from the ameliorative work of the *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. They also became increasingly critical towards the dangers inherent in the Poona Pact in respect of their representation in the elected bodies.

The challenges to the traditional practices and value systems that developed in Malabar in the context of colonial and missionary modernity and the reformist perceptions radically altered the attitude of women to customs and practices. It is to be noted that women also played an active role along with men in mitigating the evils of caste system, untouchability and the like. They also refused to remove breast cloth while entering temples. The

mobilization of the people under the class organizations of the Leftists enabled women-including those from the depressed classes-to play an active role in public life.

The demand of the depressed classes to have material and social improvements forced them to search for alternatives. Religious conversion was an option which they seriously debated in the 1930's. Conversion to *Tiya* community, Islam and Christianity were the principal proposals put forward in their conferences. But it was given up in course of time. But the space opened through this debate was clearly utilized by the Catholic missionaries in the Chirakkal taluk and succeeded the converting thousands of *Pulayas* to Catholic faith through the *Pulaya Mission* of Fr. Peter Caironi S.J. Another option open to the depressed classes was to join the class organizations propelled by the Leftist forces in Malabar. The struggle of the *Karshakasangham* and other class organizations against the dress, language and customs denoting hierarchy and difference came in tune with the depressed classes struggle for social equality. The demand for the enactment of the *Karshaka Thozhilali Raksha* Bill and the formation of '*Adimatozhilali Sanghatana*' and struggles launched by them enabled the depressed classes to join such organization in large numbers. Through the class organizations of the leftists the depressed classes entered the arena of public activity in large numbers.

Another significant development was the growth of popular militancy in the course of the struggle for social justice. The earliest expression of popular militancy was at Dharmadom where the polluting caste of *Tiyas* forced the *Savarnas* to clear the way. The destruction of the *theendal* board at Tali and the forceful entry to the Tali Samoham road were other notable examples. The use of popular militancy to achieve social justice was visible in the course of Kalpathy agitations also. The attempts made by *Nairs* to have equal rights in temples including the right of bell ringing, claiming *prasadam* by hand and the demand for equal treatment in the *varam* feast were the other examples. Similarly, in Guruvayur the *Sanatanist* attack on the Satyagrahies was countered in the same coin. Force was also employed against those who tried to obstruct the movement of Mahatma Gandhi in the course of the *Harijan* tour of 1934. Parallel to this, the polluting castes (especially *Tiyas*) also entered the temples without taking in to consideration the objection of the *savarnas*. They also took the depressed classes along with them.

The self conscious *Adidravidas* adopted a two fold strategy in this context. As noted earlier temple entry was not a serious concern in the depressed class consciousness. But in many places they had to pay tribute in the form of money and grains. The gradual growth of self respect and self confidence enabled them to discontinue the practice of paying tribute in the form of *Adimappanam*, *Thozhalpanam* and *Adimaanellu Vekkuka* etc. In many places they categorically stated that unless they were given equal treatment, they wont pay such tribute at the '*Adimakallu*' set up for the same

purpose. Along with this they also began entering teashops, barbershops and other public places. They also began using ponds, rivers and other fresh water avenues like other sections in the society without fear and anxiety.

The use of popular militancy became widespread in the years following the enactment of the Malabar Temple Entry Act- 1938. The response of the *savarnas* to the Act also exposed the hollowness of the arguments of the Gandhian nationalists in respect of 'change of heart'. The referendum clause in the Act made it difficult to admit the depressed classes into the temples. This forced those who worked towards the 'change of heart' of the *savarnas* to lament that not even a single temple was opened in Malabar even after years of struggle. It was also pointed out that in Tamilnadu about a dozen temples were opened without any such widespread campaign. The adamant attitude taken by the *Sanatanists* on the issue of temple entry and the failure of the nationalists to influence the caste Hindus provoked the polluting and depressed classes to shift their allegiance to the radical organizations which stood for the inversion of power relations through all means.

The polluting castes and depressed classes with the support of Communists began entering the shrines forcefully. All over Malabar people irrespective of caste affiliations began entering the temple tanks; took bath (*Mungikuli*) and then entered the temples. They also began entering other contested sites. This type of display of popular militancy was annoying to the

*savarna* nationalists. It also forced the Congress ministry in Madras to enact the Madras Temple Entry Act, 1947. The forceful entry into the contested sites was an attempt to assert the rights of the lower orders of the society than to practice the *savarna* mode of worship. The adamant *Sanatanists* felt that their sacred shrines were polluted and so they withdrew from the shrines for the time being. The polluting and depressed classes also evinced little enthusiasm for the rituals and ceremonies in the temples. This shifted the attention of the people towards secular institutions, ideas and value systems. Thus the long years of struggle for social equality and justice yielded the result and the Malabar society entered in to the threshold of secular democracy.