CHAPTER II

RESURGENCE OF THE DESERTED

Compared with most of India, Kerala had an unusually high proportion of literate people in the traditional period. The culture of Kerala in the pre-British period had fostered wide-spread school-going. The upper-caste Hindus had an excellent organized institutional arrangement for educating their wards, especially the male ones.

In the descending order of literacy the position was like this: Brahmin, Kshatriya and Ambalavasi followed by Nair and then Ezhava and the so called slave-castes. The Christians were, of-course, ahead of the Muslims and in-fact right behind the Nairs. Caste rituals, pollution etc. were very predominant in those days. Malayalis distinguished themselves in two kinds of pollution viz; by people whose very approach within certain defined distances causes atmospheric pollution to those of the higher castes and by people who only pollute by actual contact. The following were the prescribed distances at which each caste must stand, viz: the Nayadi (dog-eaters)- 72 feet, the Pulayan (agrarian slave)- 64 feet, the Kanisan (astrologer)-36 feet and the Mukkuvan (fisherman)-24 feet.

A Brahmin should take bath if he happens to touch outsiders. He

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cannot step into the household of the Sudras. For Carpenters 14 feet and for Cherumas 64 feet were the distances to get rid of the pollution. In the novel *Saraswathi Vijayam* there is the depiction of ‘Kuberan Namboothiri’, the villainous character examining the Cherumas, keeping them at a distance of about 64 feet. Among the second class are ranked Muhammadans, Christians and foreign Hindus who defile only by touch….Pollution, however acquired, by the near approach of a low-caste man or by touch, can only be washed out by complete immersion in water.

Although the Nairs were a privileged class, they also had to suffer caste evil like un-approachability. The Brahmins and the Kshatriyas kept the Nairs at some distance apart while talking. If they touched a Nair they had to take bath. Nair should stand 16 feet, Ezhava 32 feet and Pulayas 64 feet away from Brahmins. The whole framework of Hinduism was for the comfort and exaltation of Brahmins. The authority and power vested with the Namboothiris to put anyone to death on the spot, those who did not obey even their cruel orders, and the ease they enjoyed in society made them pleasure lovers.

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The Brahmins had a monopoly of learning for many centuries and doubtless this was one of the ways in which they managed to secure such commanding influence in the country.\textsuperscript{12} Brahmins held monopoly over knowledge during the feudal period particularly in important fields like astronomy and its baser form astrology, political science, mathematics etc. Sanskrit language and the written word were some methods employed to retain their authority. Sanskrit was a secret code that prevented knowledge from spreading among the lower castes.\textsuperscript{13}

A. Ayyappan comments on these customs, “In Kerala there was the most pernicious ritual method of keeping the lower caste constantly at a distance of several yards from the person, residences and institutions of the higher castes, the economic method of preventing them from owning land with severe occupancy rights and the intellectual method of excluding them from all sources of knowledge enshrined in the Sanskrit language”.\textsuperscript{14} This is very clear in the portrayal of the character Kuberan Namboothiri, in the novel Saraswathi Vijayam who furiously asks the Cherumas who studied writing and singing in the ezhuthupalli (the traditional school) of the Saiv (white man), “As per rule you are not allowed to learn writing. If you learn writing starvation will be the result, not only for you but elsewhere in the land. Don’t you see the decreasing rain fall? Also don’t you see thunder and lightning

\textsuperscript{12} William Logan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.108.


too much now? Will it not come, if people do against caste rules? What these abominable white people are doing?”¹⁵

The Brahmins made sure that as long as the lower classes remained ignorant they were submissive. The lower castes had no option but to accept the suzerainty of the Brahmins to escape from his wrath. Even the Kings had to pay respect to the Brahmins. They ranked virtually above the Kings and were to some extent above and outside the political system of the kingdoms. The rulers were dependent on them for the administration of justice. So they were in a position to exercise control over the rulers and enjoy a privileged position.¹⁶

The Brahmin students were usually educated from the institutions like salais (traditional school) and madams (monasteries from where education was imparted to Namboothiri boys). They also practised gurukula (traditional way of learning at the abode of the guru) type of education. The Brahmins became the absolute interpreter of the religious texts and thus they became the powerful class in the society. They seem to have embodied in the Sanskrit language, rules of life regulating their most trivial actions.¹⁷ The occupational list of Kerala’s traditional scholars shows that literacy was designed to conserve custom, to organize and sanction the feudal kingdom and to provide artistic entertainment and religious and philosophical enlightenment to the ruling castes.¹⁸

¹⁵ Potheri Kunhamboo, *op.cit.*, p.35.
The lower class people learned reading, writing and arithmetic and also acquired some competence in agricultural and meteorological sciences through the medium of local languages. The latter type of education was to help the lower class in the practice of their traditional occupation, mainly cultivation of the land. Indigenous institutions were rooted in pre-colonial social order, aimed at functional knowledge and vocational orientation corresponding to the caste hierarchy.

In those days generally everybody aimed at an education that caters to the need of doing karyastha (supervisor) job in the household and property of janmis (landlords). In that kind of educational system study of geography, history and arithmetic were enough. The knowledge that such and such mana (abode of Brahmin) has that much of area of jannam (hereditary property right of the landlord) land was their geography. The study of the stories and the heroic deeds of various janmi Namboothiripads and their predecessors was their history and the knowledge about the paattam (lease) share of each janmi was their arithmetic. The Nair students were educated at the kalari (the traditional school for martial arts). In the kalaris instructions were given both in warfare and letters. The Ezhavas had also their own ezhuthupallis (the traditional school). Ezhuthupallis provided

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education in reading, writing, preliminary arithmetic and a smattering of calendrical science.\textsuperscript{24}

There were also vast sections of the population at the lowest stratum of society belonging to the agrarian slave class who received little education of any kind other than that handed down to them from generation to generation by word of mouth.\textsuperscript{25} By denying right to education to the Sudras, the Brahmins could easily suppress them and exploit their services for the benefit of all the other divisions of society.\textsuperscript{26} But there were exceptions. Even certain sections of the backward communities like those belonging to the Ganaka caste were educationally advanced.\textsuperscript{27} In those days the only one caste who had 100\% literacy was Malayaas. The girls and boys of this community learnt writing.\textsuperscript{28}

In the Mappila schools called \textit{othupallis}, the local \textit{mulla} or leader of the mosque taught children to recognize the Arabic letters, carved on wooden planks. He gave instruction in Malayalam grammar and syntax, logic, the traditions of the prophet, and the chanting of the Quran. The wealthier trading and landowning families employed tutors to educate

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\textsuperscript{25} P.R Gopinathan Nair, \textit{op.cit.}, p 28.


\textsuperscript{27} M.S.A Rao, \textit{Social Movements and Social Transformation- A study of two backward class movements in India}, Delhi, 1987, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{28} Murkoth Kunhappa, \textit{op.cit.}, p.10.
their wealthier children. Some of these learned to speak and write Arabic fluently.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus indigenous education had deep roots among various communities in Malabar. Since literacy was limited within a few communities, literature was also in their purview. During the medieval period majority of the books reflected the voluptuous life of the upper class people.\textsuperscript{30}

**Ezhuthachan- An Iconoclast**

The above kind of literary scenario of Kerala is seen drastically changed with the advent of the *kavithrayams* (three poets) namely Cherusseri, Ezhuthachan and Kunjan Nambiar. It is interesting to note that Ezhuthachan and Kunjan Nambiar did not belong to the Brahmin community. William Logan writes, “It was no less than a revolution when in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century one Tunchath Ezhuthachan, a man of the Sudra caste boldly made an alphabet (the existing Malayalam one-derived chiefly from the *Grantha*-the Sanskrit alphabet of the Tamils, which permitted of the free use of Sanskrit in writing) and boldly set to work to render the chief Sanskrit poems in Malayalam….It was in consequence of his influence and success that Malayalam as a written language obtained its most recent development.”\textsuperscript{31}

Thunchath Ezhuthachan wrote epics keeping a bird in front because the low caste people were supposed not to see Saraswathy, the

\textsuperscript{30} Raghava Warrier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Kerala Charithram*, (Mal), Sukapuram, 1992, p.263.
\textsuperscript{31} William Logan, *op.cit.*, pp.92-93.
Goddess of knowledge.\textsuperscript{32} Actually Ezhuthachan is the Sri Narayana Guru of Nairs- the Guru who consecrated other gods for the Sudra Nairs.\textsuperscript{33} The trio in fact, actuated a shift in the aesthetic realm by the presentation of stories related to the moral values and social criticisms which are palatable to the lower savarna castes like Nairs. This literature helped greatly towards the dissemination of knowledge. By the effective use of literature, Ezhuthachan was erecting a parallel power centre\textsuperscript{34} at a time when Brahmins held sway over letters and literature. The Sanskrit literature was, after this, no longer a secret, and there was perhaps no part of South India where it was more studied by people of many castes during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{35} Also the Malayalam script became the medium of literary Malayalam for high-caste Hindus, and gradually spread to the lower castes and the non-Hindus during the British period, especially with the popularization of printing after the mid-nineteenth century. The spread of government-sponsored schools during the British period also helped to gain universal acceptance for the Malayalam script.\textsuperscript{36}

**Sprouting of Colonialism and Modernity**

In Kerala the horizons of this knowledge transmission became wider and wider by the arrival of missionaries, English language,


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.18.

\textsuperscript{35} William Logan, *op.cit.*, pp. 93-94.

European culture and print. In-fact the print had created a revolution elsewhere. By 1455 John Guttenburg, the inventor of printing could produce only about 200 copies of Bible. But around two crore books had already been printed by 1500 A.D and its number increased to 20 crores in 1600 A.D.\textsuperscript{37}

The history of print in India begins after the advent of the Portuguese. They brought many Jesuit groups to India. The Jesuits adopted several methods to propagate their faith. As a measure they started the first printing press at Goa in 1556.\textsuperscript{38} They introduced the first printing press in Kerala at the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. These presses were in Cochin, Quilon, Vypikkotta and Ambezhakkad.\textsuperscript{39} Although print reached India in the mid 16\textsuperscript{th} century it got an impetus only under the British. It is a truth that the British who came to India primarily for trade happened to be the rulers of this vast region and subsequently started the colonialism.\textsuperscript{40}

Malabar came to the hands of the British with the Treaty of Seringapattam in 1792.\textsuperscript{41} Tipu Sultan of Mysore relinquished to the English company control over Malabar. In 1800 it became a district in the Madras Presidency. Covering an area of 5795 square miles, it was


\textsuperscript{38} Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, New Delhi, 2003, p.33.


\textsuperscript{40} D.K. Field House, *Colonialism (1875 - 1945), An Introduction*, London, 1981, p. 6. He says colonialism means the condition of a subject people and is used exclusively of non-European societies, when under the political control of European states or American.

\textsuperscript{41} William Logan, *op.cit.*, p. 473.
divided into nine *taluks* (sub-division of a revenue district): Chirakkal, Kotayam, Kurumbranad, Calicut, Wynad, Ernad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and Palghat.\textsuperscript{42} According to 1881 census 23.3 lakhs was the population out of which 11.58 lakhs were males and 11.75 lakhs were females.\textsuperscript{43} Of this 69.15% were Hindus, 29%, Muslims and 1.8% Christians. The district proper is bounded on the north by South Canara, on the east by Coorg, Mysore, Nilgiris, and Coimbatore, on the south by the Native state of Cochin and on the west by the Arabian Sea.\textsuperscript{44} It was such a vast area having a sea board of about 150 miles and having an extreme breadth of 80 miles (from Ponnani to Valayar) that the British got. Once the power and control was gained in Malabar it was the sole aim of the British to maintain undisrupted and unchallenged authority.

When the British began to reign over India they had to face multifaceted problems and challenges owing to the diverse nature of the Indian society. For the proper and effective administration they had to collect details of the colonized people which may lead to a better understanding about them. “This was actively pursued during the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by bringing to life a network of cultural institutions and practices which might ensure easy access to knowledge about the colonized. To begin with, attention was focused on textual knowledge and how it could be made available to officials engaged in bringing natives under the colonial cultural umbrella”.\textsuperscript{45}


\textsuperscript{43} William Logan, *op.cit.*, p.VIII.

\textsuperscript{44} *Statistical Atlas of Malabar*, Sl.No 1779, Book No. C/142, RAC.
With the above purpose they started the study of Indian languages. Bernard S.Cohn says that then more and more British officials were learning the classical languages in India (Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic) as well as many of the ‘vulgar’ languages. More importantly this was the period in which the British were beginning to produce an apparatus: grammars, dictionaries, treatises, class books and translations from the languages of India.\footnote{Bernard S.Cohn, “The Command of Language and the Language of the Command” in Ranajit Guha, (ed.), \textit{Subaltern Studies IV}, Delhi 1985, p. 282.} He also noticed that they used these texts for their own purpose and converted Indian forms of knowledge into European objects.\footnote{Ibid., p. 283.} The cultural identities of the dominated Indians were restated as colonial knowledge, thus obfuscating, the historical reality of the dominated cultures.\footnote{K.N Ganesh, “Cultural Encounters Under Colonialism: The Case of Education in Keralam”, \textit{op.cit.}, p.154.}

Even when the Europeans were pilfering our treasure-houses of knowledge to depict it as their own original creations, they considered India as an uncivilized country. The colonialists appropriated indigenous knowledge, denying the dominated people the right to represent their knowledge, and on the other hand, imposed the knowledge of the colonialists using the epistemic space apparently created by the decline of a civilization.\footnote{Ibid.} By then the East India Company was moving away from the task of acquiring knowledge about the subjected to the Anglicist task of imparting knowledge to them. The concern of the state
was now the construction of a colonial subject, a cultural symbol for Indians in quest of modernity. In their efforts to civilize India they introduced many novel ideas and brought many institutions. As a part of this ‘colonial modernity’ most of the parts of Malabar was connected by road which originally aided the troop movements of Tipu but later facilitated trade.

William Logan says, “The Joint Commissioners of East India Company drew up regulations for the administration of the revenue, founded on the Bengal code, modified so as to adopt it to the circumstances of the country. These were followed by regulations for the civil and criminal administration of justice. Among the last acts of the Joint Commissioners was the inauguration of the postal establishment”. And with the opening on 12th May 1862, the section beyond Podannur, the West Coast was put into direct railway communication with the presidency town which made a great leap in the transportation facilities of Malabar. The momentum and acceleration of this encroachment of colonial rule in every aspect of social life was great. The reforms in administrative, economic and judicial fields heralded a revolutionary change during the second half of the 19th century throughout Kerala and among all communities.

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In the early days of colonialism in India, the educational policy of the East India Company was manifested in such a way as to enable paradigmatic influence defining spaces and establishing channels of cultural and political negotiation between the rulers and their subjects. Mount Stuart Elphinstone’s (Governor of Bombay) minutes of 1823 contained a series of exhaustive proposals that impressively enunciated the full scope of appropriate intentions.\(^{55}\)

But the British rulers in practice managed to topsy-turvy the above proposals in Malabar. The British did not support the old system of indigenous education since it was not beneficial for the colonial administration. British rule while exploitative had set in motion economic forces leading to the destruction of the traditional Indian society.\(^{56}\) Actually the government needed English educated people to rule the illiterate masses in a better way. So they were interested in imparting English education forsaking the traditional one. Lord Macaulay said, “I feel that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the

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\(^{55}\) Extract minute by Mount Stuart Elphinstone in Aparna Basu (ed.), *Indian Education in Parliamentary papers*, part I, Bombay, 1952, p.197. These were the proposals- “the following are the principle measures required for the diffusion of knowledge among the natives: first, to improve the mode of teaching at the native schools, and to increase the number of schools; second, to supply them with school books; third, to hold out some encouragement to the lower orders of the natives; fourth, to establish schools for teaching the European sciences and improvements in the higher branches of education; fifth, to provide for the preparation and publication of books of moral and physical sciences in native languages; sixth, to establish schools for the purpose of teaching English to those disposed to pursue it as a classical language and as a means of acquiring knowledge of European discoveries; seventh, to hold-forth encouragement to the natives in the pursuit of those latest branches of knowledge.

millions whom we govern- a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect.”

Thus the British government held the opinion from the beginning itself that it had no responsibility to make education universal. It said that the people who had interest in education should build schools; the government would extend small financial assistance. As a result the colonial system in India failed to introduce a system of public instruction among the rural population and neglected even the town centres in Malabar like Tellicherry, Cannanore and Calicut…..Therefore public instruction in its modern sense was given last priority by the British in India during the early 19th century. Wedded to the policy of higher education and indifference to the indigenous education the British Malabar neither witnessed any significant government efforts nor that of the Christian missionaries. Secondly the British economic policy left the landlord among the caste Hindus to take care of their educational needs in the handful of British schools established by the Christian missionaries while the vast majority of the population were the most rack rented in the world and too poor to afford English education.

Since the government did not show interest in the mass education, the Christian missionaries and the private managements were entrusted with the above responsibility. So the progress of elementary education

acquired a slow momentum in Malabar during the subsequent period. The fact that the educated people leaned towards English education was also a reason for the retarded growth of primary education. Infact mass literacy needs mass school-going which began only in the early 20th century.\textsuperscript{60} But even at the end of the 19th century there was no mass literacy.\textsuperscript{61} Mass education is not possible in Indian society without suppressing the great barriers to mass education –gender, caste discrimination and class oppression.\textsuperscript{62}

The British policy in Malabar and other rural districts was not in favour of structural transformation of society through industrial development and popular education. Therefore there was no development of human capital, one of the essential features of economic growth also. In brief, the social transition was not accelerated in rural areas by the British. It was against this social background that the Basel Mission has acted as a catalytic agent that introduced changes and social progress.\textsuperscript{63}

**The Advent of Missionaries**

The Charter Act of 1833 of the British Parliament facilitated the European missionaries to carry out evangelical work in the territories governed by the English East India Company.\textsuperscript{64} Encouraging such agencies was the government policy in those days because the colonial rule was not ready to bear the huge financial burden for public

\textsuperscript{60} V.K Ramachandran, *op.cit.*, p.48.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p.55.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p.56.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p.58.
instruction. It was also necessary to encourage the missionary work to appease the locals of England. In the beginning of 19th century a lot of missionary societies were founded in England in order to save the heathen souls as part of the colonial strategy of evangelicalism. This new strategy was active both within and outside the church. The Basel Evangelical Mission, established in Switzerland in 1815, began its activities in North Malabar a quarter of century later, establishing a network of elementary and high schools by the end of the century.

The Local Board Act of the Madras Govt. in 1834 was the base on which the educational activity began. The new historical situation introduced the German Basel Mission in South India by 1835. Malabar which had been governed directly by the British and where no evangelical activities were undertaken formerly by any other mission opened new venue promoting the gospel.

The Basel Mission undertook many social service activities as running of educational institutions, printing and publishing houses, hospitals, orphanages and old age homes. The Basel Mission took a strong stand against caste. The mission rejected outright the pattern of caste related occupations and experimented creating a group of persons without castes. The Basel Mission was responsible for setting up the

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66 Peter Van Der Veer, Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain, Delhi, 2002, pp.6-7.
67 Dilip M.Menon, Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar 1900-1948, New Delhi, 1994, p.64.
first weaving and tile factories in Malabar largely to provide employment for its converts.\textsuperscript{70}

In Malabar the Basel Mission under the guidance of Dr. Hermann Gundert started the first school at Tellicherry on 14\textsuperscript{th} May 1839.\textsuperscript{71} It was the primary object of the Basel Mission to place education within the reach of the masses, and to impart a thorough elementary education in the people’s vernacular.\textsuperscript{72} The objectives of the establishment of schools by missionaries were several. The first and probably the most important was that intervention in the process of dissemination of knowledge was the best way for proselytisation. Thus the objective was to convey through the medium of education a great amount of Christian truth to the native mind. Every branch of knowledge communicated was made subservient to the desired end.\textsuperscript{73} When the Basel Mission concentrated on its programmes at Tellicherry they found it essential to start primary educational institutions… Primary education was also considered by them as a matter of priority in spreading the Gospel in a region like Malabar.\textsuperscript{74} At Nettur, Calicut and Palakkad also the Mission started schools. The Basel Mission opened 42 elementary schools in Malabar between 1839 and 1914.\textsuperscript{75} In 1862 Brennan set up the Brennen School at


\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}, p.77.

\textsuperscript{73} K.N Ganesh, “Cultural Encounters Under Colonialism: The Case of Education in Keralam”, \textit{op.cit.}, p.168.

\textsuperscript{74} K.K.N.Kurup, “The Basel Mission and Social Change in Malabar”, \textit{op.cit.}, p.58.

\textsuperscript{75} Chummar Choondal, “The Basal Mission”, in M.G.S Narayanan, (ed.),\textit{op.cit.}, p.140.
Tellichery. In 1872, the government directly controlled the affairs of the school. The high schools and colleges built later were the results of private enterprise and generosity. During the first half of the 19th century the missionary schools were the only source of education for the lower castes as well as for girls. Noted writer and journalist Murkoth Kumaran reminisces the services of the Basel Mission with gratitude in his biography. He says that most of us do not think much about the benefits to the country done by the Basel Mission Society by starting higher education institutions like Basel Mission High School at Tellicherry even before 75 years ago.

The Basel Mission had its difficulties in the field of education. Their reports stated that many of the higher caste people were afraid of the school. However, the intermediary castes like the Thiyyas sent their boys and girls to these institutions. Most of them were drawn to the school by the hope of worldly advancement to be obtained by a little proficiency in English. The Mission had even organized schools for children exclusively belonging to the depressed castes. During the last

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78 Murkoth Kunhappa, *Murkoth Kumaran*, (Mal), *op.cit.*, p.36. Kumaran reminds: “In the early period there was not much who understood about the need and the greatness of English education. The rich did not want that, the poor could not afford……..The Thiyyas who had not any scare of losing the caste, studied English right from the beginning. In such a period many poor students were given free education and thus many reached the top ladder of power and as a result the local people were enlightened about the benefits of English education. Fifty years ago when I was a student here the Brennen High School was meant for the children of the rich and big officers and the Mission school for the children of the poor.”
79 Eleventh Report of the German Mission, Mangalore, 1851, p.32.
quarter of the 19th century the educational activities of the Mission culminated in the establishment of Malabar Christian College at Calicut.

The success and popularity of Basel Mission schools depended a great deal upon the personalities of two great men Rev. Samuel Hebich and Dr. Hermann Gundert. Although the instruction imparted through these institutions (primary educational institutions) were not strictly secular in the modern sense they contained some of the modern trends of English education which were incorporated in the modern educational policy of the British in India. The missionaries were always by the side of the lower classes to espouse their cause. Education also spread among them and beyond everything else this paved the way for their betterment…the missionary schools afforded ample facilities for the education of the converts.

Thus despite the discouragement from the part of the government, the children of the lower castes received education through missionary schools which were open to all communities. This helped the backward communities to increase their awareness of the world and imbibe modern ideas. The spread of education made the lower castes conscious of the importance of overcoming their economic and social backwardness. Among the lower castes more literate were those who became the members of the Mission. Though their literacy was meant

80 Wilma John, “Contribution of the Basel Mission to the Socio-Cultural Life of the West Coast of India”, op. cit., p.79.
for reading Bible and prayers it did not confine within the imagined limits. Due to this kind of modern education and interaction with the Mission societies, the Dalit sections got a social space in the ‘colonial modernity’. But this was made possible only by the continuous tussle with the hegemony. Simultaneously they got a virtual liberty from the customary system of slavery and became agricultural labourers.\textsuperscript{84}

In fact it was the expulsion of converts from the traditional caste-related occupations that prompted the Basel Missionaries to initiate economic activities. The social engineering effected here was in creating a casteless group of converts. This was achieved by the spread of literacy, intermarriages of converts with different caste back grounds and the factory environment under which the converts worked.\textsuperscript{85} Many observers of Basel Mission have highlighted the fact that there have not been instances of mass conversions. Calvinist theology lays emphasis on individual salvation. The chosen individual has to prove his selection through his activities in life. This would deny the possibility for mass conversion. From the 1\textsuperscript{st} table given below, it is very clear that conversions were not too much as it is believed and from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} table it can be understood that the majority of converts belonged to Thiyyas and Cherumas.

Table 1

\textbf{Conversions up to 1914 are included.}\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p.148.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannanore</td>
<td>1615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tellicherry</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chombala</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calicut</td>
<td>2735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manjeri</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codacal</td>
<td>1255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caniyamkulam</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaghat</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

The following table gives the caste background of converts of Codacal Parish as on 17-12-1893.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nair</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chetti</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiyya</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmith</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vettuvan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheruman</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vannan</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaniyan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>453</td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Infact the extent of conversion of Basel Mission was small. As in 1914 the total number of converts was less than 20,000. The direct social impact was primarily among the converts who were a microcosm among the society of Malabar and South Canara. The real impact was by way of a demonstration effect which could in turn make the depressed castes more strongly challenge the existing authoritarian structure.  

Dr. Hermann Gundert along with Mrs. Gundert played an important role in the educational activities of Basel Mission over a decade in Malabar. As it was a formative period which had inter-related

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87 Ibid., p.149.
88 Ibid., p.144.
to the British educational policy the seminal role played by the Gunderts became a legacy in this region. Under their direct supervision day schools, female schools and boarding schools were started by the Mission. They were categorized as Malayalam school and English free school.\(^\text{89}\)

It can be said that the missionaries were the cultural leaders of colonialism. The link between the European imperial power and the missionary groups dates back to the time of Portuguese. To shatter the overwhelming Brahminical hegemony of feudalism and to install a new alternative instead, the colonial cultural practitioners or the missionaries developed two zones of activity in the field of knowledge: one was education and the other printing and journalism.\(^\text{90}\)

There is no doubt that the missionaries regarded their educational activities as an important means for proselytization.\(^\text{91}\) In respect of education the missionaries evolved a bi-forked approach to penetrate into the life of the masses of Malabar. One was to propagate English language highlighting it as an ideal language and the other to manifest a new Malayalam prose style palatable to anyone.\(^\text{92}\)

The missionaries were not only interested in educating the illiterate and ignorant but also to educate them in their way. There was already existing indigenous curriculum which imparted knowledge in

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\(^\text{89}\) K.K.N.Kurup, “The Basal Mission and Social Change in Malabar”, \textit{op.cit.}, p.60.
\(^\text{90}\) Shibu Muhammed, \textit{op.cit.}, p.105.
\(^\text{91}\) Koji Kawashima, \textit{Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore 1858-1936}, New Delhi, 2000, p.87.
\(^\text{92}\) K.N Ganesh, “Malayala Saahithyathinte Samskaarika Bhoomishasthram”, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.626
the local cultural context, which could be countered only by developing a new culture of knowledge which was disseminated through a new institution in the western model, the school. However the school could exist in the local cultural context only when the culture of knowledge disseminated through the school assumes dominance. For this the missionaries sought the aid of as yet unused methodology of translation and the technology of printing.\textsuperscript{93}

**English supersedes**

For the dissemination of English education during the 1850’s the missionaries started a few Anglo-vernacular schools. These schools were models on the English schools and the text books used here were translations from the English books.\textsuperscript{94} Thus the function of the new school system was the introduction of modern colonial culture. The principal feature which symbolized was the introduction of English.\textsuperscript{95} English was the only medium for higher education at that time. Veena Naregal says, “The emergence of English as the sole language as higher learning meant the relegation of the vernaculars as ‘fit’ only for primary education.”\textsuperscript{96} English was depicted not as a language of the clerks but as a cultural language of the aristocrats that propagate universal virtues.\textsuperscript{97}


\textsuperscript{94} Koji Kawashima, op.cit, p.90.

\textsuperscript{95} K.N Ganesh, “Cultural Encounters Under Colonialism: The Case of Education in Keralam”, op.cit., p.171.


\textsuperscript{97} K.N Ganesh, “Malayaala Saahithyathinte Samskaarika Bhoomishasthram”, op.cit., p.626
All these ensured the highest status of English. Gauri Viswanathan observes: “English represented both a language and a system of knowledge against which native cultural and social practices were to be measured and then reformed”.\(^98\) English was then the medium of instruction in the upper and lower secondary schools. The education department advised the managers to adopt vernacular as the medium up to third forum or 7\(^{th}\) standard.\(^99\) In those days also learning in English was a symbol of status and prestige. So the suggestion was unheeded.

By 1870’s political, economic and legal transactions were made in English. Thus English education became the necessary criterion for communication and securing a job. This fact is elaborated by Murkoth Kunhappa: “Under the East India company there were many officers among the Thiyyas including Churayi Raman Tahasildar who did not know English. But during the time of Churayi Kunhappa, the son of Raman Tahasildar (1870’s) English was necessary to argue in the courts. It was a time of transition of court language from Malayalam to English.\(^100\) In general those who played a leading role in literary, social and political spheres underwent English education after their indigenous education. English clearly replaced Sanskrit as the elite language, language of knowledge and culture, a displacement symptomatic of the cultural transformation under colonialism. Higher learning had to be knowledge imparted in English, Western science, technology, humanities and Law.\(^101\)

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99 Education Dept. File No. A 809, p.21-RAC.

Besides propagating English education the missionaries developed a new prose style palatable to laymen and the downtrodden. This missionary prose was projected as a language which could be used by everybody, unlike Sanskrit and Prakrit. This re-ordering was originally the work of the missionary who had to express his ideas as simply possible in an alien language, but gradually became the language of pedagogic and later literary communication.\textsuperscript{102} K.N Ganesh observes, “the missionaries played a new method of communicative strategy by converting the oral language directly into written language which was different from those methods of Arnos Pathiri and Paulinose Pathiri in which they used an aristocratic language profuse with Sanskrit words. Another intention was to create an easier medium for the missionaries who were compelled to study a language like Malayalam with numerous diversities. In the schools founded by the missionaries they developed a curriculum according to this prose form. Missionaries like Dramont, Benjamin Bailey and Dr.Hermann Gundert prepared vocabularies. And this was given wide propaganda by their presses. Indeed the missionary prose to a large extent influenced the linguistic style of the periodicals and the books published during the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century”.\textsuperscript{103}

By the advent of ‘colonial modernity’ thus there occurred the first phase of transition. “The missionary-colonial culture gave importance to colonial, economic and social adjustments forsaking the regional aspects. There came a common nature for agricultural relations and

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, p.179.
\textsuperscript{103} K.N Ganesh, “Malayala Saahityathinte Saamskarika Bhoomishastram”, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.625-6.
social interactions. Also there developed institutions and offices of hegemony like courts, police, education and officials for various departments. The customary laws and precedents were replaced by written regulations. Colonial forms of knowledge took the place of indigenous knowledge. The dispensation of justice was transferred to courts from the institution of natvar (traditional judge) and the Brahminical Sanskrit tradition gave its way to colonial mundane culture and English”.

A dialogue in *Indulekha* between the characters Panchu Menon and Shinu Pattar indicates the fact that due to the establishment of courts, even among the ordinary people legal awareness had been reached by 1880’s. The importance of the study of English is also underlined. The context is the heated discussion between Panchu Menon and Shinu Pattar, when Panchu Menon objects Madhavan’s (hero) idea of sending Shinu’s son for English education. Antagonized by this, Panchu Menon bans Shinu from coming to his oottupura (the dining place of Brahmins attached to temples) or to the temple. But Shinu retorts that a Brahmin can go to all oottupuras and temples and if he is prevented he will lodge a petition. If it were the feudal system Shinu Pattar would not have dared to threat a feudal landlord like Panchu Menon by telling that he will file a suit. But with the installation of the British government in Malabar and the establishment of offices and courts, legal awareness enhanced, even among the ordinary people.

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105 The first novel in Malayalam written by O.Chandu Menon in 1889.
Another dialogue in the novel *Lakshmikesavam* 107 (first published in 1892) also highlights the above truth.

The above dialogues shed light on the transition in the society of Malabar during the 1880’s. The legal awareness had increased to such an extent that it enabled one Kumaran Nair to file a case in 1892 and that against *Kerala Pathrika*, the famous newspaper. The report in the *Kerala Pathrika* in May 1892 said that, that a complaint has been lodged in the Deputy Magistrate’s court Calicut, by one Kumaran Nair second complainant in the Feroke case, against *Kerala Pathrika* for not inserting in the paper the name of the Printer and Publisher of the paper. 108

In this process of transition the contribution of print was substantial. The roads, canals, and railways which formed the arterial network of colonialism helped the promotion of print media. The aim of printing itself was to disseminate knowledge in the quickest possible manner. At the same time the arterial network accelerated the tempo of achieving the purpose of print by several times. In such a propitious environment, by setting printing houses the missionaries targeted the propagation of Christianity easily among the natives. 109

107 Padu Menon, *Lakshmikeshavam*, (Mal), Kottayam, 2004, p.30. The dialogue is as follows. Landlord: Why not bring here and give him(Narayanan) four blows for abusing us?

Manager: Now it is not the old period. Apart from that since he has studied English he has connection with many men of eminence. If you do so it may lead to some litigation which may malign your image.

Landlord: While I was a child I have seen some of my uncles doing so.

Manager: Now we cannot do like that. Since the country is under the company, the freedom and knowledge of people has considerably increased.

108 *Kerala Pathrika*, 21st May 1892, MNNPR, TNA.

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The introduction of print broke through the barriers of knowledge, built into the pre-colonial curriculum. English became the language of honour and self-advancement. The growth of English as a form of social control ensured the cultural hegemony of Western thought and values. English became the medium of dissemination of advanced scientific and technical knowledge, which successfully eliminated the Brahminical-Sanskrit system of higher knowledge. Hitherto Brahmins held monopoly over knowledge. The first threat to this monopoly came from the missionaries. Newspapers, the most developed form of printing communication introduced by them in the 19th century were centres of colonial knowledge formation born outside the feudal communicative system.

The Basel Mission and the Church Mission Society developed journalism as a form of cultural discourse for the first time in Kerala using printing press. The first Malayalam magazine Rajyasamaachaaram and the second news magazine Paschimodayam were the newspapers published by Basel Mission. The language and content of the missionary newspapers and curriculum followed in their schools were similar. Science, geography, Malayalam, English and Bible were the subjects in the curriculum. The Basel Mission educational institutions gave an emphasis to catechetical instruction including Bible history, geography as taught by the Greek, but it

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111 Shibu Muhammed, op.cit., p.106.

included English, Malayalam, arithmetic and particularly needle work for girls. The author Joseph Mooliyil also gives a vivid account of the system of curriculum followed in the mission schools, in his novel Sukumari which is a mirror of the mission activities of the 1860’s. In the novel it is said that catechism, Malayalam reading, arithmetic, handwriting, English reading, geography, history, health science, needle work and music were the topics included in the syllabus of standard five.

Rajyasamachaaram largely contained Christian principles. The contents of Paschimodayam included astrology, traditions of ancient Kerala, geography, star gazing, evolution of the Malayalam alphabet, foreign news etc. To put it briefly missionary journalism can be interpreted as the informal form of colonial education. For the creation of colonial information and formation of subjectivity the policy of the missionary newspapers was to ridicule the feudal overlords and their faith on the one hand and to present justification and logic for colonialism on the other. For the overlords, the formation of subjectivity was caste based. By gaining beyond caste divisions and creating a common subjectivity, colonialism could easily win support from the subject people.

The missionary colonial culture was a new experience for a society that had been grown under the influence of Brahmin Sanskrit

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114 The novel in Malayalam written by Joseph Mooliyil in 1897.
116 Shibu Muhammed, op.cit., p.108.
117 Ibid.
tradition. It is because of the diversity in experience, that people were ideologically fascinated by the above culture, though it was grown as a new form of hegemony. To those who were lying in the bottom ladder of Brahmin-Sanskrit tradition it was a means of emancipation. The Christian ethics, spread by missionary colonial culture became instruments to criticize the feudal culture. Infact the sharp criticism against \textit{janmi} system and matrilineal system was born out of the concepts of private wealth and gender relations proposed by the colonial ethos. The religious and cultural ‘mission’ works among the untouchables gave a novel orientation for the growth of a new consciousness.\footnote{K.N Ganesh, “Malayaala Sahithyathinte Saamskaarika Bhoomisasthram”, \textit{op.cit.}, p.622.}

\textbf{Alternative for Feudalism}

Thus the 19\textsuperscript{th} century makes and marks revolutionary changes in the customs of a feudal society based on traditions and shows many symptoms heralding its death. And the missionary-colonial culture installed an ‘alternative’ instead. It was by way of this ‘revolution’ that the lower classes got emancipation from the hegemony of Brahmanical feudalism. “In the landlord system the inferiority of the lower classes was an accepted fact. It was also agreed that they were not equal to the upper classes in respect of education, life style and behaviour. But in the new circumstances it was difficult to establish that the lower classes were not eligible for English education and for new employments”.\footnote{K.N Ganesh, \textit{Kerala Samooha Padanangal}, (Mal), Pathanamthitta, 2002, p.39.}

Since the advent of the British government in India in 1857 the following tendencies were very conspicuous in the early years of its
rule. 1. By the streamlining of the Nair force and disarmament (revenue, police enactments) they could curtail the strength of the landlords and the *janmis*. 2. By new legal enactments they could streamline the political influence of caste and religious institutions and could entrust it to a bureaucracy not at all dependent upon the landlords leading to the creation of capitalist system. 3. Modernization through the introduction of English education and by the discouragement of customs like matrilineal system and slavery. 4. Showering encouragement upon the middle class like the Thiyyas who rose to the ladder of progress through trade with the company. 120 The English Government allowed the lower classes to enter into state services for various jobs, which were denied to them earlier. This meant the opening up of state services to people who were hitherto kept outside, and thereby enabled them to share power and prestige of position in the hierarchy. This process helped to instill a sense of equality among them. 121 The commercialization and the growth of capitalistic relations in the colonial period improved the financial status of communities like Ezhavas. The lower classes too wanted representation in the rule of the land. 122

Infact the English East India Company from the very beginning, chopped the wings of the rulers of the various kingdoms thereby making them as titular *naduvaazhis* (local chieftains). It was done by vesting the political power in the hands of the company. But they did not make any change in the case of the *janmis* and tenants. At this juncture it can be

seen that the large communities of Nairs were getting split into three variant groups. Majority of the sthaani (big landlord) Nairs were stripped off from power, like the Namboothiris who were engaged in extravaganza and pomposity utilizing the land under their control. They wasted their time and money by engaging in polygamy and spending time in kathakali (a Kerala art-form) and poetry. At the same time many of the Nairs who were deprived of the army work with the landlords, were making a jihad (holy war) with the new government. They were making an exodus to the medieval dreams by turning off their faces to English and modern world. But a minority among the Nair community ‘fighting against a sea of troubles’ managed to send their children for English education.

But the Thiyyas could explore the most, the new avenue of education opened to them, due to various reasons. In Kolathunad a sizable Eurasian population grew up as a result of marriages between Englishmen and women of Thiyya matrilineal caste. The offspring retained Hinduism and their matrilineal kinship system, but they learned English and some of them became prosperous military leaders, merchants, cash-crop farmers and professionals even before British rule. The great leap forward of the Thiyyas starts when the English East India Company and later the British government took over the reigns in Malabar. Dr. Hermann Gundert’s dictionary defines the Thiyya

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124 Ibid.
as a community which rose to prominence by serving the British in India.\textsuperscript{126}

**Thiyyas Ascend the Ladder**

The period from 1840 to 1890 can be regarded as the flourishing period of Thiyyas. The Thiyyas of Malabar, though were *avarnas* (the lower caste) and much inferior in the social structure, had a traditional background in the study of Sanskrit and other subjects. This community had contributed scholars, therapeutists, and soldiers. Therefore the Thiyyas had culturally come up to a position to acquire English education and there existed no caste barrier to hinder them from venturing for a new experimentation.\textsuperscript{127}

But the high caste people of Malabar did not respond to the call. Caste practices and the weight of tradition prevented the Namboothiris from acquiring English education although they were able to afford the same.\textsuperscript{128} Perhaps the feeling of the loss of political power and other rights may have made them to cling more to the illusionary vanities of caste-community and to hide in the shell of conservatism than accepting English education to ascend the ladder of success.\textsuperscript{129} The *ambalavasis* (a temple-connected community) and other castes that performed various services in the temple stuck to their traditional loyalty to the Brahmins.


\textsuperscript{127} K.K.N Kurup, “Vidyaabhyaasavum purogathiyum thiyya samudhayathil” *op.cit.*, p.434.


\textsuperscript{129} M.G.S Narayanan, “Malabar Samooham Kazhinja Noottandil”, *op.cit.*, p.416.
The intimate connection of the Nairs with the Namboothiiris also led them to stay away from government service.\textsuperscript{130}

But there was not any scare among the Thiyyas of losing any caste sanctity and it was easier for them to meddle with the Europeans. The financial situation of the Thiyyas was much improved by the new political situation. Cannanore, Tellicherry, Calicut and Palghat were the main centres of European activities then. There was great possibility to get employment in these centres during the early stages of European activities. Some of the Thiyyas now became contractors and they procured monopoly contract for providing spices, toddy, liquor and vegetables to the Company agencies. Some others did menial jobs under European bosses and another few worked as peons in the European army.\textsuperscript{131}

Thiyyas engaged in various kinds of trade other than toddy tapping. Majority of the Thiyyas were farmers. Some of them who had cultivated in leased lands amassed riches later by encroaching forest lands and doing farming activities there. Those who had worked as agricultural labourers also started to cultivate themselves in leased paddy fields. During the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, there was steep rise in the price of agricultural commodities. By the surplus money they purchased new lands. There was a time when 10 rupees was enough to purchase one acre of land. In that way also some became rich. Thus Thiyyas became landowners in many a way.\textsuperscript{132} Those Thiyyas who did

\textsuperscript{130} Murkoth Kunhappa, “Thiyyas of Kerala”, in M.G.S Narayanan, (ed.), op.cit., p.158.
\textsuperscript{132} Murkoth Kunhappa, Murkoth Kumaran, op.cit., pp.27-28.
not own lands got progress through various trades; some carved laterite stones from farm lands and some engaged in the shaping of those stones. When those stones were used for building houses the Thiyyas became masons and contractors. Those who made pathways in the paddy fields earlier, became road workers. Head-load workers became bullock-cart drivers and horse-cart drivers. When trains were introduced Thiyyas became engine drivers followed by the British and the Anglo-Indians. When motor cars were introduced Thiyyas who were expert in bullock-cart driving became their motor-car drivers too.133

Among the Thiyyas there were certain important officers in the early period. There were many Thiyyas who held the post of Subedar and Jamedhar in the local militia under the East India Company and Tellicherry was a strategic centre of the company in Malabar. At Mayilankunnu, Morakkunnu, Dharmadamkunnu etc. Thiyyas were appointed as army sentinels. Thiyyas were army officers under the East India Company. The letter of the Govt. of Madras in October 1936 throws light on the fact that the Thiyyas had a regiment in Malabar earlier.134

As there was a super-stratum of Thiyya Pandits throughout the lands the Englishmen used them as munshis (teachers) to learn

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133 Ibid., p.28.
134 Public Dept., D.O.No. 22111-1 dt 22nd October 1936, Govt.of Madras, RAC. The text of the letter follows, “Public dept. D.O.No.22111-1 dt.22 October 1936, Govt.of Madras.HIS EXCELLENCY LORD ERSKINE, G.C.I.E GOVT. OF MADRAS. Thiyyas represent one of the most important and educated communities of North Malabar and until lately, there was a special regiment (Thiyya) in Malabar, which has done useful service. Now that this regiment is being disbanded, it is only proper that Thiyyas should be given sufficient representation in both the ranks of the Malabar battalion, especially in view of the fact that Malabar has a special Territorial Force of its own”. 
Malayalam. Naturally therefore clerical jobs, positions in the police department, junior executive posts in the revenue sections etc. were filled by the Thiyyas. It was in 1857 that Queen Victoria assumed sovereignty over India. Within two years (1859) we find a Thiyya member, Kuria Kanaran-becoming a deputy collector. The decades that followed witnessed a spate of this untouchable community filling all sorts of posts under government. At one time all the ten taluks (subdivision of a revenue district) of Malabar were ruled by men belonging to this untouchable community as Tahasildars (head of a revenue sub-division) which is perhaps a unique phenomenon in India in the last decade of the 19th century.\footnote{Murkoth Kunhappa, \textit{Murkoth Kumaran}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.161.}

Churayi Kanaran, Uppott Kannan (Deputy collectors), Panangaadan Kannan, Diwan Bahadur E.K Krishnan (Sub-Judges), Churayi Raman, Karai Govindan, Ondane Kunhampoo (Tahasildars), Principal P.Sankunni, eminent teachers like Panangaadan Raman, Thatha Kanaran, Mooliyil Krishnan and so on belong to the above list. Churayi Kunhappa, Kottiyathu Ramunni, Oyitti Krishnan, Potheri Kunhampoo, C. Krishnan and so on were important lawyers of that time. Some of the Thiyyas started English and Malayalam newspapers. Adv. Poovaadan Raman, the founder of \textit{Malabar Spectator} and \textit{Kerala Sanchari} and C.Krishnan, the editor of \textit{Mithavadi}, other journalists like Kallaatt Raghavan and Murkoth Kumaran and so on belong to this community. Ayyathan Janaki and Murkoth Madhavi of this community were the first ladies to take degree in modern medicine from Malabar.\footnote{K.K.N Kurup, “Vidyaabhyaasavum purogathiyum thiyya samudhayathil”, \textit{op.cit.}, p.436.}
In short this was the period that witnessed the rise of bureaucrats. In Malabar all these men of eminence who were in pursuit of English education were the contribution of the untouchable community— the Thiyya. These new elites were born out of the colonial and missionary presence in North Malabar.

Among the Thiyyas those who were financially marching forward utilized the educational opportunities to the maximum. Also among those who have passed matriculation examination, Thiyyas were the majority. Considering their qualifications many of them got posting in the government service. This in a way helped the rise of a new salaried class. In the government service their inferior caste status was not yet a problem in Malabar. (But things were much different in the princely state of Travancore. In 1891 in Travancore the literacy of Ezhavas and Pulayas were 1.5% and 0.09% respectively.) It is a truth that in order to get more government appointments for the Ezhava community Dr. Palpu and others furnished Ezhava memorandum which did not find any fruits. This pathetic condition in Travancore is very explicit from a powerful editorial in Malayali comparing the Ezhavas of Travancore with those of the Thiyyas of Malabar. “What we are obliged to bring to the public

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138 Dilip M. Menon, Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar 1900-1948, op.cit., p.64.
notice is the utter indifference which the Diwans of Travancore and the Madras Government have been and are showing in this matter to the half a million (Ezhavas) out of the two and a half million in Travancore. The two distinct grievances are non-admission into all Government schools and non-admission into all Government services”.)

Lower caste employees utilized the advantages of the new postings in the government service, for their redemption from their inferior status. Even a peon of inferior caste in the revenue department was allowed to visit a Brahmin house by virtue of being in that post. Strict caste rules had not permitted such visits so far. So indirectly government service could elevate them from the inferior status. Therefore the Thiyyas by way of English education and government employment tried as far as possible to liberate themselves from the clutches of the caste.

Nairs too Come up

When the Thiyyas were busy school-going and were in pursuit of employment many of the forward communities remained idle at home. The Brahmins and the Nairs who were much ahead in the indigenous education did not rush for the English education due to the constraints of their caste. But a few of the poor Nairs who were able to possess some land by working in the army or in the offices of the company dared to send their children for English education. This situation acquired a

144 Ibid., p.434.
momentum by 1870’s and the Nairs also started to attend schools in plenty and they too got jobs in government services.

In 1884 the Government made a declaration that English educated people would get priority in the government service. Since the posts were reserved for the English educated, a thinking was developed among the people that modern education would ensure them a job in the government service. The Nairs responded to this call very positively.

A noticeable feature in Malabar during the last two decades of the 19th and the first two decades of the 20th centuries was the rise into prominence of a section of the kanakkar (one who held land on kanam-tenure). These kanakaar were the intermediary tenants. Mostly belonging to the Nair caste, especially in south Malabar, they were the first to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by English education. They got into the bureaucracy or studied law and became advocates thereby strengthening their economic position and enhancing their social prestige.

The overwhelming majority of the 1000 graduates, undergraduates and matriculates in the Malabar district at the end of the 19th century came from the upper caste Hindus. Towards the end of the 19th century, the number of officials drawing a salary of more than 10, 20 and 50 rupees a month were 1063, 245 and 90 respectively, the

146 N.V Sovani, “British Impact on India”, in Studies in the Cultural History of India, New Delhi, p.322.
148 The Malabar Marriage Commission Report, 1891, p.9, TNA.
majority of whom were Nairs. In several families, the first generation started as village officials, but the second and the third were able to rise to higher positions of munsifs, magistrates, judges and senior civil servants. The bulk of the English educated middle class came from this social stratum; they had the necessary financial resources as well as social vision to send their wards to institutions which imparted English education.

The opportunities were thus opened up in government employment and professions and a new worldview, informed by the individualism and liberalism was imbibed from the Western thought. The Nair taravads (joint family of Nairs) of Malabar had access to modern culture to the extent in such a way to make the activities of Congress a thread of discussion in the first major Malayalam novel Indulekha itself. Its significance and success are to a great extent rooted in its ability to capture the cultural and political experience of the intelligentsia, nuanced by the contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in it.

By 1890’s the Muslim community also started to wake up. The noted Muslim social reformer, Makthi Thangal not only promoted the study of English and Malayalam but also encouraged the Muslims to


join the government service. He presented a scheme for the primary education and published it in the journal *Salahul Ikhwan*. In this scheme he had included Malayalam, English, Arabic and arithmetic. In order to get fluency in Malayalam he suggested to read the stories from *puranaas* and *ithihasas*.

When the missionaries were engaged in establishing schools there were also many persons belonging to Thiyyas and Pulayas who had obtained opportunity to acquaint with English language in an informal way. The novels like *Sukumari* and *Saraswathivijayam* are in support of the above view. Though written in the 1890’s the story of *Sukumari* is that of the 1860’s. In the novel the character, Sathyarthi (earlier Raman) is a cook of an English doctor. Fascinated by the brilliance of Raman the doctor made him able to read, write and speak English. It is said that the doctor was a good friend of the German missionary who founded the mission centre at Kannur in 1841. This missionary baptized Raman and converted him to Christianity. The missionary in the novel who converts Raman is a representative of Dr.Hermann Gundert who was the instrument behind establishing the mission centre at Kannur in 1841. From the novel it is understood that Raman got employment as a clerk only because of his knowledge in English language which he acquired through informal education.

In *Saraswathivijayam* there is a reference of the character Marathan who learnt to read and write in the *ezhuthupalli* at

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Ancharakkandy established by the German missionaries for teaching Cheruma children. This fictional story co-relates with the historical truth which refers to the works of Dr. Gundert at Ancharakkandy.¹⁵⁷ Marathon later becomes Yesudasen, and after formal collegiate education becomes the sessions judge.

Thus the colonial rule up to 1890’s was a period of transformation for Malabar bringing revival as well as change. The Thiyyas had already got educated in missionary schools in large numbers and were decorating the coveted offices of the British Government. By then the Nairs were able to understand the error they made in the judgment of English education. With a sense of repentance, with a new found vigour and with a ‘military spirit’ they strove for education. The novel *Indulekha* indirectly depicts this ‘Nair conquer and victory’. About *Indulekha* Robin Jeffrey writes: “Malayalam’s first major novel, *Indulekha* also celebrated education. Indulekha, the heroine knows English; her suitor Madhavan is a graduate in Arts and Law; and together they struggle successfully to overcome the prejudices of old Kerala. ............ The book ends with Madhavan’s and Indulekha’s marriage, Madhavan having just heard that ‘he would shortly find himself gazetted to the civil service.’¹⁵⁸

“These incidents capture complimentary aspects about the popularity of education in Kerala. First, a genuine belief in the worthiness of education pervades Malayali attitudes. As early as 1890,


school for small boys was seen as a good thing and an educated Indulekha was a fitting heroine. At the same time education leads to rewards. Madhavan is admitted to the Indian civil service. People with educational qualifications bring both profit and prestige to their families”.

“…Female education in Malabar has been more popular than in other parts of South India. The Nairs especially are very earnest in the education of their sisters and nieces. No girl is permitted to grow up to womanhood without a fair knowledge of reading and writing. Knowledge of Sanskrit and of music, vocal and instrumental is also added in all well-to-do households… As might be expected the missionaries were the first to establish Girl’s Schools.”

Thus the last quarter of the 19th century constituted a historical conjuncture wherein colonial interventions as well as indigenous developments radically transformed the polity, economy and the lifestyle of the society. Then Malabar was a melting pot in which the people were also melting together. Among the literates English knowing people were more than those who knew Malayalam. The emergence of this class created a paradoxical situation in which English newspapers were more widely read and circulated even when the brutal majority was speaking Malayalam. At this period Malayalam journalism was making tiny tots and crippled steps to emerge as a mighty influence in the social, economic and political scenario of Malabar; a giant leap to the 20th century.
