

Chapter IV

Major Dalit Movements in the Post-Independence Era

The trajectory of dalit movements and dalit politics in Kerala during the post-independence period assumes great significance in the context of this study. It is a long-continued struggle which has passed through different stages of transformations over the years. A critical analysis of its evolution, growth and role in mobilizing and empowering dalit masses is crucial in sketching its real challenges and prospects in contemporary society. Its evolution may be examined in two phases. Firstly, the early phase is characterized by the decline of dalit movements. It is worthwhile to note that different mainstream political parties attempted to capitalize on the embarrassment and inertia of dalit movements in the early post-independence period by intervening seriously in politically mobilizing dalits. Besides, the period also witnessed the emergence of a few early dalit organizations with certain specific ideological overtones and a militant character. Secondly, the latter phase of post-independence period, from 1970 onwards, witnessed the resurgence of dalit organizations in different parts of the state, in the form of varied social and political movements of the dalit masses. In fact this study is basically centred around a detailed study of these organizations and their role in empowering the dalit community.

4.1 The Decline of Dalit Movements and Political Interventions

The post-independence phase of the dalit movements in Kerala during the early stages had been a time of inaction and passivity. Though a few organizations were functioning, they did not actively intervene in confronting the dalit problems. It was an uneventful period for dalit movements. Scholars maintain different views on this situation. It was the period after the glorious era of the great leaders of the dalit emancipation struggle like Ayyankali, Poikayil Yohannan and Pampady John Joseph. Perhaps the absence of such enlightened leaders might have created a dearth of leadership in mobilizing the dalit community. Another reason for the inactivity of dalit movements during this period might have been created by the belief of dalits that probably independence would bring about necessary changes in the conditions of the downtrodden castes. Anyhow it had created a political vacuum among the dalits. Different political parties particularly the Communist movements tried to build inroads into dalit politics. In the princely state of Travancore in south Kerala, the Communists and the Communist-led All Travancore Trade Union Congress organized a relatively large uprising in two villages near the industrial-commercial town of Alleppey and on the outskirts of Kuttanad, a paddy cultivating region that has become well known for its agricultural labour movements¹. Thus the party, through its agricultural labour unions, mobilized the agricultural labourers of the Kuttanad region of Alleppey district, the majority of them belonging to the dalit community. Further under the auspices of the party, village libraries were opened, reading and writing circles were set up and workers and tenant farmers themselves were encouraged to write in the union sponsored publications². This marked the beginning of a long period of association between the

Communist movement and dalits, as a result of which both gained in certain crucial areas. While the former got a substantial chunk of its recruits, the latter got a few of their basic demands-land, increase in wages, better labour relations etc-met, at least partially³.

One of the important subjects of the agricultural labour protests raised by the party was based on the confrontation between tenants and landlords and the party tried to highlight this struggle in different ways including the medium of cultural art performances. The contributions of the famous theatre, Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC), was noteworthy in propagating these ideas among the people through its different plays. Likewise the influence of the lyrics of great poets like Vayalar Ramavarma, P. Bhaskaran, O.N.V. Kurup and so on which aimed at the social change and transformation of social consciousness of the people also helped the growth of revolutionary movements in the state. At the same time, the government started many harijan welfare schools in different parts of the state during this period which helped the educational facilities of the downtrodden castes to a great extent. They became more conscious of their rights and showed signs of self-assertion and resistance. The Communist movement and its influence has helped dalits to revolt against many improper social customs and practices.

However the credibility attributed to the Communist movements by the dalits declined gradually particularly from 1970's onwards. Dalits found themselves in a situation of dilemma when confronted with difficulties in realizing the principles of freedom, equality, fraternity etc as propagated by the party. The party had to face the criticism that it often compromised these principles to accommodate the challenges of commercialization in modern times. Capitalist tendencies began to

influence the policies of the party. Simultaneously the downtrodden castes particularly the educated and talented leaders among them showed their potential to criticize the ideologies and to discern the true intentions of the party. Though the dalit community was given many assurances to improve their welfare, their living conditions remained the same. The benefits of power was controlled by the savarna sections of the party. Political power was beyond the reach of dalits and they remained a mere vote bank for several years. In spite of the domination of the party among them, the dalits were not mobilized politically. They were not recruited to the political leadership, though some of them were nominally accommodated. They were politically isolated and exploited by the party. Hence the disadvantaged sections of society showed signs of a growing tendency to distance themselves from the party.

A similar attitude gradually developed among dalits against other political parties also. For example the Congress party's concept of dalit emancipation was manifested in its motto the 'upliftment of the harijans'. However, critics have pointed out that the real objective behind the harijan upliftment programme of the party was to transform the sizeable dalit population of the country into a solid vote bank of the party. The same objective is followed by the party in Kerala through its dalit feeder organizations or through controlling certain dalit organizations by deputing the sympathizers of party into its leadership. The dalit feeder organization of the party such as the Dalit Congress, entrusted with the task of the upliftment of the downtrodden castes in Kerala, is carrying out the political goals of the party. It is alleged that the dalit leaders of the party are not interested in protecting the interests of the dalit community. They are constrained to act within the goals and interests set by the party. The party

is governed by the leaders belonging to upper castes, and a few dalit leaders who are accommodated in the organization, are not given key roles in the decision-making process of the party.

Dalit leaders argue that the dalit emancipation programme of the Congress party is based on an approach that is condescending in nature and a patronage that comes from above. However, from a subaltern perspective, it should be become a strengthening process, that takes place within the community itself. The party considered dalits as a people to be redeemed by it and made them dependent on it. Today the dalit community is more aware of this hegemonic attitude of the party and is cautious in extending support to it. Consequently there is a gradual fall in the amount of support extended by dalits to the party.

The dalit political agenda of other major political parties including both the national and regional parties functioning in the state is not different from the political motives of the Congress or the Communists. All the major political parties retain dalit feeder organizations, entrusted with the task of protecting the interests of the party on dalit subjects rather than engaging in mobilizing and empowering the dalit community. The representatives of people who are elected from reserved constituencies on party labels to different representative bodies of the country are often guided primarily by their party interests rather than their commitment to the dalit community. As a reaction against this negative approach of the major political parties, dalits are now trying to organize themselves as a political power even by deserting the mainstream political organizations. Dalit leaders and activists are now advocating the concept of the 'dalit communitarian politics', an endeavour to transform the whole dalit community into an organized political power. The concept of the 'dalit-

backward-minority unity' as an emerging alliance of the subaltern sections is also an endeavour which supports dalit political mobilization

4.2 Early Dalit Movements

A brief survey of the few early dalit movements during the post-independent period is relevant in this context. It was an uneventful period without any remarkable contributions of the movements. The caste dalit organizations which existed in those periods were involved only in continuing the family traditions and customs of its members particularly in conducting the ceremonials on different occasions of family life like birth, marriage, death etc. Further, they used to organize the routine meetings of the organizations. However, the latter part of 1960's witnessed the emergence of certain dalit organizations which were founded on certain specific ideological characteristics. It opposed the caste based divisions of the dalit identity and upheld its secular, democratic and national character. Some of these organizations exhibited also a certain amount of militant character. Besides, these organizations which were active in 1970's and 1980's later became weak or dissolved themselves by the turn of 1990's. Among these movements, Kerala Stipendary Students Association (KSSA), Kerala Harijan Students Federation (KHSF), Socially Economically Educationally Depressed Indian Ancient Natives (SEEDIAN), National Dalit Liberation Front (NDLF) etc deserve special mention.

Kerala Stipendary Students' Association (KSSA) was established in Kottayam district during 1967-68 period, to protect the stipendary benefits of students who belonged to the dalit community. The main leaders of this organization were K.K. Manmadan, S. Rajappan, V. Padmanabhan and so on. One of the important features of the functioning of this organization was that it protected interests of all dalit students who belonged to different

castes including the dalit Christians. However, the main objective of the movement was limited to protecting the reservation benefits of dalit students and it did not actively engage to solve other dalit issues. As a result the KSSA gradually declined and later it merged with SEEDIAN.

Simultaneously, Kerala Harijan Students Federation (KHSF) was established in Trivandrum region in 1967, to protect the reservation benefits of dalits students who belonging to Hindu castes alone. The organization basically looked after the welfare of the students who were staying in the cosmopolitan hostels of Trivandrum and Ernakulam area.

The most important dalit organization which functioned during this period was Socially Economically Educationally Depressed Indian Ancient Natives (SEEDIAN). It was started as a study group, headquartered at Kottayam, during 1969-70 period under the leadership of M.J. Prasad, K.K.S. Das, V. Padmanabhan and so on. It organized study classes for lower castes people belonging to different age groups and careers such as students, youngsters, women, labourers etc and was also engaged in confronting different dalit issues. One of the important areas in which the movement often engaged was the demand for the distribution of land for the survival of dalits. The organization counted it as a democratic problem in the sense that the right to property was denied to a certain underprivileged sections of the population. SEEDIAN sometimes resorted to aggressive agitations against this discrimination and critics have pointed it out as the militant character of the organization. However, the leaders claimed that in fact it was a struggle aimed at the survival of the downtrodden castes⁴. The movement also demanded reservation in private sector in proportion to the population of dalits.

The ideology of the movement is based on the concept of dalit identity as a subjugated nationhood. Dalit identity should not be conceived as caste-based but it should be regarded as a nationality. This is a philosophical enquiry which upholds the view that the dalit is an oppressed nationality. The major force of this oppressed nationality of India is the dalit community and nation is their legitimate political right. This concept of dalit nationality is the basic negation of casteism and a theoretical extension of Ambedkar's thoughts⁵. SEEDIAN upheld a broader vision of downtrodden castes which was secular, democratic and national. Dalits belonging to different castes including dalit Christians constituted its members.

SEEDIAN was a vibrant dalit organization for a long period. The stronghold of the movement was Kottayam district and its activities were found in many other districts including Malappuram, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha etc. It used to organize awareness programmes to educate the dalit masses on different dalit concerns and carry out agitations to tackle varied dalit problems. The movement owned a weekly publication called 'SEEDIAN'. However, the functioning of the organization has declined later and completely disappeared from the scene from 1990 onwards due to certain ideological clashes that developed within its leadership. Some of the leaders wanted to retain the philosophy of Ambedkar as its only guiding ideology. However, certain other leaders held the view that the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideologies also should be upheld along with the Ambedkarite ideology. This ideological clash ended in the dissolution of SEEDIAN. Another reason cited for the dissolution of the movement is related to the challenges of globalization. In the new globalised world order, the organization has lost its relevance with out any agenda⁶.

During the period when SEEDIAN was functioning, an organization called the National Dalit Liberation Front (NDLF) was established in 1988 under the aegis of SEEDIAN itself. It was a fraternity of dalit organizations from different states joining together to strengthen the ideology which counts dalits as an oppressed national people. Many organizations like the Dalit Sangharsha Samithi from Karnataka, Andhra Dalit Maha Sabha, Dalit Panthers Movement from Maharashtra etc have collaborated with this fraternity. Though SEEDIAN was dissolved in 1990, the functioning of NDLF was continued as a broader and larger fraternity of oppressed groups.

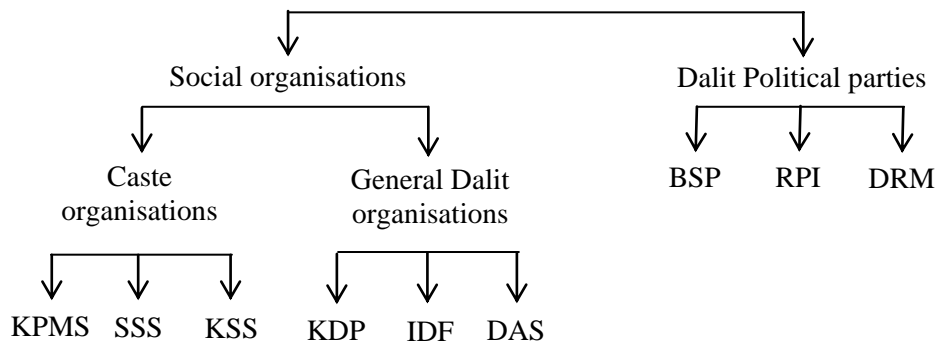
4.3 Resurgence of Dalit Movements in the Post-Independence Era

After a long period of the inaction of dalit movements in Kerala, the state witnessed the revival of dalit articulations again, in the latter phase of post-independence, starting from 1970 onwards. Many social and political organizations of dalits were established and already existing organizations began to revitalize their functioning, aimed mainly at the socio-political empowerment of downtrodden castes. The major dalit social organizations of the state, which emerged during this period, may be grouped into two categories. The first category is known as caste/subcaste organisations which are characterized by their specific caste loyalties and are established to protect the interests of the respective castes. On the contrary, the second category advocates the philosophy of dalit unity without the distinctions of caste, religion and party politics and are referred in this study as the general dalit movements. Besides, there are also a few dalit political parties function in the state as the agents of political mobilization of dalits. In order to study about the major dalit organisations of the state, three major organisations from each of these categories selected (see Figure 4.1). The methodology for selecting the major organization was based on different

parameters such as a strong organizational structure, mass membership support, maximum number of branches and active functioning both in the past and present. Besides the study also considered the geographical reach of the organization. In this study the organizations selected are functioning at least in 4 districts in Kerala. As the major partners in the dalit mobilization process of the state, the present chapter discusses the major caste organizations and the subsequent chapter deals with general dalit movements and dalit political parties.

Figure 4.1

Major Dalit Organisations: A Diagrammatic Representation



Note : This categorisation was made after taking into consideration the views of academics, leaders as well as members of dalit society.

Source: *TheField Survey*

Before examining the resurgence of varied categories of dalit movements in Kerala in detail, a brief sketch of their main general characteristics will show the nature of their functioning in the state. Firstly, they are protest movements, established by dalit themselves, against caste oppression and social inequality. The opposition against the casteist structures of society constitute the focal point of confrontation between dalits and savarna castes in Kerala as elsewhere in the country. At the same time, they also aim at the reform and change of dalit society as well as their

social and political consolidation. They chalk out various plans and programmes to mobilize and empower the dalit population to achieve these goals. Secondly, there exists a plethora of dalit movements in Kerala (see Appendix VI) In fact, the proliferation and division that exist among movements act as a major hurdle in empowering the dalit community. Together with this problem, the coordination of the movements are often challenged by party politics, religious differences, caste-divisions of the dalit masses etc. Thirdly, the guiding ideology of the majority of the dalit movements of the state is Ambedkarism. At the same time, there are organizations which strive to combine Marxist-Leninist perspectives with Ambedkarism. Fourthly, the major issues raised by the movements, in the present scenario, relate to the rights of dalits on land, education, employment and protection of reservation benefits. These are certain crucial concerns which affect the aspirations of dalits for a better future. Fifthly, it is worthwhile to note that dalit movements, today, attempt to form the alliances of the 'similarity exploited' sections of society such as dalits, tribals, OBCs, women, minority etc. It is a positive endeavour which strengthens the resistance of marginalized groups. Along with this initiative, the emerging concept of dalit communitarian politics, based on the political strength and consolidation of the community, is also an attempt to empower dalits. Sixthly, it is true that dalit movements often neglect the concerns of economic deliverance as well as the initiatives of employment generation aimed at the welfare of the dalit population. These should become the agenda of organizations which aim to make their functioning more vibrant. Finally, dalit movements often neglect or are often incapable of addressing the challenges of globalization. Though many among them want to integrate its positive results into the agenda of movements, their

deprived condition often makes such attempts ineffective. It calls for the reformulation of the policies and programmes of movements in confronting the challenges of globalization in tune with changing times.

4.4 Major Caste Based Organisations

As dalits in general are identified in terms of their 'jati' identities, caste organizations claim a major role in the organizational phase of dalit mobilization process of the state. It is also true that these organizations exhibit a strong and regular organizational structure and mass membership support. The daily life of the members of each dalit caste, to a great extent, is interwoven with the interventions of their respective caste organizations. However, there is a common criticism levelled against them that they are engaged mainly in upholding the religious and family based customs and traditions of its members on different occasions of family life like birth, marriage, death etc. As such they are engaged only in promoting the interests of the respective castes and not in spearheading the larger and broader interests of dalit community as a whole. But the leaders of caste organisations refute such criticisms and content that they raise common dalit concerns mainly through coordination groups of dalit organisations or by themselves. Moreover, they argue that they are inevitable in protecting the reservation benefits of SC sections. These benefits as enshrined in the constitution of India are given based on specific caste identities. Thus the basis of reservation is caste and caste organizations are inevitable. If the eligibility of a particular caste for such benefits is challenged by government, only the concerned caste organization possesses the capacity to check the adverse moves against it. Thus they act as the guardians of reservation rights of SCs.

According to the report of the Census of India 2001, the scheduled castes population of Kerala is categorized into 69 castes. (see Appendix II) Among them, the first three major castes in terms of their population are Pulayan/Cheramar, Kuravan/Sidhanar and Parayan/Sambavar. The Cheruman caste, prevalent in Malabar region, though constituting a major caste, has been considered as an allied community belonging to the first category of castes. In order to study about the major caste organizations, the first three major castes were selected. As there exists several organizations for each of these castes, the most vibrant organization of the caste was selected according to the different parameters of such an organisation as given in this study. As Pulayan/Cheramar⁷ constitute the first major caste in the state, the study focuses on KPMS which is the largest caste organisation of both pulayas and state as well.

4.4.1 Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (KPMS)

Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (KPMS) was established in 1970 under the charismatic leadership of P. K. Chathan Master, ex-minister in the first Communist ministry led by EMS Namboothirippad in 1957⁸. He was the leader of Pulayas in Cochin who were organized under the Cochin Pulayar Maha Sabha. At that time, Pulayas in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar were distinct and separate entities organizationally or otherwise. In Malabar, they were organised under the Harijan Samajams, while the Pulayas in Cochin and Travancore were rallied around in separate Maha Sabhas. Many activists of Cochin and Travancore Pulayar Maha Sabhas assembled at Nandavanam school in Trivandrum on 17th March 1968 and decided to establish a unified organization for Pulayas at the state level and a new 'Ekopana Samithi' (coordination committee) was formed and which started functioning soon. The KPMS was formed as the result of the activities

carried out through the 'Pulaya Ekopana Samithi' during 1968. The Samithi carried out different programmes which unified Pulayas and their Maha Sabhas in Cochin and Travancore. Ekopana Samithi units were formed at the district, taluk and village levels and the new organization was established after mobilizing the people up to the village level on an organizationally sound foundation⁹. P.K. Chathan Master received the active support of the educated and enlightened sections of the Pulaya community, particularly the government employees and young generation in founding the organization. The first branch of the organization was established at Vengannoor-the birth place of Ayyankali. P. K. Chathan Master and K. Chandra Sekhara Sastri were the founding president and general secretary respectively.

4.4.1.1 Objectives and Organisational Set-up

The main objectives of KPMS are clearly enunciated in the bye-law of the organization as 'to solve the social disabilities of the Pulayas and other allied categories of the Pulaya community and to achieve their economic, cultural, educational and employmental growth'¹⁰. The organization also aims to ensuring the benefits of reservation to SC/ST; to work in close collaboration with other SC/ST communities to protect their common interests; to fight against many uncivilized and expensive customs and traditions of the community; to set up of educational institutions, hostels and libraries; to increase the job opportunities and higher wages for Pulayas; to publish books, journals, news papers etc to educate the community; to earn money and run institutions for the community etc¹¹. While analyzing the various programmes of the organization from 1970-95, S. Sasankan, the former general secretary of the Maha Sabha for long years, observed that the struggle for social justice was the primary duty of the

organization and they were proud to consider KPMS as the important organisation in India to begin this struggle. He has also admitted the fact that while they successfully organized the struggle for social justice to a great extent, they often failed to initiate programmes for the economic deliverance of the members of the community and that they were resolved to strive for it in the future¹².

The source of inspiration behind the establishment and growth of the movement was the life and teachings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Ayyankali. The selfless and dedicated services of a host of great leaders of the Pulaya community like P.K. Chathan Master, K. Chandra Sekhara Sastri, P.K. Raghavan, J.R. Das, E.V. Ayyappan Master, M.K. Chathappan, A.K. Vallone, P.M. Madhavan, S. Sasankan, T. V. Babu, Punnala Sreekumar and others strengthened the organization in the different stages of its growth.

The administrative set-up of KPMS is hierarchically divided into state executive committee, district committees, taluk unions and branches at the local level. The state executive committee coordinates the activities of the Maha Sabha at the state level and its members are elected for a term of 3 years. The state committee is composed of 35 members including the president, general secretary, treasurer, working president, organization secretary, 3 vice-presidents, 3 assistant secretaries etc. The Maha Sabha has a patron also. The district committee coordinates the activities of the Maha Sabha at the district level and its members are elected for a term of 3 years. KPMS has 9 district committees in the state except at Palakkad, Malappuram, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasargode districts. It shows that in the Malabar region of the state, KPMS is yet to establish its hold. Comparing different districts, it is found that Alappuzha, Kollam,

Ernakulam and Thrissur are the strongholds of KPMS. There is also a vibrant presence of the organization at Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki and Kozhikode districts. Taluk union committee controls the activities of the Maha Sabha at the taluk level and its members are elected for a term of one year. If the number of branches in a taluk union exceeds 50, if necessary, that union may be divided into two or more separate union committees. Branches form the primary unit of KPMS. The branch committee coordinates the activities of the Maha Sabha in the village or locality and it is elected for a term of one year. A branch may be formed with a minimum number of 25 members. Four or five branches may be functioning in a panchayat where a sizeable number of Pulaya community resides. There are around 3000 branches of KPMS at present and around 4 lakh registered members. The registered state committee office is located at Thiruvananthapuram. KPMS publishes a monthly magazine called 'Nayalapam' as the mouth piece of the organization. The main feeder organizations of the movement are the Kerala Pulayar Mahila Federation (KPMF) which coordinates the activities of the women members of the community and the Kerala Pulayar Youth Movement (KPYM) which strives to mobilize the Pulaya youth.

There is a common criticism levelled against KPMS that the organization used to maintain a pro-CPI attitude in terms of its electoral politics, policies and programmes. Of course, the founding president of the Maha Sabha, P.K Chathan Master was a member of the Communist ministry in 1957. P.K. Raghavan, the patron of the Sabha for long years, was a minister in the LDF government in 1970 and 1987 representing CPI. There were also Members of Legislative Assembly and other political leaders who belonged to the Left parties, and at the same time maintained a close association with

KPMS. The party affiliation has produced positive results in gaining many favours from the government for the Maha Sabha and its members. However the leaders of KPMS reject these criticisms levelled against them and argue that their support for left party politics was totally problem-based and that it has never been a blind allegiance. They claim that the organization is keen to keep a safe distance from political parties.

In this context, it is worthwhile to note that as a protest against the pro-CPI approach of KPMS, the organization faced an inner division in 1990, which resulted in the formation of Kerala Pulayan Maha Sabha¹³ with the headquarter at Ernakulam. The new organization stood for political neutrality and aspired to be free from the clutches of political parties. In fact, the division in KPMS was a reaction against the supremacy of P. K. Raghavan in KPMS as well as in Left party politics. It is alleged that as a minister, he often failed to stand up for the KPMS cause converting it into a subservient organisation of the CPI. The main leaders behind this revolt and subsequent establishment and growth of the new organization were K. K. Painky, Vakkanad Raghavan, K. T. Sankaran, Sivaraman Kattanam, Thoppil Raghavan, A. K. Damodaran and so on. Regarding their reunion with the parent organization, the Sabha holds the view that until and unless KPMS changes its pro-CPI stand, it is unable to reach an agreement. However, it has no hesitation to join hands with KPMS in dealing with common dalit problems. In these circumstances, the reunion of both organizations seem to be a difficult pact to be reached.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that KPMS, departing from the policy of the organization for a long period, adopted an anti-LDF stand in the Lok Sabha elections of 2009. The leaders of the organisation contented that it was a reaction against the neglect and indifferent attitude

of the LDF government towards different demands of the organization including the demands for education, land and employment of SCs. Though this approach has helped UDF in the elections, the organization pointed out that it should not be counted as an unconditional and open allegiance to any political party or alliance permanently¹⁴.

4.4.1.2 Early Demands and Agitations

It is important to discuss the major milestones in the history of KPMS and various programmes organized by the movement during its different stages of growth. It was consistently involved in confronting different problems faced by the community for a long period. As the largest caste organization of dalits, the Sabha also took the lead in collaborating with other dalit organizations to address the varied problems faced by the whole dalit community in the state. KPMS also tried to exert pressure on the government to protect the rights of the community to implement varied welfare schemes and to grant several concessions for the downtrodden castes.

The organization had prepared its first memorandum concerning the various demands of the community on 30th May 1968 and organized agitations to achieve these demands under the aegis of the Harijan Joint Council, the common platform of different SC organizations. In 1970, the government took several measures upon these demands. It assured priority and fixed percentage in land distribution, implemented minimum wages for agricultural labourers, assured reservation for admission in aided private colleges, allowed reservation for Sainik School admission, increased reservation for medical and engineering colleges, sanctioned the use of 10% of budgetary allocation of other departments for SC welfare in addition to the budgetary allocation of SC welfare department, introduced a special recruitment in state service etc. These concessions have been

counted as an all time exceptional gesture of any government aimed at the welfare of SCs¹⁵.

The Charter of Demands prepared by P. K. Chathan Master, president of KPMS on 12th May 1976 and submitted to the government was as detailed here: extension of reservation for SCs for another 10 years; distribution of 50 percent of surplus land to Harijans; minimum wage; allocation of small scale industries; provision for loan facilities; removal of unemployment; housing for a minimum of 10 families per year; establishment of a city improvement trust and facilities for education and hostel accommodation for SC children¹⁶.

Though KPMS has been functioning in the state since 1970, the organization marked a vibrant growth and functioning from 1981 onwards only. The annual conference of KPMS held at Trivandrum in 1981 made certain changes in leadership and elected P.K Raghavan, P.K. Chathan Master and K. Chandra Sekhara Sastri as the president, general secretary and organizing secretary respectively. State conferences of the organization began to be regularly conducted. Prior to the state conferences, annual meetings of lower units starting from branch level also were conducted. During this time, on 7th May 1981, KPMS organized a massive rally and dharna in front of the taluk offices, collectorates and secretariat to exert pressure on the government for the various demands of the Maha Sabha as endorsed by the Trivandrum conference. Hundreds of members of the organization attended agitation organized to protect the various rights of the community.

The Maha Sabha also undertook a long agitation against certain early recommendations of the Mandal Commission which were available in 1981. The Pulayas who were actually in the SCs list, on the recommendations of the

Commission, were enlisted in the OBCs category. KPMS organized agitations against this discrimination and district collectorate marches were conducted at different district headquarters on 4th November 1982. Thousands of members of the organization attended this march. Prior to the march, one lakh letters were sent to the Prime Minister of India and about thousand protest marches by foot were organized at village and taluk levels. It was a long continued agitation and KPMS raised the same demand both in the Cliff House march on 1st October 1986 and in the secretarial march on 1 October 1990. However, when the central government decided to grant 27% reservation to OBC sections on the recommendations of the Mandal Commission on 13th August 1990, the government withheld the newly recommended OBCs list of the Commission. Consequently the state Legislative Assembly on 4th April 1991 approved the already existing OBCs list of Kerala and forwarded it for the ratification of the central government as the central OBCs list. Thus the Pulayas were excluded from the OBCs list prepared by the Mandal Commission.

The Kerala circle of the Central Post and Telegraph Department rejected the caste certificates of Pulayas in Kerala arguing that such benefits were given to the 'Pulayan' caste, as given in the revised SC list of 1976. Consequently the caste name 'Pulaya' could not be considered for reservation benefits. Many 'Pulaya' certificate holders were denied their benefits. In fact, it was only a technical objection as these two terms were used interchangeably. The term 'Pulaya' was used as the English translation of 'Pulayan'. Protesting against this discrimination of the department, KPMS organized a gigantic Raj Bhavan march on 26th July 1984. A massive memorandum signed by around 10 lakh people was submitted to the Governor of Kerala, prior to the march. The leaders of

KPMS claimed that around 2 lakh members the organization attended the Raj Bhavan march and in response to the agitation the central government suggested a temporary solution to the problem. Accordingly, the state government instructed the authorities concerned to issue caste certificates marking the correct caste name 'Pulayan' as given in the SC list to those certificate holders with their castes entered as 'Pulaya'¹⁷.

KPMS organized the Cliff House (official residence of the Chief Minister of Kerala) march on 1st October 1986 to protest against the following decisions of the state government. The government had recommended to the central government about certain new castes to be enlisted in the SC list in 1986. The government did not increase the reservation quota in accordance with the increase in population in 1981. During examination time in April, SC students were denied stipends and hostel residency. The compensation of Rs. 5000/- announced by the government to the SC women who were rape victims, was considered as an insulting act towards the dalits. Prior to the march, two state wide marches by foot were also organized as part of its campaign. Thousands of Pulayas attended the agitation and it was a successful event. It was also considered as a struggle which raised not only the problems of Pulayas alone but the demands of the whole dalit community. The government favourably considered a few of these demands in 1987 by adopting the following steps: it revoked the humiliating order concerning dalit women, hostel facilities and stipends were granted to SC students during summer examination time; it froze the revision of SC list etc¹⁸.

The state SC/ST Joint Council was formed at Trivandrum on 18th December 1988 with the president of KPMS as its general convener. It was a joint endeavour and a common platform of different dalit as well as tribal

organizations. They decided to work together according to the nature of issues on which they could come together. Besides, the head office of KPMS was inaugurated on 17th June 1989. It was built on the 5 cents of land bought in the name of the Sabha at Nandavanam, Trivandrum. This endeavour was fulfilled with the generous contributions of the members of the organisation¹⁹.

The secretariat march was organized by KPMS on 1st October 1990 by raising important demands like exempting the Pulayas, who actually belonged to SCs list, from the OBCs list as recommended by the Mandal Commission, dropping the move to add new castes to the SC/ST list of Kerala, increasing the reservation in accordance with population growth etc²⁰. As part of campaigning for the march, state wide jathas by foot also were conducted ahead of the agitation. The secretariat march was a successful event attended by thousands of people. The agitation was a strong warning to the government against the enlisting of new castes in the SCs list without serious deliberations.

KPMS celebrated the silver jubilee of the organization in 1994-95. It was an year long celebration which started with the jubilee inauguration at Ayyankali square, Trivandrum on 1st November 1994. As part of the jubilee, different conferences were held like the youth conference at Kottarakara on 19-20 November 1994, north Kerala Pulaya conference at Quilandy, Employees' conference at Ernakulam on 12th March 1995 and Mahila conference at Kaduthuruthy on 7th May 1995. The concluding jubilee programme was held at Alappuzha from 1-3 December 1995. The concluding jubilee rally was attended by 5 lakh people belonging to Pulaya community²¹. Many political leaders, leaders of different dalit organizations and KPMS attended the programme.

4.4.1.3 Agitations of KPMS together with SC/ST Joint Council

The SC/ST Joint Council organized a rally for the protection of religious rights and harmony on 6th January 1993 at different district headquarters. This programme was organized as a reaction against the demolition of Babri-Masjid on 6th December 1992. It was an attack on the secular fabric of India and the rally expressed the sentiments of the dalit community towards this issue.

The SC/ST Joint Council organized the Raj Bhavan march on 1st November 1993. Prior to the march, state wide jathas by foot were organized from Kasargod to Trivandrum. The main demands of the agitation were as follows: drop the move to revise the SC list, drop the move to start self-financing engineering colleges, conduct CBI inquiry into the murder of C.T Sukumaran, a senior IAS officer belonging to the dalit community etc. The march was attended by 5 lakh people belonging to KPMS and other dalit organizations²².

The SC/ST Joint Council in collaboration with KPMS organized another Raj Bhavan march at Trivandrum on 28th December 1996²³. Before the march, a vehicle campaign jatha was also conducted from Trichur to Trivandrum. The main demand of the agitation was the problem of revision of SC list particularly the demand for separate reservation scheme for dalit Christians. KPMS was opposed to granting reservation for them from the existing reservation scheme.

KPMS organized an agitation declaration rally and a public meeting at Kottayam on 22nd January 1998. The agitation raised the following demands: grant reservation in the appointments of private educational institutions; effectively implement reservation for SC category in

cooperative institutions; enquire into the irregularities of the functioning of 'peoples planning programme'; end the atrocities against SC/ST; form the state SC/ST Commission; install the statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in front of the state Legislative Assembly etc²⁴.

The SC/ST Joint Council in collaboration with KPMS organized a secretariat march on 17th Feb 1999. A vehicle campaign jatha was also conducted from Trichur to Trivandrum ahead of the march. The main demand of the march was to implement reservation in the appointments of aided private educational institutions. Leaders of different dalit organizations and hundreds of people belonging to these organizations attended the agitation.

KPMS organized the huge 'Rights Dedication Meeting' and rally in collaboration with SC/ST Joint Council at Ernakulam on 25th August 2000. As part of its campaigning, two 'Rights Dedication Jathas' were conducted from Balaramapuram and Vadakara, which concluded at Ernakulam. One of the important features of this programme was that the demands of the agitators were presented before the nation and people and not addressed to any particular government. The dalit leaders were anguished at the indifferent attitude of the consecutive governments towards their various repeated demands. So they decided to place these demands before the nation and people. Thousands of people belonging to KPMS and other dalit organizations attended the agitation, showing their strength. The main demands of the agitation were: implement reservation in private educational institutions; check the efforts of new dalit castes to be enlisted in SC/ST list; form of the state SC/ST commission; install the statue of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar in front of the state Legislative Assembly; ensure the reservation of jobs for SCs in the public sector companies; check the

misappropriation and non-usage of SCP, TSP funds; reduce the disparity between the rich and poor particularly in the context of the rigid casteism existing in India.

The secretariat was besieged by KPMS in collaboration with SC/ST Joint Council on 27th May 2002²⁵. A large section of the dalit community attended the march. A vehicle propaganda campaign was carried out from Thrissur to Thiruvananthapuram preceding the agitation. The main demands of the agitation were as follows: ensure reservation for SC/ST sections in the appointments of private educational institutions, allot at least 10 cents of land and housing to the landless and homeless section of SCs, drop privatization, enquire about the irregularities in the utilization of SCP, TSP funds etc.

Another important milestone in the history of KPMS was the Cliff House march. It was organized by KPMS in collaboration with the SC/ST Joint Council. Hundreds of people attended the agitation. The march was held at Thiruvananthapuram on 3rd March 2004 as the culmination of the 15 days of vehicle propaganda campaign carried out from Thrissur to Thiruvananthapuram. The main demand of the agitation was the implementation of reservation in the private sector and the organizers claimed it as the first all India agitation organized by the SCs with this objective²⁶. More specifically speaking, they demanded reservation of jobs for dalits in the private industrial sector of the country²⁷. The Maha Sabha leaders claimed that the decision of the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in principle to include the reservation of jobs for SCs in private industrial sector was due to the impact of this march. Of course, it had been a persistent demand of many dalit agitations and a government cannot always ignore such vital demands of the subaltern sections.

4.4.1.4 Recent Initiatives, Programmes and Struggles

The Mahatma Ayyankali Smaraka (MAS) Trust was registered on 19th January 2005 aimed at achieving economic justice for the SCs. It was intended to mobilize the economic resources of the dalit community for establishing educational, cultural and industrial initiatives and thereby to create employment opportunities for the members of the Maha Sabha and SCs in general.

The National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR), the common platform of dalit organizations in India, organized the Parliament march at New Delhi on 15th December 2005. KPMS actively participated in the agitation by sending 500 volunteers. The main demand of the agitation was to consider reservation of jobs for dalits in the private industrial sector of the country. There was a suggestion for legislation in this regard in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the then UPA government. Hence the agitators demanded legislation on the subject. The dalit leaders claimed that the positive suggestion of the Confederation of Industrialists in India to impart free training in employment skills to dalits may be considered as a positive response to the agitation.

As part of the state wide agitation of KPMS to campaign for the various demands of the organization, taluk union committees of KPMS in Kottayam district organized a march and dharna in front of the taluk headquarters on 17th October 2007. The agitation was organized in five taluk headquarters of the district viz Kottayam, Changanacherry, Vaikom, Kanjirappally, Meenachil and the treasury office at Kaduthuruthy. The following demands were raised during the agitation: drop the move to include dalit Christians in the SCs list, cancel the decision which extended the term of SCs certificate to 10 years, give representation to the community in the State

Scheduled Caste Commission, grant land to the landless people, stop the atrocities against SCs, implement reservation in the private sector etc²⁸.

In order to strengthen the economic prosperity of the members of the organisation, KPMS started the 'Panchami' small savings scheme at the branch level of the organization from December 2007 onwards. The main objective of the scheme was to foster the habit of saving and self-reliance among the members of the Sabha, to prepare finance and other basic factors for establishing self-employment initiatives, to create responsibility to take over such enterprises collectively and at the personal level²⁹.

A huge rally and mammoth meeting called the 'Sadabdi Sangamam' was organized by KPMS at Ernakulam on 14th February 2008 to mark the centenary of the revolutionary struggles undertaken by Ayyankali, the great social reformer. It was the concluding ceremony of the year long celebration of the Sadabdi which started on 14th February 2007. Thousands of members of the Sabha attended the concluding programmes. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, important leaders of Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, leaders of KPMS etc. participated in the function³⁰. KPMS also submitted a memorandum of following demands to the Congress president: implement reservation in the private sector; introduce legislation for the second land-reforms; increase the government investment in the social sector; introduce special recruitment for unfilled posts; implement reservation in self-financing educational sector; strictly enforce the Scheduled Caste Atrocities Prevention Act etc.

The KPMS in collaboration with other organizations for the downtrodden castes organized the 'second land reform agitation journey' from Kanhangad to Balaramapuram. The jatha concluded at Balaramapuram on 1st November 2008. The concluding meeting was attended by leaders of different

dalit, tribal organizations and hundreds of members of these organizations. The agitation was a reaction against the LDF government's declaration of a second land reform excluding the subaltern sections³¹.

4.4.2 Sidhanar Service Society (SSS)

Kuravar, also known by the name Sidhanar, constitutes the second major dalit community in Kerala³². They have been called Sidhanar as a people blessed with gifted talents particularly in the field of traditional medicine and astrology. This is a knowledge possessed by the community and transmitted through generations³³. Kuravar is a highly orthodox community who have mainly inhabited the southern parts of Kerala and this term is used to denote the people who live in the mountains or hilly areas or the people who speak aloud. The main occupation of the community is linked with agriculture and majority among them are agricultural labourers. The traditional small scale industries like handicrafts, cashew nuts etc as well as the construction sector also employ them as labourers.

4.4.2.1 Evolution and the Structure of the Organization

The early attempts of organising the Kuravar community have been initiated during 1927–29 period, under the leadership of Varkala S. K. Raghavan. He was influenced by the life and teachings of Sree Narayana Guru and wanted to establish an organization for his own community after the example of the Ezhava movement. He established an organization called the 'Satyavilasini Sangham' centred around Nooranad in Alappuzha district and it is considered as the earliest movement of the community. There was also another organization called the 'Aramukhavilasam Kuravar Sangham' founded by Kallada Narayanan Raman³⁴ during 1930's. It was formed with the support of the community spread around Kallada, Kunnathur and surrounding places at Kollam district. Meantime, the efforts of uniting these two organizations were

also held at different levels including the mediation of the well-wishers of the community like Changanassery C. N. Parameswaran Pillai, Elanthoor Kumarji and so on. Subsequently the leaders of both organizations together with the mediators for unification met at Elanthoor in 1937 and decided to form the Travancore Kuravar Maha Sabha by way of merging the existing organizations of the community. Varkala S. K. Raghavan and P. C. Adichan³⁵ were elected as the president and secretary of the organization respectively. P. C. Adichan was later nominated to Sri Mulam Assembly as the representative of the community. Due to his commitments as the member of the Assembly, he was unable to associate actively with the affairs of the community. Besides, certain allegations of financial misappropriations were raised against him³⁶. These controversies resulted in the schism of Kuravar Maha Sabha into the Kuravar Maha Sabha led by P. C. Adichan and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam under the leadership of Varkala S. K. Raghavan. Consequently these organizations functioned as two separate parallel entities.

As a protest against the organizational disunity that prevailed in the community, a group of progressive and educated youth of the community came together and established an organization called the All Travancore Kuravar Yuvajana Parishad in 1947. In fact, it was a reaction against P. C. Adichan who often neglected the interests of the community. Among the main organizers of this endeavour, the leaders like K. S. Krishna Sastri, Puthoor Kochukunju, Ezhamkulam Sasi, Pandalm Gopalan, J. S. Bhaskaran and others played significant roles. The new organization laid emphasis on the education of the community and persuaded families to send their children to the schools. Besides, they established night schools and old age education facilities at the branch level. This kind of functioning of the new organization attracted the members of the community and as such the leaders decided to

convert the Yuva Jana Parishad into a full-fledged social organization called the Kerala Sidhanar Service Society (KSSS) in 1951³⁷. Puthoor Kochukunju and K. S. Krishna Sastri were the president and general secretary of the organization respectively. K. S. Krishna Sastri, former member of Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly, was the general Secretary of the organization for a long period from 1950–63. Due to certain cases of financial misappropriations and subsequent judicial verdicts against him, he was not associated with the functioning of the movement for the period 1963 – 67. During this period, Kallada Narayanan, former member of the Kerala Legislative Assembly led the organization. However, the organization met with a schism in 1968 when K. S. Krishna Sastri along with Kallada Narayanan registered a new organization called the Sidhanar Service Society (SSS) with Reg. No. Q4/68³⁸. The president and general secretary of the new organization were Kallada Narayanan and K. S. Krishna Sastri respectively. However, K. S. Krishna Sastri was expelled from the new organization in 1980 followed by several controversies that arose against him and Kallada Narayanan assumed pre-eminence in the functioning of the movement³⁹. He continued as the president of SSS till his demise in 1996. During this period, N.C. Sathyapalan, ex-MLA, became the acting general secretary for a short period. Meanwhile, A.K. Thankappan assumed office as the general secretary in 1981 and he has been serving the organization in the same position from that period onwards. Along with him, N.C. Sathyapalan took charge as the additional general secretary of SSS having powers to deal with the financial matters till 1997. After the demise of Kallada Narayanan, Mavelikkara S. Kesavan has been serving as the president of the organization from 1996 onwards. Thus the Kuravar/Sidhanar community witnessed the emergence of three major organizations: Kerala Kuravar Maha Sabha (the major

organization of the community who retains the old caste name Kuravan), Kerala Sidhanar Service Society and Sidhanar Service Society.

In this context, a brief note on the reunion efforts of these organizations is also necessary. It is to be noticed that a few unity meetings were held from 1986 onwards and even a unity forum has been formed. However certain leading organizations among them did not associate with this initiative. Moreover, the demand of the Kuravar Maha Sabha to uphold the Kurava identity of the organization was not acceptable to others and this has been a major set back for this initiative. The reunion of organizations is not, thus, an easy task. However, a few among them are maintaining a spirit of mutual co-operation and trust in their relations.

Among the three major organizations of the Kuravar/Sidhanar community, the SSS seems to be the most vibrant organization in terms of the various parameters of such an organization given in this study. The bye-law of SSS clearly explains the objectives of the organization as to function in different ways to foster the social, educational, cultural, spiritual and physical development of the members of the community⁴⁰. The ideology of the movement strives to realise social justice, equality of opportunities and cultural revival of the Sidhanar community. The marginalized groups are often the victims of an unjust social order characterized by the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. They are denied access to centres of power, wealth and social status. Thus the task of the organization is to lead the community in its endeavour to achieve these goals. Simultaneously the organization has been keen to safeguard the customs and traditions of the community. The religious faith of the community is based on the Hindu religious customs and traditions. The temple worship and the worship of Hindu religious deities form an important part of their community life.

Moreover, the organization is actively associated with the conduct of the religious rituals and ceremonies on important occasions of family life of the members of the community such as birth, marriage, death etc.

The growth of SSS has been the result of the dedicated and selfless services of a number of leaders of the community in its different stages of evolution. Among them the contributions of P. C. Adichan⁴¹, K. S. Krishna Sastri, former member of Travancore – Cochin Legislative Assembly, R. Achutan, former member of Travancore – Cochin Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha, R. Govindan, former member of Kerala Legislative Assembly and Bhargavi Thankappan⁴² have been remarkable. Subsequently the services of a host of other leaders like Kallada Narayanan, former member of Kerala Legislative Assembly, A. K. Thankappan, Mavelikkara S. Kesavan, Anchal Sreedharan, Kumpazha Kunju Cherukkan, A. K. Gopalakrishnan, T. C. Raman, Sarasamma, Pathala Raghavan and so on have made the functioning of the organization vibrant.

The administration of the organization at the state level is managed by central executive committee, director board and state committee. The central executive committee is composed of nine members: state president, three vice-presidents, general secretary, secretary, assistant secretary, auditor general and registrar. The director board is a larger body comprising 35 members. The responsibility of the state committee is to implement the decisions of the director board⁴³.

The district level administration of the organisation is managed by district council and district council executive. Though the presence of SSS is found in many districts of the state, the strongholds of the movement are Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts. There

is a sizeable but scattered presence of the community in Kottayam district also. The union council and union council executive manage the administration of the movement at the panchayat/taluk levels. All taluks in Kollam district, Nedumangad, Chirayinkeezhu and Thiruvananthapuram taluks in Thiruvannanthapuram district, Adoor, Ranni, Kozhencherry and Thiruvalla taluks in Pathanamthitta district, Mavelikkara and Chengannoor in Alappuzha district are the main centres of SSS. The branch administration council looks after the affairs at the branch level, the lowest unit of the movement. There are around 800 branches also known as Karayogams and more than 75000 members in the organization. The headquarters of the movement is located at Kottathala, Kottarakkara in Kollam district. The main feeder organizations of SSS are the Sidhanar Service Yuvajana Federation (SSYF) for mobilising the youth and Sidhanar Service Mahila Federatiion (SSMF) for organizing the women. The organization publishes a monthly magazine called the 'Block Force' as its mouthpiece. SSS registered a trust called 'Mithra Sankethan Vikasana Trust', with registration No. 591/97 to mobilize the economic resources of the community for its own growth and self-reliance. It is aimed at establishing various types of institutions and thereby providing employment opportunities to the members of the organisation.

Regarding the political affiliations of the organization, the leaders have claimed that they keep an equal distance from the coalition politics of both UDF and LDF⁴⁴. However, it is evident that SSS used to maintain a close relation with Left party politics particularly in the context of the close association of its patron, Bhargavi Thankappan with CPI. At the same time, the leaders content that the organization is keen to support meritorious candidates in the elections irrespective of their party affiliation. Besides, the

candidates who maintain a sympathetic approach towards the demands of the community are also favoured by the organization.

4.4.2.2 Early Agitations

The organization was actively involved in confronting different issues concerning the community and all other downtrodden castes. One of the early agitations of SSS aimed at restoring subcaste reservation for SCs, thereby achieving social justice and equality of opportunities. It had organized a series of agitations for this demand (see Table 4.1)

Table 4.1
Early Agitations of SSS to Restore Subcaste Reservation

Sl.No	Period	Method and place of agitation
1	10 June 1983	Trivandrum district council organized dharna and rally before secretariat
2	24 March 1984	State committee organized dharna and rally before secretariat
3	7 March 1985	Eight hour dharna before secretariat
4	6 June 1986	Dharna and rally before taluk offices
5	18 August 1986	Dharna and rally before village offices
6	1990	Mass memorandum submitted before state government
7	1994	Memorandum submitted to the Indian President and the Prime Minister. Also filed case in the High Court of Kerala.
8	24 January 1996	Dharna and rally before secretariat

Source: A.K. Thankappan, 'Sidhanar Service Society, Sarthakamaya Anchu Pathittandukal', Sidhanar Service Society, Suvarna Jubilee Smaranika, Trivandrum 1998, p.58.

4.4.2.3 Early Demands and Campaigning Programmes

The Charter of Rights presented by SSS before the central/state governments comprises issues of both public interest and dalit concerns: reinstate subcaste reservation for the appointments of SC/ST; frame time-bound programmes to tackle the issue of unemployment; strengthen the public sector to control the prices of commodities; increase the job reservation of SC/ST upto 15%; take measures to get the benefits of 'people's planning programme' to downtrodden castes through the implementation of special component plans; implement the appointment in the private educational institutions through PSC; allot 50% of the land given by the government through title deed to SC/ST sections; take measures to give land, housing and labour to SC/ST sections; continue the present form of caste reservation; drop the move to enlarge the SC/ST list; grant educational institutions to SC organizations; increase the stipends and lump sum grant of SC/ST students; appoint special commission to solve the problems of Dalit Christians; return the lost lands of STs to them⁴⁵.

The SSS has undertaken a wide range of campaigning programmes so as to restore subcaste reservation, to eradicate the problems of unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and the use of intoxicating items, to check anti-caste reservation agitations and creamy layer discussions etc. The organisation took special interest in organizing programmes for eradicating illiteracy as resolved in its 38th state conference held at Mavelikkara from 11–12 May 1985 and several such illiteracy eradication camps were organized in different parts of the state attended by a very large section of the members of the community⁴⁶. The organisation also grants scholarships and other educational aid for empowering the community in the field of education. The SSS organised programmes campaigning against the use of

alcohol, drugs etc. An anti-intoxication camp was organized along with the jubilee celebrations at Nooranad from 9–10 August 1997. This camp was led by Edyaranmula Johnson, the advisor to World Health Organization. Political leaders, top government officials, and the leaders of SSS also managed the sessions of the camp. Eye-donation programmes have been a regular feature of the functioning of the organisation and medical assistance is given to the poor members of the community.

4.4.2.4 Golden Jubilee of SSS

The golden jubilee celebrations of SSS held from February 1997 to December 1998 was an important milestone in the history of the organization. As part of the jubilee celebrations, it organized ten mega meetings in different parts of the state⁴⁷. **1.** Kallada Narayanan memorial torchlight relay which started from the tomb of Kallada Narayanan at Kilikolloor on 31st January 1997 was followed by the inauguration of the jubilee at Thiruvananthapuram on 1 February 1997. **2.** The youth conference and 50th state annual conference were jointly convened at Karunagapally from 10–11 May 1997. The meeting of the delegates on the second day elected the leaders of the organization for the next three years. Thousands of members of the community, particularly youngsters, attended the rally and public meeting organized as part of the conference. **3.** The grand cultural festival and budget meeting of SSS were held at Nooranad from 9 - 10 August 1997. As part of the programme, a colourful cultural procession and public meeting were also organized. **4.** The women's conference of the community together with the delegates meeting, public meeting and cultural events were held at Pathanamthitta from 7 – 8 November 1997. **5.** A fellowship meeting of the officials, employees, intellectuals and representatives of the people belonging to the community was held at Kollam on 25th January 1998. **6.** A friendly meeting of the leaders of

other dalit organizations, together with meetings of delegates and public were organized at Punalur on 29th March 1998. **7.** The students conference of the community and a ceremony for honouring the former activists of the organization were held at Nedumangad on 14th April 1998. **8.** The 51st annual conference of SSS and 8th golden jubilee conference were jointly celebrated at Kottarakkara on 16th August 1998. As part of the programme, annual general body meeting, public meeting, ceremony for honouring the senior activists of the organization etc were also organized. **9.** The cassette release of SSS and the 9th mega meeting of golden jubilee were jointly held at government L. P school near Bharanikkavu on 30th August 1998.

All the above nine programmes which were organized prior to the jubilee valedictory ceremonies were held at different places. They strengthened the organizational base in these places. In order to educate the community, seminars on themes relating to relevant issues were also conducted. These programmes were attended by political leaders, ministers, academics, government officials, leaders of SSS as well as other dalit organization and a large section of the members of the community.

10. The valedictory function of the golden jubilee of SSS was held at Thiruvananthapuram on 28th and 29th December 1998.⁴⁸ Prior to the concluding programmes, a jubilee proclamation rally was organised from Chembazhanty, the birth place of Sree Narayana Guru on 20th December 1998. The rally led by A. K. Thankappan, general secretary of SSS, passed through different districts like Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta - the strongholds of SSS. The first day of the jubilee celebrations began with the delegates' conference on 28th December 1998. The conference passed certain important resolutions which included the various demands of SSS and submitted it to the state/central governments

for their consideration. The first day also witnessed the ‘Sidhanar Mahasangamam’, the huge rally and public meeting attended by more than one lakh members of the community. The ‘Golden Jubilee Smaranika’ portraying the history and dynamism of the movement was also released during the meeting. The members of the community staged different cultural programmes in the evening. The second day of the jubilee celebrations witnessed a seminar on the subject ‘Social Justice and Downtrodden People’ in the forenoon session and a cultural meeting in the afternoon. The jubilee validictory programmes were attended by political leaders, ministers, top government officials, academics, leaders of the SSS, other dalit leaders and, above all, hundreds of members of the community. The period of the golden jubilee celebrations is counted as the golden era of the SSS for it rejuvenated the organization in all respects.⁴⁹

The golden jubilee memorial head office building, a long cherished dream of SSS, was inaugurated at Kottathala, Kottarakkara in Kollam district on 10th October 1999. Along with the office-building, a cultural study centre, reading room and technical study centre were also established. The celebrations of the Organization’s Day was observed on the same day together with meetings of delegates and public. These programmes were attended by political leaders, leaders of the community and a good number of members of SSS.

4.4.2.5 Later Demands and Programmes

The SSS organized the ‘Dalit Rights Declaration Rally’ and a public meeting at Kollam from 28th to 30th December 2001. The main demands of the agitation were the following: implement reservation of jobs in private sector, take measures to save the agricultural sector, formulate measures to address the problems of unemployment etc. Separate conferences for

women, youth, students and children were conducted during this programme. The leaders claimed that around 25000 members of the society attended the programme.

A two day convention of SSS was held at Kottarakkara on the 29th and 30th December 2002 along with a joint meeting of the youth and women forums of the organization. Besides it is to be remembered that 'empowerment of dalits' was main theme of the deliberation of SSS during its state annual conference held at Punalur, Kollam district from the 28th to the 30th December 2003.

The state committee of SSS organized the leadership training camp at Youth Centre, Veli, Thiruvananthapuram on the 20th and 21st March 2004. This camp was mainly aimed at revamping the functioning of the movement based on the exhortation of the 56th state conference of SSS to empower the community to achieve social justice. The central executive committee members, director board members, state committee members, state committee members of Sidhanar Service Yuvajana Federation and Sidhanar Service Mahila Federation, branch council members etc attended the programme. The different sessions of the camp were managed by various political leaders, Members of Legislative Assembly, top government officials, leaders of the SSS and other dalit organizations.

The regional conference of SSS was conducted recently at Kottarakkara on 2nd August 2006 to revitalize the functioning of the organization and to chalk out programmes to revamp its structure. The meeting reiterated the demand of the organization to reinstate subcaste reservation for SC/ST sections. The leaders and a good number of the members of SSS attended the gathering.

4.4.3 Kerala Sambavar Society (KSS)

The Sambavar community, known by different names as Paraiyan, Parayan or Sambavar constitutes the third largest dalit community in Kerala. As ‘Parayan’⁵⁰ was considered a pejorative and derogatory term, it was changed to Sambavar, a more dignified and refined modern usage. It was V. K. Ramachandra Das, leader of Sambavas and former Member of Legislative Assembly who approached the Dewan of Travancore, C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer in 1955, for changing the caste’s name from Parayan to Sambavar and the Dewan favourably approved the request. Along the regions near Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, Parayar were known as Sambavar on the basis of their devotion to Lord Siva, who is often considered the God of the outcastes and forest-dwelling castes.

4.4.3.1 Formation and Growth of the Organization

The early attempts at forming an organization for the Sambavar community may be traced back to Sri. Kavarikulam Kandan Kumaran⁵¹ and he established an organization called the ‘Brahma Prathyaksha Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham’ in 1911. Afterwards, Pazhoor Kunjadi, also known as Pazhoor R. Siva Subramanya Sambavan established an organization called the ‘Sambavar Sangham’ in 1915. Then I. C. Chandra Sekharan established the ‘Sree Nandanar Moksha Paradayani Sangham’ located at Mavelikkara in 1931. The same organization was changed to the ‘Sree Nandanar Vilasam Moksha Pradayani Maha Sabha’ under the leadership of V. K. Ramachandra Das, V. J. Atma Gopal, A. V. Haridas and so on and started functioning in different parts of Travancore. In an effort to forge unity among the Sambavar community, both the ‘Brahma Prathyaksha Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham’ and ‘Sree Nandanar Vilasam Moksha Pradayani Maha Sabha’ united and formed the ‘All Tranvancore Parayar Maha Sabha’

at Arukalickal near Adoor in 1933 under the leadership of P. K. Kumaran and V. K. Ramachandra Das⁵². In 1955, V. K. Ramachandra Das established the 'All Travancore Hindu Sambavar Maha Sabha', and later its name was changed to the 'All Kerala Hindu Sambavar Maha Sabha', (AKHSMS) in 1959. In Travancore area, it emerged as the leading organization of the Paraya community. Simultaneously, there was another organization for Sambavas in north Kerala known as the 'All Kerala Sambavar Maha Sabha' (AKSMS) located at Cochin under the leadership of Dr. C. C. Prasad⁵³. Though many rounds of discussions were carried out to unite these two organizations, none of them produced any concrete effects. Subsequently an 'Ekopana Samithi' (unification council) was formed under the leadership of Pandalam Bharathan, A. K. Narayanan (Changanassery), M. M. Sukumaran (Madapally), C. Kutty (Ernakulam), Vennikulalm Madhavan (Ernakulam), A. A. T. Varapuzha (Ernakulam) and so on. When the 'Ekopana Samithi' approached the government for registration, it was learned that these two organizations had not renewed their registrations duly and as a result their approvals were withheld. In such a situation, the Samithi recommended for a new organization and they felt that their recommendation was not readily acceptable to the two organizations⁵⁴. The result was the formation of the new organization known as the 'Kerala Sambavar Society (KSS)' at Aluva on 27th May 1979. In this endeavour, many already existing Sambava organizations merged with KSS. The important leaders of this new organization were Pandalam Bharathan, C. Kutty, M. Surendran and others. The formation of KSS is also attributed to the fact that both AKHSMS and AKSMS, the already existing two leading organizations, lacked progressive ideas and a spirit of reform.

Meanwhile the efforts of unification between AKHSMS and AKSMS continued and an important initiative of merger between them took place at Kottayam in 1984. These two organizations even merged together and actually formed a new organization called the ‘Sambavar Maha Sabha (SMS)’ with K. Ramankutty of AKSMS as the president and K. K. Bhaskaran of AKHSMS as the general secretary. Unfortunately this merger did not last long and they got separated soon. They remained as two independent organizations called the All Kerala Hindu Sambavar Maha Sabha (AKHSMS) and Sambavar Maha Sabha (SMS). A series of disputes and even judicial interventions followed the separation between these two organizations. Consequently the Sambavar community witnessed the emergence of three major organizations: AKHSMS, SMS and KSS. Though many attempts of unification have taken place among these three organizations, none of them produced any positive results. Actually the disputes between AKHSMS and SMS remained as a major setback to realize this goal. The leaders of KSS claimed that they were always ready for an unconditional reunion.

The leading organization of the Sambavar community is the KSS. The main objective of the KSS is to make the Sambavar community conscious of their organization as well as rights, to work in an organized manner to achieve their legitimate rights and to act in different ways for the integral development of Sambavar community who have been subjected to slavery, ignorance, superstitions, improper customs and practises etc for centuries⁵⁵. The ideology of the movement is mainly based on the visions of Dr. Ambedkar as in the case of many other dalit organizations. At the same time, the movement also follows the footprints and exhortations of Ayyankali, Kavarikulam Kandan Kumaran and so on. Though the members

of KSS follow the customs and traditions of Hindu religion, it is not an organization established exclusively for promoting these religious traditions. It works for the protection of social justice and equal opportunities which are denied to the downtrodden castes. The programmes of the organization are aimed at realising the socio-economic, cultural and educational empowerment of the Sambavar community. It also fights against different kinds of superstitions, improper customs and practices which are deep rooted among the members of the community.

The important leaders who have made great contributions in founding and building the organization are C. Kutty, Pandalam Bharathan, Vennikkualm Madhavan and so on. In subsequent years, a host of other leaders like T. Babu (Kunnathoor), T. M. Thankappan (Ernakulam), T. K. Sadanandan (Thrissur), C. Kandan Master (Thrissur), P. Karuppayya (Idukki), Pappan Venmenadu (Thrissur) and others played important roles in converting the KSS into a leading organization of the community in its different stages of growth.

The administrative structure of the organization is divided into different levels: state executive, state committee, district committee, taluk committee and branch committee. The state executive which is entrusted with the task of the general administration, leadership and policy formulation of KSS is elected from the state committee. The state committee, whose approval is required for the decisions of the executive, is elected from the annual general body meeting of the organization. The important office-bearers of the movement at the state level are the patron, president, vice president, general secretary, secretaries, treasurer, registrar etc⁵⁶.

The district level administration of the organization is governed by the district committee which is elected from the annual district general body meeting. The district committee is composed of district executive, ie. the office bearers at the district level and other committee members. Though KSS is functioning in all districts of the state except Wayanad, the organization is vibrant in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam and Thrissur districts. Among these districts, the strongholds of the organization are Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Ernakulam. In Pathanamthitta district, the key centres of the movement are Pandalam, Aikkad near Koduman, Adoor, Mylapra etc, whereas in Ernakulam district, the important pockets of KSS are Perumbavoor, Kunnathunadu, Thrippunithura etc. In Kottayam district, Madappally, Changanassery, Kanjirappally, Erumely etc form the nerve centres of the organization.

The taluk level administration of KSS is governed by a taluk committee which is elected from the annual taluk general body meeting. Taluk committee is composed of the taluk executive, ie. the office bearers at the taluk level and other committee members. Branch committee which governs the administration of the movement at the local level is elected from the annual branch general body meeting. Branch committee is composed of branch executive committee members, ie. the office bearers at the branch level and other branch committee members. KSS has around 500 branches and around 1,10,000 members spread all over the state. The headquarters of KSS is located at Ernakulam. The main feeder organizations of KSS are Kerala Sambavar Society Yuvajana Federation (KSSYF) which is aimed at mobilising the youth while Kerala Sambavar Society Vanitha Samajam (KSSVS) is engaged in the task of empowering women.

Though KSS does not publish any official magazine as its mouthpiece, there is a monthly news magazine, published by its Thiruvananthapuram district committee, 'KSS Thiruvananthapuram District News Letter'. However, during its early history, in the mid 19th century, a magazine called 'Parayar' was published from Madras with the subscription of around 500 copies. It had a short life, though.⁵⁷

As far as the political affiliations of the organization are concerned, the leaders now claim that they keep an equal distance from both the LDF and UDF⁵⁸. But it has been a fact that a sizeable portion of the community, as in the case of other dalit castes too, constitute an important vote bank of the left parties. It is also to be noticed that Pandalm Bharatham, the former general secretary of KSS for a long time had contested as the candidate of UDF in the Kerala Legislative Assembly elections of 1996 from Pandalam reserved constituency. However, he lost the election. KSS also openly supported V. R. Sivarajan, the defeated LDF candidate of Konni constituency, in the Kerala Legislative Assembly elections of 2006. However, the organization officially maintains the stand that it is opposed to the direct and independent involvement in politics.

4.4.3.2 Early Demands and Agitations

The Charter of Demands submitted by KSS before the government of Kerala in 1982 clearly explains the early important demands of the organization: take measures to protect the traditional bamboo-related occupation of the Sambavar community; install the statue of Dr. Ambedkar before the Legislative Assembly of Kerala; drop the move to exclude the Pulaya/Cheramar community from SC list in Kerala; protect the interests of SC/ST in granting reservation benefits related to government jobs; grant dalit Christians due benefits of reservation according to the strength of the

population; grant stipends and lump sum grant benefits at an enhanced rate to SC/ST students without unnecessary delay etc⁵⁹.

KSS organized a series of agitations to exert pressure on the government to achieve the various demands of the organization particularly in protecting the hereditary occupation of the community relating to bamboo products. The following schedule (Table 4.2) shows certain important early agitations organized by KSS.

Table 4.2
Early Agitations of KSS

Sl.No.	Period	Modes and Places of Agitation
1	20 th August 1979	Mass dharna before Bamboo Corporation office, Angamaly
2	27 th November 1979	Dharna before district collectorates
3	2 nd – 28 th March 1981	Fast relay satyagraha before Bamboo Corporation office, Angamaly
4	1985	Dharnas before secretariat
5	24 th September 1986	Dharna before secretariat
6	6 th December 1986	Dharna before collectorates
7	24 th September 1987	Dharna before secretariat

Source: Pandalam Bharathan, op.cit., p.43

The KSS organized a historic 57 day fast relay satyagraha from 6th December 1987 to 31st January 1988 before the state secretariat to achieve the various demands of the community. It was followed by a 9 day fast agitation from 1–9 February 1988 by Pandalam Bharathan, the then general secretary of KSS. The leaders of KSS claimed that due to these agitations

an agreement was reached with the government on the following issues: Sambavas who are bamboo labourers, even if their names were not registered in Bamboo Corporation, were declared eligible for welfare schemes including pensions; the raw materials such as bamboo, reed, cane, palmyra etc, to be provided sufficiently to the community; title deeds of land to be given to all SCs soon; exemption period from tests to be extended for SCs employees etc⁶⁰.

The birth centenary of Dr. Ambedkar was celebrated at the branch, taluk and district levels of KSS from 14th April 1990 to 14th April 1991. Demanding the installation of the statue of Dr. Ambedkar in the centenary year itself before the Legislative Assembly of Kerala, the organization conducted the secretariat march on 6th December 1990. This agitation was attended by around 10,000 members of the community. KSS also published 'Dr. Ambedkar Janma Sadabdi Smaranika 91' to commemorate the occasion. The memory of Dr. Ambedkar always has been revered in the organization and 14th April, his birthday and 6th December, the day of his demise are commemorated at the branch levels with special prayer meeting and other functions.

The organization conducted the state wide march which started from Kasargode on 5th April 1992. The march concluded at the secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram on 11th May 1992. The main demands of the agitation were the following: do not change the present SCs list in Kerala, install the statue of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar before the Legislative Assembly of Kerala, increase the reservation rights of SCs in proportion to their population, implement reservation for SCs in the appointments of private institutions, implement the pension welfare schemes for the traditional Sambava bamboo labourers and protect their other related demands etc⁶¹. The leaders

of KSS and hundreds of members of the organization were actively associated with the programme.

The organization conducted a series of agitations during the period 1991–95 to protest against the problems confronted by the dalit community in general. The murder of C. T. Sukumaran IAS, an efficient administrative officer belonging to the dalit community was a matter of agitation for KSS and many other dalit organizations during the period. Many agitations were organized under the leadership of SC/ST Joint Council to speed up investigation into this matter. Besides, KSS fought against self-financing professional colleges particularly against Adoor and Chengannoor government self-financing engineering colleges. The dalit students often faced financial difficulties to pursue education in self-financing institutions. The organization also led agitations against the enlarging of SC list which posed threats to the existing beneficiaries of this list. This problem was indeed a subject of agitation for many dalit organizations during the period.

The state committee of KSS organised the picketing of district collectorates of the state in two stages: on 5th December 1998 at Idukki and on 5th January 1999 at other districts. The main demand for this agitation was to install the statue of Dr. Ambedkar in front of the Legislative Assembly of Kerala. Hundreds of KSS members attended the agitation. While considering the participation of the members of the community at different district headquarters, the agitation at Kottayam witnessed the highest number of participants (750), while the lowest turnout (77) was recorded at Ernakulam district⁶².

4.4.3.3 Agitations of KSS together with SC/ST Joint Council

KSS was actively involved in the massive secretariat march organized by the SC/ST Joint Council at Thiruvananthapuram on 17th February 1999. A campaign by vehicle was conducted from Thrissur to Thiruvananthapuram, preceding the march. The agitations raised following demands: grant reservation to SC/ST in the appointments of private educational institutions, allot the first vacancy to SC/ST in cooperative institutions were the 10% reservation has not been implemented, effectively implement the SCP, STP fund utilization in 'people's planning programme', check the misuse of reservation benefits of SC/ST by using fake caste certificates etc⁶³. Thousands of members belonging to different dalit organizations including KSS attended the programme.

The organization started the fund raising programme of Rs. 10 lakh for constructing its state committee office, through the sale of 10 lakh coupons circulated among its members. The programme was inaugurated at Pathanamthitta on 28th November 1999. The leaders of different dalit organisations, representatives of the people, leaders of KSS etc attended the programme. In spite of the fund raising programme, the building construction is yet to be completed due to financial constraints.

The SC/ST Joint Council organized the collectorate marches of one lakh people at different district headquarters of the state on 5th January 2000 and KSS was actively involved in all centres of the agitation. The main demand of the agitation was the implementation of reservation for SC/ST in the appointments in private sector educational institutions. Hundreds of members of different dalit organizations attended the programme.

KSS was actively associated with the mammoth 'Rights Dedication Meeting' and rally organized by the SC/ST Joint Council at Ernakulam on 25th August 2000, attended by thousands of members of different dalit organisations. The agitation was aimed at highlighting the various demands of dalits including the demand for implementing reservation in private educational sector and in all other government aided sectors. This demand was presented not before any particular government but before the nation and people. In fact, it was a reaction against the indifferent attitude of the consecutive governments towards the demands of dalits for a long period. The huge crowd also joined the citation of the pledge by which the rights were dedicated before the nation and people.

The SC/ST Joint Council organised a fast of 1000 people at the secretariat on 7th February 2001. The member organisations of the Council attended the agitation. KSS participated in this programme by sending 250 members⁶⁴. This agitation was conducted to achieve the various demands of the downtrodden castes including the demand for reservation for dalits in private educational sector.

4.4.3.4 Silver Jubilee of KSS

As a preparation for the silver jubilee year of the KSS, the organisation conducted a state leadership training camp together with youth, women conventions at Changanassery from 24th to 25th May 2003. The leadership training camp was attended by around 200 elected delegates and more than that number attended the youth and women conferences. These programmes were aimed at revamping the organization before the golden jubilee celebrations.

The silver jubilee celebrations of KSS was conducted at Pandalam on from 1st to 3rd January 2005. It was a prolonged programme which started at Changanassery on 25th May 2003, and was celebrated in different districts in different ways. The three-day silver jubilee valedictory programme and the 25th state annual conference were celebrated together. The occasion witnessed a wide variety of programmes such as delegates meeting, Sambava unity meetings, youth/women's meetings, seminars, symposiums, cultural programme, rally, public meeting etc. Among the different programmes of the occasion, the Sambava unity meeting attended by the leaders of different Sambava organizations deserves special mention. The initiative for such a unity gathering was praiseworthy, though such efforts do not often acquire adequate momentum. The seminars and symposiums on current problems faced by community such as reservation in private sector, protection of the traditional bamboo occupation of Sambavas etc also were relevant. The occasion also raised the following important demands of the organization and planned agitations to realize these demands: implement reservation in private sector, allot 10% reservation for SC students in self-financing professional colleges, distribute the stipends and other concessions of SC students on time, form the state SC/ST Commission, give adequate representation to SCs in PSC, Travancore Devaswam Board, state Women's Commission, state Human Rights Commission etc. A host of dignitaries including ministers, representatives of the people, political leaders, academics, leaders of different dalit organisations, leaders of KSS and above all, hundreds of members of the organization attended the programmes.

4.4.3.5 Recent Endeavours

KSS organized the state special convention at Adoor on 16 – 17 December 2006 to declare the agitation by raising the following demands of KSS: allow reservation for SC/ST in private sector, do not share the SC/ST reservation with new sections, do not sabotage SC/ST reservation through creamy-layer, protect the traditional bamboo occupation of the Sambavas etc. As part of the programme, an anti creamy-layer reservation protection rally was also conducted. Together with this programme, a reception was given to certain important leaders of the community as well as the leaders of agitation who represented organization in the Parliament march in Delhi on 15th December 2005. Representatives of the people, leaders of social organizations, political leaders, leaders of KSS and other dalit organizations and hundreds of members of the community attended the programmes.

The organization convened an ‘Agitation Declaration Meeting’ at Kottayam on 18th August 2008 raising the following demands: declare an SC development policy; withdraw the governmental decision which increased the term of SC certificates to 10 years; entrust the appointments in the aided education institutions to PSC; make higher educational facilities accessible to SCs; implement the adivasi settlement pact etc. These demands were submitted to the government as a memorandum on 19th July 2008.

To conclude, after analysing the early phases of dalit movements as well as the intercession of mainstream political parties in dalit society, the study focuses in detail on the crucial role played by the caste based organisations such as KPMS, SSS and KSS in the socio-political empowerment of dalits. In fact, the caste based organisations constitute the major chunk of the organizational set up of dalits in Kerala. However, it is observed that these organisations are often guided by sectarian interests of

respective castes. Consequently they often fail in presenting a united effort or in forming a common platform whereby they can collectively bargain for the legitimate demands of dalit masses. It is also interesting to note that the policies, programmes and the pattern of agitations of these organizations have a marked similarity except for certain specific demands of the respective community. Almost all the organisations shied away from confronting the core problems faced by the downtrodden castes in general. Moreover, each of these organizations has its own political affiliations and interests. The leaders of these organisations have their own vested political interests. This often leads to disharmony and divisions among organisations of the same caste which impedes the true consolidation and empowerment of dalits. Despite these shortcomings, the potential of these organisations in dalit empowerment should not be underestimated. They act as the major and active organizations of dalits in their resurgence. The objective of the various organisations, leaders and members of the community is to strive collectively to foster unity, to chalk out policies, programmes, social interventions, and agitations aimed at their upliftment and empowerment.

Notes and References

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2. Richard W. Franke, *Life is a Little Better: Redistribution as a Development Strategy in Nadur Village, Kerala*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1993, p.225.
3. J. Prabhash, *Affirmative Action and Social Change, Social Mobility of Dalits*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.54.
4. Interview with K.K.S. Das, former general secretary, SEEDIAN on 28th April 2009.
5. K.K.S. Das, *Dalit Desiyatha (Mal.)*, Federal India Books, Kottayam, 2002, pp.5-6.
6. Interview with Sunny M. Kapikkad, noted dalit activist on 13th January 2007.
7. The term 'Pulayan' is said to be derived from 'pula' which means pollution in the sense of caste impurity. A 'pulayan' is considered as a polluting man. Another argument is that the term is derived from 'Pulam' which means field. Pulayas are slaves working in the fields of their masters. A section of the community prefer to be called Cheramar; used in the vernacular as cheruman or cherumakkal. There are a lot of Christian converts among them. The caste name cheruman or cherumakkal is derived from the Malayalam word 'cher' which means soil, and 'makkal' meaning children. Thus this term is interpreted as the sons of the soil. There is also an argument that cheramar or cherumakkal was a corrupted form of cheramakkal, as the original inhabitants of the ancient Cheranad. As such they are the original inhabitants of the land pushed out by invaders. (For details see, Saradamoni, *op.cit.*, pp.50-51. Also

see S.C. Bhatt and Gopal. K. Bhargava (eds.) *Land and People of Indian States and Union Territories*, Vol. XIV, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2005, p.47)

8. It was registered in 1970 under the Travancore-Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act XII of 1955.
9. For details see, S. Sasankan, 'Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, 1970-95', *Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, Rajatha Jubilee Souvenir*, Trivandrum, 1996, p.105.
10. *Bye-law*, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, p.3.
11. *Ibid*, pp.3-4.
12. Interview with S. Sasankan, former general secretary, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha on 14th February, 2007. Also see S. Sasankan, *op.cit.*, p.119.
13. The new organization used the caste name 'Pulayan'. The leaders argued that only the caste 'Pulayan' is referred in the SC list and no reference as Pulaya or Pulayar is to be found there. Pulayan is the singular expression of the plural 'Pulayar' and the former one is a better usage like the name of the famous community organization of Nairs as the Nair Service Society. (Interview with Vakkanad Raghavan, former general secretary, Kerala Pulayan Maha Sabha on 13-3-2007).
14. *Malayala Manorama*, 14th April 2009; 20th July 2009.
15. S. Sasankan, *op.cit.*, p.105
16. *Keralathile Pathinanchu Laksham Pulayarkku Oru Ekekrita Sanghatana (Mal.)*, KPMS Publications, Series I, 1976, pp.21-25, quoted in Joseph Mathew, *op.cit.*, p.112.
17. For details see, S. Sasankan, *op.cit.*, p.111.
18. For details see, *Ibid*, pp.113-114.
19. For details see, *Ibid*, p.107.

20. Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, *Activity Report* for 21st annual conference held at Aleppey from 3-4 August 1991 pp.5-11.
21. For details see, S. Sasankan, *op.cit.*, p.119
22. For details see, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, *Activity Report* for 24th state conference held at Thiruvalla from 10-12 June 1994, pp.7-15
23. For details see, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, *Activity Report* for 27th annual conference held at Calicut from 13-14 December 1997, p.10.
24. Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, *Activity Report* for 29th annual conference held at Vaikom from 1-2 August 1999, pp.18-20.
25. For details see, Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, *Activity Report* for 32nd state conference held at Angamaly from 13-15 December 2002, pp.17-18.
26. Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, *Organization Report* for 33rd state conference held at Changanacherry from 16-17 October 2004, p.12.
27. The Republic day message of K.R. Narayanan, the former President of India on 26th January 2002, referred to the need of reservation of jobs for dalits in the private industrial sector of the nation particularly in the context of the challenges of globalization. KPMS organized the march by drawing inspiration from this message of the former Rashtrapati.
28. *Malayala Manorama*, 18th October 2007.
29. *Bye-law*, Panchami Small Savings Scheme of KPMS, p.1
30. There was an observation in the media that the visit of the Congress president to the meeting of the Maha Sabha was a sign of the shift in the pro-Left policy of the organization. But the leaders claimed that the Maha Sabha had no particular political alligence and the organization would support those who helped them irrespective of 'left' or 'right' party politics. (For details see, *The Hindu*, 15th February 08, *Malayala Manorama*, 15th February 08).
31. *Malayala Manorama*, 2nd November 08.

32. As requested by the leaders of the community, the central government through the order G.O. No. LDIS. 30238/56/DD dated 7th March 1957, changed the caste's name from Kuravan to Sidhhanar, a title which represents prosperity. However a section of the community still retains the old caste name 'Kuravan' and they are organized under the All Kerala Kuravar Maha Sabha with headquarters at Kottarakkara in Kollam district. They strictly adhere to the orthodox identity of the community and are proud of being born in the blood of Kuravar. They are also resolved to protect that identity till the last moments of their life. (Interview with Maranadu Narayanan, general secretary, All Kerala Kuravar Maha Sabha on 13th Oct 2007).
33. Interview with Mulavana Thampy, general secretary, Kerala Sidhanar Service Society on 6th October 2007.
34. He belonged to east Kallada in Kollam district and served as the first representative of the community in Sree Mulam Praja Sabha in 1924 for one year. (For details see, K.S Chellappan, *Akhila Kerala Kuravar Maha Sabha, Charithram (Mal.)*, Punalur, 2006, pp. 86-87).
35. P.C. Adichan hailed from Aikkad at Kodumon village in Pathanamthitta district. He is considered as the patron of the Travancore Kuravar Sabha, which changed to All Travancore Kuravar Sabha in 1950 and later to the All Kerala Kuravar Maha Sabha. (For details see, K.S. Chellappan *op.cit.*, pp. 89-113)
36. *Innale, Innu, Nale, Kerala Sidhanar Service Society (Mal.)*, KSSSS, Kollam Taluk Union, 2003. p.5
37. *Ibid*, p.6
38. As a result of the schism in the organization, KSSSS and SSS began to function as two separate entities. The main leaders who stood behind KSSSS during this period were Puthoor Kochukunju, Mulavana Thampy, Kunnathoor Chandran, M.S. Sasidharan, Chengamanad Kochukunju and

so on. The headquarters of KSSS is located at Cinemapparambu in Poruvazhy village, Kunnathoor taluk, Kollam district. However, it was registered only in 1980 under the non-trading section of Indian Company's Act of 1955.

39. For details see, *Innale, Innu, Nale, Kerala Sidhanar Service Society, op.cit.*, p.8. Though Krishna Sastri established another organization called the All Kerala Sidhanar Service Society in 1985, the organization could not mark a significant growth subsequently.
40. *Bye-law*, Sidhanar Service Society, pp.2-4.
41. He was the former member of Sri Mulam Assembly, Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha.
42. She was the patron of SSS, former member of Lok Sabha and former member of Legislative Assembly of Kerala for five occasions. She also served as the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. She was closely associated with party politics particularly as the leader of the CPI party. The leaders claim that the political influence of this leader has positively helped the growth of the SSS in different ways. (Interview with A.K. Thankappan, general secretary, SSS on 2nd October 2007).
43. For details see, *Bye-law*, Sidhanar Service Society, pp. 27-28.
44. Interview with A.K. Thankappan, general secretary, SSS, on 2nd October 2007.
45. A.K. Thankappan, 'Sidhanar Service Society, Sarthakamaya Anchu Pathittandukal', *Sidhanar Service Society-Suvarna Jubilee Smaranika*, Trivandrum, 1998, p.61.
46. For details see, *Ibid*, pp.61-62.
47. For details see, *Ibid*, pp.62-67.
48. Report of the jubilee concluding celebrations, supplement, *Sidhanar Service Society-Suvarna Jubilee Smaranika*, Trivandrum 1998.

49. Interview with A.K. Thankappan, general secretary, SSS on 2nd October 2007.
50. The term 'Parayan' is used to denote different meanings such as the one who guards the burial grounds or as the one who beat the drums or as the one who speaks out very much. The hereditary occupation of the community is mainly centred around making mats, baskets and other handicraft works with reed, bamboo, cane, rattan, palmyra leaf etc. They are also employed as agricultural labourers.
51. He belonged to Perumbatty village, Mallappally taluk, Pathanamthitta district. He was the leader of the Paraya community and the former member of Sree Mulam Praja Sabha in 1924.
52. Pandalam Bharathan, 'Kerala Sambavar Society, Kazhinja Pathinonnu Varsham' (Mal.), *Kerala Sambavar Society, Dr. Ambedkar Janma Sadabdi Smaranika 91*, Thiruvananthapuram, pp. 41-42.
53. Dr.C.C Prasad, ex-MLA founded the All Kerala Sambavar Maha Sabha by reorganizing the already existing North Kerala Parayar Maha Sabha, an organization for the Paraya community in north Kerala.
54. Pandalam Bharathan, *op.cit.*, p.41.
55. *Bye-law*, Kerala Sambavar Society, Pandalam, pp.2-4.
56. *Ibid*, pp.7-22.
57. Kerala Sambavar Society, *Thiruvananthapuram District News Letter*, Thiruvananthapuram, September 2007, p.3.
58. Interview with Pandalam Bharathan, general secretary, KSS on 14th September 2007.
59. *Charter of Demands submitted by KSS before the Chief Minister and the Harijan Minister of Kerala, Trivandrum*, (Copy, Ref. No. 7/82 dated 29.11.1982).
60. Pandalam Bharathan, *op.cit.*, p.43

61. Kerala Sambavar Society, *Activity Report (1991-92)* for the 12th state conference at Chalakudy from 8-9 Aug 1992, pp.11-34.
62. Kerala Sambavar Society, *Activity Report (1998-2001)* for the 22nd state conference at Guruvayur from 13-14 October 2001, pp.7-8.
63. *Ibid*, p.8
64. *Ibid*, p.11