CHAPTER II

POLITICS, SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY IN KERALA: A BACKGROUND

The earlier phase of Kerala\textsuperscript{1} history, especially during the Sangam age\textsuperscript{2}, witnessed egalitarianism in which all communities had access to education. Gradual penetration of Aryanisation into ancient Kerala Society drastically changed the character of the State authority leading to the suppression of communities which had been dominant in all walks of social life during the Sangam epoch of Kerala society. The gradual suppression by the ruling class created a segregated and hierarchical social institution based on the institution of caste with such taboos as untouchability and unapproachability. All the accumulated suppression, instead of armed revolt, led to an explosion of social change which was, in fact, brought about by various movements led by community leadership in the beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Church\textsuperscript{3} had already initiated, particularly from sixteenth century onwards, the process of social transformation of the communities that joined Christianity. The social upliftment, economic development and increase of political consciousness became the outcome of these movements through literacy.

\textsuperscript{1} The earlier name of Kerala, especially during the Sangam epoch was Cheranadu which comprised of a large portion of present day Kerala.

\textsuperscript{2} Sangam age refers to the first three centuries of the Christian era in which a large number of Tamil poets lived and wrote their literary works.

\textsuperscript{3} Here the term church refers to all denominations of Christianity, including the missionaries.
development in the state and the state authority till 1947 had hardly played any role in the social changes of communities.

India's independence changed the character of the state which, with its social welfare policy, began to take active interest in the spread of literacy and in the process, various political parties, mass media and peasant movements have played a predominant role. The modern day Kerala presents before us the decline of various predominant communities and the emergence of socially and economically backward communities into a powerful social and political force to reckon with. The Kerala history, like any human history, symbolises historical cycle of change with time. It is with this perspective in mind that the present Chapter is attempted in order to give a clear picture of what exactly has reached into the inner social dynamics of Kerala history as a result of literacy development in the state from the Sangam epoch till the present day.

This Chapter is classified chronologically by giving emphasis to the interaction of social communities at every level of historical development brought about by the learning process which we call here literacy development. A totality of social development that has come about in the State as it presents today is explored systematically with careful analysis. Before proceeding further, literacy during the Sangam age is examined here.
Development of Literacy during the Sangam Age

Development of literacy, in the history of all nations, evolved not independently but as a part of the reality of the existing social system. The state has always played a role in this process: its role has been at times positive or negative on other occasions. The Sangam age witnessed a prominent social activity in the sphere of literacy. The method of spreading literacy in Tamilazhakam is not restricted to a reading and writing of books but spread over to the extent of hearing and understanding of what learned scholars spoke on the subject. For instance, the Thirukkural explains the necessity of literacy in society and in over 30 stanzas, the treatise warns of the dangers of illiteracy. People belonging to different classes of society had access to education during the Sangam age. As a matter of fact, Subramaniam points out that Aryanisation with its rigid caste hierarchy had not penetrated into the area comprising Tamilazhakam during this period.

A large number of Tamil poems and other forms of literature, which are said to have been composed by the literary figures of the age are together called Sangam literature. The period in which these literary figures lived and produced their literary works is known as the Sangam age. Sangam literature

---

4 Sangam Literacy work.
5 N. Subramaniam, Sangam Polity, Asia Publishing House, Madras, 1966, pp. 33-34.
6 The first three centuries of the Christian era.
gives an explicit picture of the government, society and education in the Kingdom of Chera which had been the ancient name of present Kerala. The Chera territory covered a part of modern Kerala state.\(^7\) Kerala is a sanskritised form of ‘Cheralam’ or Chera.

The sharp division of society based on caste was absent during the period.\(^8\) The people enjoyed social freedom and equality. The concept of superiority in terms of caste had not existed and the social structure was based on division of labour. Communities such as the Panas, the Kuravas, the Parayas and the Vedars received respect from kings and nobles.\(^9\) It was in this social context that the state authority had extended the right to literacy as a social right irrespective of the communities. Moreover, Subramaniam points out that, “Persons belonging to many communities and both the sexes were educated to the extent of being able to write good poetry.”\(^{10}\)

Apart from this, Sreedhara Menon says that women had considerable freedom for education and freedom of social movement.\(^{11}\) The Sangam age witnessed high level of female literacy which led to the emergence of a good number of highly

\(^7\) George Woodcock, Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar coast, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, p.79.


\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^{10}\) Subramaniam, op.cit., p.324.

\(^{11}\) A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit., p.81.
talented women poetesses. Auvvaiar who had lived in about 500 A.D. was an example for this. The motives of education are said to be spiritual rather than secular. The students paid the teacher either in cash or in kind. The teacher classified a student an ideal one in case he or she was able to help him in his crises. As a matter of fact, the government was monarchical in character but liberal in its policies and execution. As the society did not witness any fragmentation on the basis of caste and religion, the government did not stop any one from having access to literacy development. On the other hand, it encouraged the development of literacy among all sections of people. The literacy development and the related institutions were voluntary ones.

Development of Literacy from 6th Century to 1817 A.D.

This section examines the development of literacy from the 6th Century A.D. till the actual involvement of the Christian Western missionaries in the sphere of education in the history of literacy in Travancore.\textsuperscript{12} The Sixth century A.D. began to witness the gradual evolution of the victory of the Brahmins to establish their social hegemony over the remaining communities that had been predominant during the Sangam age with their

\textsuperscript{12} Two important kingdoms that had existed during this era were Travancore and Cochin with their fragmented principalities and small chieftains inside them. For the sake of convenience the history and development of literacy in Travancore is analysed before taking up the developments in Cochin.
social customs and other taboos. The social freedom that people had enjoyed during the Sangam age began to decline and as a result educational development started taking a different turn altogether.

The literacy development in Travancore passed through a number of stages by which disorganised “Pial” schools were reorganised into primary, secondary and collegiate education. Before 1817 A.D. there had existed in Travancore, the typical village schools known as “Pial” managed by “Asans”. As a matter of fact, these institutions were the result of private initiative and enterprise and they were financially self-supportive. A close analysis on the available historical documents of Travancore shows that these institutions had existed from ancient time onwards. The students paid the teachers the salary which comprised both kind and cash. Every village had a school and the pupils learned a few lessons in Malayalam. The teacher was either an “Ambalavasi” or “Sudra”. Before starting the education of the boy, the village school master was invited to the boy’s house and was given a small amount called a “Fanam”, beatlenut, some paddy, coconuts and plantains. After this the Asan took the boy to his school. The pupil’s book was made of

---

13 Woodcock, op.cit., p.98.
15 In the early days, before the evolution of Malayalam, language lessons were conducted in Tamil language.
16 A Fanam was equal to two or three paisa of Madras coin.
Palmyra leaves, written with an iron stylus either by the master himself or his assistant. Vernacular education had existed in Travancore till the advent of Christian missionaries and still continued in a slightly modified form even after their arrival. The vernacular schools had three divisions - primary school, middle school and high school.\(^{17}\)

Buddhism, before 1817 A.D., had played a predominant role in the spread of literacy in Travancore. The Buddhist monks initiated the spread of literacy by starting Buddhist Viharas and educational institutions. The “Ezhuthupalli”, the Malayalam term for the elementary school is the legacy of the Buddhists who called their Viharas as “Pallis”.\(^{18}\) The establishment of educational institutions near the temples in Travancore is also the Buddhist custom.\(^{19}\)

The 9th and 10th Century of early Kulashekara rule symbolises the golden age in the literacy development of Travancore, because the Kulashekara period witnessed a lot of development in the sphere of learning. There sprang up in different parts of Travancore a number of vedic schools and colleges which were attached to temples. Such institutions were called “salais” and even now these names exist in different parts


\(^{18}\) A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit., pp. 93-94.

\(^{19}\) Ibid, pp. 93-94.
of Travancore. "Salai" was generally used to show a Brahmanical centre of learning. Each temple had a centre of learning in the traditional Gurukula style. Higher education in the Vedas was the monopoly of the Brahmins and this aspect became very prominent in Medieval Travancore society.\textsuperscript{20} There were two types of higher educational institutions - "Vedapatasalais" and "Sabhamatts" and both of them received grants and other gifts. Apart from this, there were other educational institutions, where different caste and communities other than the Brahmins had access. Such institutions were called the "Pallikudam" or "Kudipallikudams". These institutions were mostly based on local initiative. The origin of these institutions can be traced to Buddhist and Jain influences in Kerala.

Hindu Puranas became a part of curriculum and as such, teaching Mahabharatha and other Epics became part of the study programme. The literacy development did not have an uniform character because there was no organised central government during this period. And therefore, the state remained divided into a number of principalities, each of which was governed by a local chieftain called Naduvazhi. Moreover, the feudal character of the social system did not create any favourable situation for the spread of literacy on a mass scale. This period also witnessed the establishment of Sanskrit

academies for Brahmin boys and Kalaries or Gymnasia for young men and women of Nair caste. The Nair girls learned and practised martial arts as well as received general education which helped them to get admission in the first English schools.

The young Nairs learned Malayalam and Sanskrit in the schools which had existed near the Kalaries. It is very difficult to trace the date of the beginning of vernacular education in Travancore. However, on the basis of the available sources, it can be said that reading, writing, arithmetic and astronomy constituted the main subjects of learning and instruction. The vernacular schools did not have proper finance and competent and trained teachers. And it was only in the 1890s that the efforts were made to revitalise the functioning of vernacular schools on a sound and systematic basis. The voluntary system of education that had existed collapsed during the 18th century.

**Education in Cochin during this Period**

It has already been mentioned that there were two princely Kingdoms - Travancore and Cochin. Travancore, in fact, covered a larger area and it witnessed throughout its history a number of agitations, and other historical developments. Cochin was a small state and it did not witness the same trends in its

---


22 A. Padmanabha Aiyar, Modern Travancore, Trivandrum, 1941, p.100.
historical evolution. However, Cochin state has had comparatively a cosmopolitan outlook because of the settlements of various communities such as Jews, and the cultural fusion and synthesis it has brought about in its historical development.

As far as education is concerned, Cochin had followed almost the same pattern. Available historical records reveal that Cochin witnessed a high level of literacy even during the Sangam period. “Pallikudams” or “Kudipallikudams” as formal local school were very much common in the state of Cochin also. And the prominence was given to the study of arithmetic. The primary school teacher was called “Kanakkayar”. In the words of N. Manuel Vedamani, “village without a Kanakkayar is useless”. This statement reveals that Cochin gave a lot of importance to the education of the people.

Children were admitted at the age of five and the schools were also called “Pallis”. Moreover, a centre of Brahminical learning known as “Kidai” had also existed. However, people belonging to the low castes did not have access to these educational institutions. The years that followed 8th century A.D. witnessed the emergence of temples as the centre of all cultural activities in the State of Cochin and they had played a predominant role in the development of literacy in the state.

---


though it was confined to upper castes. There were “Salais” which were in fact Buddhist and Jain Centres of higher learning.\textsuperscript{25} The available documents show that there had sprang up some Jain schools where education was imparted exclusively for women. As a whole both in Travancore and Cochin, Buddhist and Jains had a progressive approach towards the development of literacy.

Professors of the “Salais” were known as “Pattai” or “Pattas” and “Pattathanam” or “professorship” was treated as the noble profession of the period which was given only to Nambudiri scholars who excelled themselves in learning and instruction. The state played a very marginal role in the sphere of development of literacy and the education was mainly based on the voluntary initiative. The first state supported English school was founded at Mattancherry and it may be noted that the state initiative in education was not very successful as it was expected to be. Just like in Travancore, the vernacular schools in Cochin did not have sufficient funds and properly trained teachers. An important development that took place as part of the state initiative was the establishment of English elementary school by the Maharaja of Cochin in the year 1845 A.D., which became later the Maharajas College.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} The term Salai was also used to refer to Brahminical centre of Learning.

Meanwhile, the Christian missionaries also started establishing educational institutions for the education of the local people. It was with certain religious and social motives that the Franciscan missionaries set up Portuguese College at Changannore and almost with the same intention that the Jesuits set up colleges at Vaippincotte at Cochin. It is said that they were established for increasing Roman Catholic influence among the Syrian Christians. They taught Latin and Portuguese to many people and this was in fact the beginning of the great educational movement which subsequently penetrated even to the rural areas of the State. This early Western education influenced even the princely families. Apart from this, special schools for the girls were also set up by the missionaries. Along with the establishment of schools and colleges by the missionaries, there took place the introduction of Western literature dealing with such ideas of the western liberal school as equality, fraternity and liberty.

People of Malabar\(^\text{27}\) especially the high caste Hindus in olden days got vernacular education in the “mutts” and in the local school under the guidance of Ezhuthachan. These schools were run with contributions from the guardians of the

---

\(^{27}\) Malabar which had been a part of Madras Presidency was merged into Travancore and Cochin in 1956 to constitute modern Kerala as a part of the National States Re-organisation programme on linguistic basis.
students. The Muslim children were educated in the schools taught by the “Mullas” with the help of the passages from the Holy Quran.

**Education from 1817 to 1947:**

**Travancore**

This period marks an important era in the history of education in Travancore because Christian missionaries have already entered into the sphere of education which almost reached to the masses by the year 1817 A.D. In the beginning of 20th century, there sprang up a number of social movements led by the leadership of various caste and communities with the main focus on education. At the time of India’s independence, Travancore and Cochin witnessed rapid developments in the field of education, where one could see participation of masses, social activists, the Church, voluntary organisations and political parties. Therefore, the period may be termed as the golden era in the history of literacy development in the state of Kerala. Moreover, people as a whole was fully prepared to experiment with the conventions of modern liberal democracy which was introduced by the national leadership along with political independence. The people, due to literacy development, were in

---

a position on the eve of independence to choose their political leaders in the days to come.

Here an attempt is made to describe the vernacular education in the province first, before going into the details of other forms of education. The year 1817 A.D. is also important because, for the first time, the Travancore State started interfering on the education of Travancore. The same year Rani Gauri Parvathi Bai, with the help of British resident of Travancore Col. Munro, introduced a system of free and compulsory education under state control. The Queen also gave support to indigenous schools and due to her policy of encouragement, vernacular education progressed very quickly. Her Highness Rani Gauri Parvathi Bai issued a “Rescript” which is quoted below, “that the state should defray the entire cost of education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education, they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the State might be advanced thereby”.^{29}

As a result, the Government of Travancore established Malayalam primary schools in all the villages and it was made compulsory for the guardians of children between the ages of 5 and 10 to send them to schools. Qualified teachers were

---

appointed in the schools and they were paid by the state. The monthly salary of a teacher was Rs.7 and the Tahsildar of the taluk was given power to inspect the schools once in 15 days and report back to the government about the number of students and the progress of their studies. The Travancore government under Parvathi bai wanted that education should be run under the guidance of the state authority. However, it was only during 1867, that Travancore witnessed a sound educational system at the primary level. Apart from this, the period also witnessed the increase of schools at all levels especially in the rural areas of Travancore. Hence the year 1817 A.D. marks an important era in the history of literacy development of Travancore.30

There emerged three important branches in the system of education in Travancore after 1817 AD and they were the vernacular schools, the English schools and the colleges. Institutions for training teachers were also constituted and simultaneously attempts were made by the Government to modify and systematise vernacular education. Besides these institutions, there also existed Kalaries for training them in Gymnastics and arms. The Brahmin children got their higher education from the Vedic schools and they mastered on the Vedas, the Sastras and the Upanishads. Those who wanted to have scholarship approached individual scholars of distinction

and this period, as a whole, witnessed on the one hand, the spread of literacy to the rural areas and there emerged a number of scholars of distinction on the other hand.

In the year 1834 A.D. the government of Travancore under Maharaja Swathi Thirunal founded an English School in Trivandrum and it was in fact a private school run with the government's financial contribution. As the school progressed, the Government brought it under it within a year and named it "His Highness the Maharaja Free School". Though it was run free in the beginning, the government started charging some fee on the students from 4 Anas to ½ a rupee per month at a later date. Now the restriction on admission of students was completely withdrawn. The royal proclamation of Maharaja of Travancore in 1844 gave priority in recruitment to state services for those persons who had the background of English education. This was in fact due to the progressive outlook of the government of Travancore. This proclamation led to the rapid spread of modern education in English quickly. Under the Dewanship of T. Madhava Rao during 1858 to 1872, there sprang up vernacular education departments, an Arts College, a number of Vernacular and English schools, government schools, and a text book committee. These efforts pushed the Travancore government to the forefront of literacy development in the whole of India.
Now Travancore also entered into the field of technical education. It is worthwhile to remember here that it was the Christian missionaries who first introduced arts and industrial education in Travancore. An industrial school at Nagarcoil, institutions for printing and book-binding were started in many places. During 1865-66 the government of Travancore founded a number of small institutions comprising a group of carvers, two artists and a photographer. The Sree Moolam technical institute at Nagarcoil gave a three years course in weaving and the government gave grant in aid to this institute.

The advent of Christian missionaries heralded a new era in the history of literacy development in all the regions of Kerala. It was they who introduced a modern liberal education in the state. The Christian missionaries, on many occasions, got the support of rulers of Travancore and Cochin in the establishment of educational institutions. William Ringle Toube, was the first missionary of the London Missionary Society to reach Travancore and he founded schools where people belonging to all castes and communities were admitted for the education on modern lines. On the recommendation of resident Colonel Munro, Rani Lakshmi Bai gave a grant of land on a nominal rent to Ringle Toube. Two English schools started by the missionaries in Kottayam began to spread literacy among the people of the district. The next missionary of the London Missionary society to reach kerala was Rev. Mead who began to establish a number of
schools. Moreover, in 1818 Rev. Mead founded the Nagarcoil Seminary which became the first prominent institution to give English education in the state of Travancore.31

After a while, Catholic missionaries entered the field of women’s education. As a matter of fact, they also got aid from the government of Travancore in the form of land by grant. In the second decade of the 19th century, the London Mission and the Church Mission Society established two English schools at Nagarcoil and Kottayam and this marked the beginning of higher education on modern lines in Travancore. The Syrian Christian missionaries also devoted a lot of time on women’s education in the state. As a consequence of which, a four fold system of education emerged and it can be described as follows - (1) College which imparted higher and technical education (2) A parochial school which was attached to each Church (3) A grammar school which imparted education at intermediate level (4) The establishment of a few girls schools.

Apart from the regular course of studies the girls were taught knitting, spinning and needlework with a view to give them a livelihood on a sound footing. This development gradually brought down the popular prejudice against sending girls to schools. Moreover, the appointment of female teachers in these schools increased the popularity of the schools. Apart

from founding schools for girls, the missionaries created a public opinion in favour of women’s education and for that purpose they began to publish leaflets describing the merits of women’s education in a society. As a part of the programme, the priest also started preaching in the churches about the importance of women’s education in the development of family.

Seeing these developments, the government also came forward to set up schools for girls. Vishakam Thirunal started encouraging women’s education in the State. Between 1869 to 1870, the Travancore government opened a vernacular school within the fort at Trivandrum and this marked a beginning in the initiative taken by the government for the promotion of women’s education in the state. In the year 1863 A.D. an English school for girls was also opened in the fort at Trivandrum. In the year 1894 A.D. Travancore government again came forward to regulate the course of studies in the educational institutions. The government framed rules for the management of aided and recognised schools which were classified on a systematic way. This led to the emergence of a proper curriculum of studies for the aided and recognised schools.

In 1901 an important reform took place in the classification of schools. The old classification was replaced by the new classification into high schools, middle schools, upper primary and lower primary. This marked the modern classification of schools. Apart from this, in 1903 the government of Travancore
took up the responsibility of imparting free primary education to all the children in the state. Moreover, the government also took up the initiative in abolishing fees for the backward classes in all schools and full salary grants were also sanctioned to all private schools which focussed their attention for the promotion of the education of the backward classes. Education of Muslims was also encouraged by giving them special concessions in fees and salary grants. The salary of the teachers in the vernacular schools were raised from Rs.5/- to Rs.7/-.

As a result of the pressure partly from the missionaries and the British government, the Travancore government began to give concessions to backward classes. In 1963, there were 471 schools (government and aided) with a capacity of nearly 30,000 which were concerned with the special education of backward classes.

**Church and Literacy Development**

The Church is having a central place in education in Kerala. The history of literacy development in the State of Kerala is partly the history of the part played by the Church. The advent of Church in this field brought about a new era in the history of development of literacy in the State, in the sense that it was they who introduced modern liberal education in the state.32

The church entered the field of literacy development in 1817 A.D. in the real sense. The Church played a predominant role in educating the low castes. The Church also persuaded the princely government to give concessions to the backward classes. Moreover, the Church produced a forward looking educated and profit seeking middle class. This middle class with the help extended by the Church made a lot of advancement in economic and educational fields. As a result, the beginning of 20th century witnessed the rise of a number of banks, chitties, kuris, printing presses and other lucrative business run by them.

Many historians argue that it was because of the efforts made by the Christian missionaries in the spread of education that really encouraged the community leadership for launching social reform movements for spread of literacy in the State. The Travancore government also gave assistance in various forms to the Church for its efforts in the sphere of literacy development. Rani Lakshmibai gifted land at Kottayam for a college and also some money and building materials. Alos Seminary education was soon started by a system of traditional schools attached to

34 R.N. Yesudas, People's revolt in Travancore, op.cit., p.20.
36 Travancore Marumakkathayam Committee Report of 1903.
each parish church. Apart from the general education, the church also began to spread industrial, technical and women's education. To be more clear, Travancore government began to depend on the Church to start schools and organise the administration of education in the State. The Church also entered in the sphere of higher education. Subsequently, the number of educational institutions run by the Church increased.

The Church began to establish new colleges. One such College known today as Union Christian College was established at Alwaye and it began to function in 1921, with affiliation as a second grade college. Subsequently, the college began to expand and in 1923 it became a first grade college offering B.A. Courses in Mathematics, Philosophy, History and Economics. The Church also began to encourage female education. Besides these activities, the church had started many educational agencies such as the School Book Society, Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the Nature Instruction Society and the Zenana Mission. The school book society was supposed to establish new educational institutions and to prepare local teachers for the task of spreading literacy. The

---

Zenana Mission was the women society of the Protestant Church which was working among women and children.

The Church also founded industries for the manufacture of paper, weaving and the manufacture of sugar and Indigo. The government especially after, 1930, began to show interest in education. The state felt that for further development of literacy, the government should have control over educational institutions run by private agencies. The Travancore education reforms committee recommended to the Travancore government in 1933 that the government should be directly responsible for the management of all primary schools. The report further recommended that there was no sufficient justification for the whole scale abolition of private schools. It said "such a policy would largely increase the cost of education and would do serious damage to longstanding vested interests." The report finally concluded that government should eradicate insufficient and self interested privately managed schools and to support those run satisfactorily. The government made it clear that it did not want to take over schools properly managed by the Church.

---

43 Ibid, p.50.
The Travancore government again brought certain amount of governmental control over the private schools. Accordingly, a committee with H.C. Papworth, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Travancore as the Chairman, was appointed on 24th November 1943 to examine the education system and formulate proposals for the reorganisation with respect to post-war developments.44

**Literacy Movement by the S.N.D.P.**

In spite of these efforts in the field of education, certain communities like Ezhavas, Harijans and others were still socially and economically stagnant. Sree Narayana Guru45, a social reformer, tried to bring about a renaissance among the Ezhavas in order to uplift them in society. Dr. Palpu46 had founded in 1896 an organisation called the Travancore Ezhava Sabha for the upliftment of the Ezhava community, but still it could not succeed its objectives. Only after Dr. Palpu came into contact with Sri Narayana Guru and Kumaranasan47, he felt convinced about the necessity of establishing an effective caste organisation for upliftment of the Ezhavas. They started Sree Narayana


45 Sree Narayana Guru, a social reformer was born in 1856 A.D. in the village of Chempazhanthy, North of Trivandrum.

46 Dr. Palpu was a highly educated social reformer belonging to the Ezhava community.

47 Kumaranasan was a popular Malayalam poet who contributed a lot to Malayalam literature.
Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903 and it came to be known as S.N.D.P. It is spread all over Kerala uniting Ezhavas from one part of the state to the other. The organisation gave emphasis on education and therefore it began to concentrate to establish its own schools and colleges.

Continuous efforts were made to uplift the Ezhava community through literacy development by the S.N.D.P. with the constant inspiration from Dr. Palpu. Jobs in government services were not available to Ezhavas once. S.N.D.P. fought for securing their civil, social, educational and political rights. Meanwhile, C. Krishnan editor of the “Mithavadi” a journal, became the first president of the Cochin Ezhava Sabha, a counterpart of S.N.D.P. Yogam of Travancore, which was established in the year 1916. The main goal of Cochin Ezhava Samajam was to bring to light the grievances of the Ezhavas of Cochin. Its main activity in the beginning was petitioning. Later, its name was changed to Cochin Thiya Mahajana Sabha and in 1938 the name was again changed to Cochin SNDP Yogam. In Malabar the first organisation of the Ezhavas was Thiyar Malabar Association founded in 1925.

For the development of Literacy among the Ezhava community SNDP Yogam started establishing a number of schools. It also began to spread the importance of literacy among the people. In 1917, an all Ezhava education conference
was constituted by SNDP with the support of the education department for providing primary education to the Ezhavas in Travancore. Its main purpose was to persuade the government to open all elementary schools to the Ezhava children and to construct new schools in the areas where the Ezhava community did not have schools.48

**Literacy Development among the Nairs**

Nairs come in the upper caste category in the Hindu social order. Seeing the development of literacy initiated by the organisation of Ezhavas and the Church and its activities in education, the Nairs thought of organising themselves under the name of the Nair Service Society (NSS) which began to establish its own schools and colleges. The institutions established by the Nairs further led to the development of literacy among the Nairs who were already advanced in various walks of social life. Mannath Padmanabhan Pillai, in 1914, took the initiative in establishing the Nair Service Society (NSS) and the organisation gave a new hope to the already advanced community of Nairs to further social and economic needs of the community. By 1920s the NSS became very powerful by acquiring more than 100 acres of land and school buildings and other materials worth Rs.2 lakhs.49

---

NSS established its own schools and colleges where they gave preference to admission and jobs to the people belonging to Nair community. In the early 1930s NSS showed its opposition to the joint political conference of Christian, Ezhava and Muslim communities which wanted to reduce the influence of upper caste Hindus in the bureaucracy of Travancore State. The efforts of NSS provided a lot of opportunities for the people belonging to Nair community in the sphere of education.

**Literacy among the Kshatriyas and Brahmins**

In 1930 there were 4 schools exclusively for the education of the children of Kshatriya community and those four schools were located in Mavelikkara, Aranmula, Poonchar and Panthalam. Mavelikkara had an English middle school and the rest of them were primary schools. Besides these there were special schools for the education of the Brahmins. In the Brahmin schools, the Brahmin boys received instruction in the Vedas. Boarding and instruction were free. The government also helped financially in managing these institutions. Apart from these schools, Kshatriyas and Brahmin families also used to send their wards to general public institutions. Travancore during this time witnessed high level of literacy development among these two communities. Apart from general education, the members of the Brahmin community had specialised knowledge in Sanskrit, Vedas and other Hindu epics.
Literacy among the Muslims

The rapid growth of Islam in Kerala created a new problem of spreading literacy among the Muslims. As Islamic religion and society are looked at as identical, the literacy activities initiated by the Muslims in the beginning were religious in character and content. Mosques became the main places of literacy development. The Muslim youth learned Arabic and Persian in the mosques. Subsequently, Othupallies (Mosques schools) were founded adjoining to the mosque in order to give religious education for young boys and girls. There were two types of classes: classes conducted outside the mosque were devoted to primary education and the classes conducted inside the mosque were devoted to higher education.

Travancore government also encouraged the Muslim education by extending them half fee concession and qualified Quran teacher or Arabic Munshi. In certain areas there were special schools for the members of these communities. The government instituted special scholarship for Muslim students in English schools and colleges. Vaikkom Abdul Khadeer Moulavi gave a representation to Dr. Bishop, then director of education of Travancore and as a result of which in December 1913, a conference of the Muslim leaders of Travancore state was convened to discuss the problems of illiteracy among the Muslim population. On the recommendations of the conference,
Travancore government assigned to the Assistant Director of Education, Sri Ramaswami Aiyar, the task of promoting Muslim education. In the initial stage, no qualifications were prescribed for the appointment of Arabic teachers and later, the Travancore government established the Arabic examination Board comprising Mohammadan Inspector and Vaikom Abdul Khadeer Moulavi. This Committee laid down the qualifications of Arabic teachers and made syllabus and text books for the lower and higher Arabic Munshi examination. Meanwhile Vaikom Abdul Khadeer Moulavi was appointed as the Chairman of the text book committee.

**Literacy Development among the Scheduled Castes and Tribes**

The educational institutions founded by the Missionaries welcomed and educated the untouchables since they had no access to the government schools. As a result of this, the children of the low caste people received education and got an opportunity for upward mobility. The spread of western ideas had already created an awakening among the low castes about the necessity of literacy development. The role of the Church in spreading literacy among the lower caste becomes important because of the fact that literacy in Kerala was confined to the upper caste. To quote Kathleen Gough, “Literacy in Sanskrit was confined to upper caste and to chosen specialists...writing itself
was forbidden to the lower castes."50 Their modernisation is the result of modern literacy development initiated in the state for which multiple agencies, and factors like the Church and movement for literacy development played their role. It was with great difficulty that a few Harijans and tribes could educate themselves in pre-Independent India.

The policy of the government before independence, especially before 1935 and the people of higher caste kept the scheduled caste and tribes in permanent subjugation to the superior classes and in abject poverty and ignorance. As a result of these developments, some of the enlightened group of high caste Hindus in Kerala came forward to improve the conditions of the low caste. One such leader was Govindan Pillai who became the President of the Pulaya Sabha for sometime. Apart from this, the SNDP Yogam had also undertaken the cause of upliftment of the Pulayas and other depressed classes. Kumaranasan also advocated the cause of the depressed classes in the Legislative Assembly of Travancore. After Ayyankali was nominated to the Legislative Assembly of Travancore in 1912, there took place a number of changes in the movement of literacy development among the scheduled castes. Ayyankali started his movement for literacy development of the scheduled

castes and as the first step he opened a primary school for the untouchable children.

**Literacy Development in Cochin, 1817 - 1947**

Travancore, Cochin and Malabar followed different levels of social development, especially in the sphere of literacy, as Travancore and Cochin being princely kingdoms had to face different problems from that of Malabar which had been part of Madras Presidency. From the time of Colonel Munro, the British resident, state of Cochin began to take initiative in the sphere of literacy development. A proclamation was issued in 1818 by the Maharaja of Cochin stating the intention of establishing 33 Malayalam schools in Cochin state. The proclamation was issued at the initiative of Colonel Munro and this scheme had setting up of one Malayalam school in each village in order to give training to young men who may take up state service as writers and accountants. The schools established by the Cochin state did not show any remarkable change from the old village schools of the state.\(^\text{51}\)

Cochin was 20 years behind Travancore in various aspects, especially in the sphere of education. However, the 1870s witnessed the attempts being made by the princely kingdom of

Cochin to establish a number of district English schools, which would prepare boys into the high school in Ernakulam. This scheme was faced with a number of problems because the parents did not want to send their children to a far off place. In 1881, Cochin had only 860 students in government approved schools.

Cochin, till 1890s, spent a small portion of its annual budget on education in comparison to Travancore, which began spending a good amount of money on cheap, but popular, local vernacular schools. On the other hand, Cochin till 1890s tried to promote secondary education in English. As a part of the programme, Cochin state appointed a superintendent of vernacular education. Though Cochin showed little lower in literacy development compared to Travancore, both Travancore and Cochin were far advanced of Madras Presidency in the sphere of literacy development. As a matter of fact, in Cochin, free primary education for girls and lower caste Hindus came into effect only in 1909. However, Travancore was behind Cochin in literacy in 1891 and for the subsequent years both the states were balancing the literacy development. Cochin witnessed, during 1871-75, only 4.4% literacy, but in 1891 it went up to 18% and again it came down between 1901 to 1911.
However, in the year 1941, it went upto 41%.

Cochin in fact was fast in literacy development than Travancore mainly because of the fact that a number of people of Cochin lived in towns. It is assumed that people who live in towns and cities may be more literate than those who live in villages. Moreover, Cochin was a small state with a greater number of functionaries and courtiers than Travancore. Also Cochin was famous for its port and overseas trade, which helped the people to have interaction with a number of foreigners who arrived there.

However, the Cochin government did not intervene in the functioning, management and administration of local schools until the 1890s. Even in the late 1870s and 1880s, a number of families sent their children in the local schools, whose master had the patronage and support of rich families. During this period, the government of Cochin as well as the people began to look at literacy as a valuable contribution of knowledge towards society. As a result of the efforts made by the government and the people, the period between 1875 and 1891 witnessed high level of literacy in the history of Cochin state. Cochin in 1890s opted a system of government regulation in which the old system of school had no place at all. This led to drop out of many children. Rich families who had earlier sent their children to the

---

village school, began to send them to the government regulated schools. However, for many people in Cochin, the new government schools appeared to be very rigid and expensive. Thus Cochin between 1891 and 1901 witnessed a dramatic decline in literacy.53

"As late as 1911, however, Cochin state led the rest of Kerala with an official literacy rate of only 20 per cent for males and 14 per cent for females". In 1911, Cochin witnessed 31.8% for males and 9.7% for females in literacy. Moreover, 1911 Census reported that more than 20% of the males and 4% of the females in the old Cochin State were in a position to read and write. "In the proportion of literates to the total population. Cochin stood ahead of all districts of South India barring the exceptional district of South India, in 1911.54

**Literacy and the Spread of Class Consciousness**

From 1920s onwards, a series of outrage and upheaval grew among the lower castes, and they refused to accept the disabilities that old society enforced on them. Campaigns for temple entry Vaikom Satyagraha (1924-25), civil rights movements etc., propagated reforms of the existing social order. These movements provided conditions that encouraged youth

---


54 A. Sreedhara Menon, Ernakulam District Gazetteer, op.cit., p.711.
towards political action. People at the grass roots were disturbed by these profound social dislocation and turned to communist ideas, which made their political behaviour respectable. The activities of the communist and various small groups of socialists spread widely in the countryside between 1935 and 1960. Demonstration and public protest as a form of political activity came to be respected and desirable. These activities centred around question of basic needs such as food, shelter and educational opportunities.

The socialists built a peasant movement that had more than 30,000 members, most of them in North Malabar by the 1930s. By the end of 1938, the All Malabar Peasant's Union was formed. People sympathised with these associations, carried red flags and marched in processions to innermost parts of Kerala. Side by side, theatre developed as a propaganda mechanism and medium for educating the illiterates. The leading political players became theatrical leaders. Plays such as “Patta Bakki” (arrears of rent), “Panimutakku” (the strike) and “Rakta Panam” (drink of blood) and revolutionary songs captured audiences and ruptured the somnolence of village life. They helped as an important form of propaganda for the spread of communism and by March 1953, the District Magistrate of Trivandrum, instigated by the Congress government of Travancore - Cochin banned a

---

popular play, ‘You made me a Communist’.\textsuperscript{56} It helped a long way in spreading the Gospel of the communist movement and it also helped in the literacy development.

The communists, under the leadership of Krishna Pillai, Naboothiripad and Damodaran led strikes of weavers, beedi rollers, scavengers, electrical workers, umbrella makers and tile labourers in and around Tellicherry, Cannariore and Calicut in 1937. Working in rural areas, the communists developed an appeal that combined people’s yearning for change. In Malabar areas, communists had the support of peasants. Influence of Tamil culture, crises of matrimony and caste system of Kerala were peculiar features of Palakkad. By 1940s the landless labourers largely from the lower castes who had no right at all in land increasingly became regular reliable voters for the communist party.\textsuperscript{57}

Between 1945 and 1951, the communist party in Kerala followed a number of tactical lines for seizing power. In October 1946, the communist-led coir workers around Alleppey confronted the police and the army in a revolt named after the two villages at its centre - Punnapra and Vayalar. The government crushed the revolt. Realising the futility of open

\textsuperscript{56} India Today, New Delhi, 31 March 1983, p.79.

revolt, the communist party in Kerala contested India's first elections of 1951-2. In the 1951-2 elections in Travancore - Cochin, the communists took 18 percent of the total vote and 25 out of 108 seats. In Malabar, the communists and their allies won seven assembly seats and Congress only four out of 29 seats in the Madras Assembly. With this election, Kerala had produced something like a two party system, in which virtually every constituency would be closely contested by the communists and the Congress. The communists share of the vote rose from less than 10 per cent in Travancore in 1948 to 18 per cent in Travancore - Cochin in 1951 and 1954 and 35 per cent when it won to form the government in 1957. 58

The first set of agrarian legislations were introduced by the Communist Ministry soon after its inception. It passed in the legislature the most radical tenancy reforms through the introduction of the Agrarian Reform Bill (ARB) and Jenmikkaram Payment (Abolition) Bill. The government of 1957 also tried to introduce greater control over private educational institutions. But the legislature could not enact them, as the Presidential assent to these Bills were not given. The Catholic Church, the Nair Service Society, the Muslim League and the Congress Party called for 'Liberation struggle' (1957-59) to dislodge the ministry.

The Ministry was dismissed by the Government of India and imposed President's Rule on 31 July 1959. "The Communists of Kerala made tremendous efforts to mobilize the peasants and the workers in support of the Bills they introduced, but their efforts could not match the combined strength of the local landed interests and the mighty constitutional weapons of the Union Government. Thus even when a legislation is followed or paralleled by a social movement, the successful implementation of legislation depends on the nature and content of the opposition it faces."

A significant aspect connected with these changes in Kerala society was the bulk printing that encouraged the spread of literacy. The significance of daily newspapers and weekly journals increased at a drastic rate. "By 1947, at independence, almost every village had its reading-room, newspapers, novelettes and printed copies of sacred books and famous Malayalam literature." The working class and the lowest caste showed growing interest to read or hear views delivered by newspapers and discuss issues. By 1951, over 43 per cent of Cochin's total population was literate according to the official statistics. In 1961, the literacy rate for Kerala as a whole was 46.9 per cent, while the all-India average was only 24 per cent.

---


60 Kathleen Gough, 1968, op.cit., p.156.
The effective literacy in 1961, over the age of 4 in Southern Cochin was 59.5 per cent.\textsuperscript{61} Literacy was not widespread in Travancore-Cochin areas by 1960. On the other hand in rural Malabar, there was less enthusiasm among the lower castes to get educated. The majority of the illiterates belonged to untouchables and Muslims, while the most advanced were Syrian Christians and high-caste Hindus. This is not to be assumed that the untouchables were denied opportunities to become literate. As political awareness began to spread among them, the untouchables also came to realize the benefits of being literate.\textsuperscript{62} At the same time, the expenditure on education rose from about 20 per cent of government outlays in the early 1950s to nearly 40 per cent in the late 1970s. Government figures showed about 750,000 students in all the schools of Cochin and Travancore in 1940. Combined Travancore-Cochin and Malabar had over two million students in 1950. This rose to 3.5 millions by 1961, an increase of 75 per cent.\textsuperscript{63}

**Literacy Development in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar since 1947.**

With India's independence, the government's policy including that of literacy drastically changed. Kerala government


\textsuperscript{62} Kathleen Gough, 1968, op.cit., p.156.

began to give, as a part of National Education Policy, importance to the literacy development of the state. On the recommendation of the Director of Public Instruction, the government proceeded to implement the provisions of the policy during 1946-47 in certain taluks of the state. The first Communist Ministry that came to power in 1957 introduced an Education Bill which was aimed at restructuring the educational system, in the state in order to give a new outlook to the whole programme.

The period witnessed the low level of literacy development in the state. Secondary education also achieved great progress in post-independent Kerala. In 1948, there were 333 secondary schools and in 1960, it had gone up to 871. The same way, the students, teachers and budgetary allotments also increased. Section 58 of the Kerala Panchayat Act 1960 authorised the panchayats to supervise and control government primary schools by a special order from the government. The following table shows the growth of population and the progress of enrolment in schools.

The Table I shows the educational development in various districts in Kerala in terms of the number of schools, number of

---

64 Kerala Panchayat Act, 1960, p.34.
**TABLE: 1**

Percentage Distribution of Area, Population, Schools & Students in the Districts of Kerala 1973-74 to 1979-80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>-1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>11.89</td>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>10.51</td>
<td>11.98</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Alleppey</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>-4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kottavam</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-6.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>13.08</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>27.64</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>9.97</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>10.79</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Palaghat</td>
<td>11.32</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>6.74</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>11.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>9.36</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>14.88</td>
<td>24.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cannanore</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>10.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

students in them and the changes taken place, for the period 1973-74 to 1979-80. It is evident from the table that the number of schools in the districts of Kerala between 1973-74 to 1979-80 has gone up from 10,858 to 11,389 showing an increase of 4.89%. In the year between 1974-75 and 1979-80, the total number of students in the state also has gone up from 53.57 lakhs to 56.02 lakhs with an increase of 4.57%. It can be noted that, there is an increase in the number of students in Idukki, Malappuram, Kozhikode, Palghat and Cannanore districts, and this clearly indicates the gradual spreading of literacy in these backward districts of the state. The same period also witnessed the expansion of the facilities for the training of secondary teachers. Extension service centres were opened in various training colleges in the state. These educational activities led to the increase of the literacy development in the state. Similarly, in the 1970s the Library Union in the state took the initiative in launching literacy projects in various regions with the help of Central Education Department. Library movement in Kerala is an integral part of the literacy movement. It may be noted that powerful library movement helped to spread literacy in the state.65

TABLE: 2

Literacy, Male and Female; 1875-1991, for Selected Areas (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travancore</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochin</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>45.8*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malabar Dt</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>89.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinnevelly</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>36.4*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanjore</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras Pres.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamilnad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>62.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Travancore-Cochin state was formed in 1949
*Kanyakumari area now a separate district (literacy: 48.6 per cent in 1961)
Sources: Census of India for relevant years.
Communities and Education

Ezhavas

This part would deal with conflict between state and communities for literacy development. It also analyses the result of the interactions between communities and the state in the sphere of literacy development. The first community taken for examination is the Ezhavas. The Ezhavas in the beginning were treated as untouchables. Therefore, they wanted to consolidate themselves for political, civil, cultural and educational rights. The S.N.D.P. focussed its attention in the spread of literacy development among the Ezhavas. Towards that end, it began to establish its own educational institutions. The Ezhava community achieved remarkable progress in the sphere of literacy due to the efforts of S.N.D.P. Yogam. Among Ezhavas there were 31.03% illiterate, 34.45% literate, but below primary, 20.50% primary educated, 9.73% middle school educated, 3.47% S.S.L.C. completed and above S.S.L.C. 0.67% in the year 1965.66

Today Ezhavas have come to occupy positions in all walks of life and this was not the case a couple of decades back. In 1950s, they were the backbone of the communist government and once educated, Ezhavas got opportunity to be mobile. This social mobility

helped them in acquiring wealth. The educational institutions established by them under the leadership of SNDP helped them in acquiring degrees and employment opportunities. And now they are a very powerful community. There was a time in pre-independent Kerala when the educated Ezhavas were not allowed to take up government jobs for which the Ezhava leadership struggled for quite sometime. Therefore, the community leadership in the post independent period, pressurised the state government to include them as one of the backward communities, so that they would get reservation for admission and jobs in educational institutions. This is what we witness today in the reservation policy of the state government and as a result many educated Ezhavas have acquired government jobs.

**Nairs and Literacy Development**

NSS began to establish schools and colleges for the education of the Nair community, apart from establishing technical and engineering institutions. The Mahatma Gandhi College at Trivandrum was established in August 22, 1948. Followed by this, a number of colleges came into being in places like Perunna and Kesavadasapuram. Moreover, the year 1954 witnessed the establishment of a training college and in 1958 NSS came forward to establish a polytechnic institute at Panthalam and an engineering college at Palakkad in 1960. These developments had further increased the literacy among the Nairs.
It has already been mentioned earlier that the Nairs were very powerful community till recently and they had the privilege of occupying governmental positions and other jobs in the state of Kerala. They were in fact one of the advanced communities in terms of literacy also. The spread of literacy enabled various communities to acquire jobs both in private and in government departments. The following table shows the community wise employment in the beginning of 1970s in different departments of the Kerala state.

**TABLE : 3**

Communitywise Employment in Kerala in the Beginning of 1970s in Different Departments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Last Grade</th>
<th>Non-Gazetted</th>
<th>Gazetted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>4.500</td>
<td>2.800</td>
<td>7.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity Board</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Transport</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Corporation</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quasi-Govt.</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage to total population:


The above table shows that Nair's comes at the top in the matter of last grade jobs in various departments of the state. Even in non-Gazetted and Gazetted jobs Nairs come first. This clearly shows Nair dominance in various professions, especially in government bureaucracy.

The land reform and the subsequent political developments in the state fragmented large land holdings possessed by the Nair Taravads. Disintegration of the Joint Family System among them and their replacement with the nuclear families mainly as a result of social mobility further degenerated the Nair dominance. In the feudal society, they had a predominant social position, which is, according to scholars like Robin Jeffrey, on the decline. The progress achieved by various backward communities in the matter of literacy enabled them to occupy position of power and authority, which was once the monopoly of Nairs and Brahmins. Today, like any other community in the state, the Nairs also have to struggle hard for education and employment opportunities.

**Muslims and Education**

The Muslims in Kerala were backward in the sphere of literacy compared to the rest of the communities. Special schools for the exclusive use of the members of the community had also been established in certain areas. The education of Muslim girls also

---

67 Last Grade refers to clerical and other related types of jobs.
received attention. Simultaneously, as a whole, Muslims in Malabar were much backward in literacy compared to the Muslims in Travancore and Cochin. The formation of Muslim Educational Society (M.E.S.) in 1964 by a group of educated Muslims under the leadership of Dr. P.K. Abdul Gafoor was the beginning of educational activities among the Muslims of Kerala. The society gives scholarships to hundreds of Muslim students to enable them to complete post graduate training in professional and technological fields. In 1967, the society established its first college at Mannarghat in Palakkad district. Moreover, the society established a number of colleges, hospitals, orphanages, hostels and job training centres. It started new colleges at Ponnani, Valancherry and also took over the management of the colleges at Manapad and Crangannore. It is also managing six colleges, including post graduate ones. Apart from this, there are residential and non-residential schools with English as the medium of instruction.68

These educational activities of the society helped many in Muslim community to take up jobs especially in their own institutions. The educational society is concentrating to eliminate illiteracy among the adult Muslim women. The ladies wing of the society runs women's college at Calicut and it is the only one college for women managed by the society. They conduct Seminar, Symposia

and lecture programmes in order to spread literacy among the Muslims in the State of Kerala.

**Church and Education**

In the history of Kerala, the role of the Church in the development of literacy is very remarkable to be explained here. Church played an active role in the spread of literacy among those communities which were socially and culturally very backward. The progress of technical education, women’s literacy and the subsequent social upliftment of communities are some of the results of the efforts made by it. Thus, the church is having a central place in education in Kerala. To be more clear, the entry of the Church in the sphere of literacy development brought about a turning point in the history of education in Kerala in the sense that modern liberal education was introduced into the state by them.69

In the beginning, one of the major aims of the church was to uplift the low caste to whom education had been denied by the princely government. The Church paid a lot of attention to the general education of the low castes. Schools had been established where Christians and non-Christians belonging to all classes and sections of society were admitted. With the advent of Church in the field of education, the grip of brutal caste regulations got somewhat declined. On many occasions, the church persuaded the princely

---

governments to give concession for the education of the backward classes.

The efforts of the Church in opening English schools and colleges in the pre-independent Kerala created a great impact in the social development of the respective communities which is explicitly visible in the material and spiritual development of the communities. Literacy began to spread among the peasantry in the rural hinterland of the state and the result was a great awakening among the people for achieving literacy, irrespective of caste and class. A major development took place in 1957, when Kerala government led by E.M.S. Namboothiripad introduced an Education Bill with a view to check the activities of the church.

A major development Church created among the socially deprived classes is the spread of literacy among them, who are now in a position to compete with other advanced communities in the field of employment and other social positions. The progress achieved by various communities, especially Christians, is mainly the outcome of the educational activities initiated by the Church.

The Church had taken an active interest in female education even after India’s independence. The Church was convinced that family was the basic unit of society and therefore, female education was very important for upbringing children in a better way. They also set up colleges for women’s education. As a result of this, there took place an awakening about the importance of women’s education.
leading to more and more girls attending educational institutions. Thus a good number of women came out as graduates and took up jobs, including teaching profession, as distinction was made between men and women in the recruitment of teachers. As a result, there was a good number of women teachers especially in primary schools. During 1958 - 59 alone, there was 17,400 women as against 23,790 men teachers in the state.\textsuperscript{70}

**Literacy and Development among the SC/ST in Post-Independent Kerala**

It is already been mentioned earlier that there was a social movement among the scheduled castes in the state organised by Ayyankali who emphasised on education. At the same time, no leadership emerged among the tribes who lived in the interior parts of the state where they did not have any facilities of life including access to education. Today, partly because of the impact generated by the social movements in the state and partly because of the efforts made by various organisations including the secular state of post-independent India helped to bring about a higher literacy rate among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in comparison to that of other states in India.

In order to illustrate the progress achieved by scheduled castes in the sphere of literacy the following table is given. As the study

deals with the literacy development in Ernakulam and Palakkad districts, district wise literacy development of the scheduled castes during the period 1971 and 81 is mentioned below.

**TABLE :4**

**General Literacy Rate of Scheduled Castes in Kerala 1971 and 1981**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Literacy % 1971</th>
<th>Literacy % 1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
<td>Total Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>34.30(8)</td>
<td>62.5(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>42.48(5)</td>
<td>65.0(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleppey</td>
<td>54.40(1)</td>
<td>70.4(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>46.55(3)</td>
<td>72.9(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>34.30(8)</td>
<td>56.4(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>45.40(4)</td>
<td>65.3(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>39.67(7)</td>
<td>61.6(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palghat</td>
<td>20.41(11)</td>
<td>46.7(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>25.91(9)</td>
<td>47.9(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>40.74(6)</td>
<td>58.8(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyanad</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannanore</td>
<td>25.49(10)</td>
<td>55.3(9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: N.A. = Not Available.

Rank orders of the Districts are given in the brackets.


The above table shows that Alleppey ranks first in literacy (54.40%) followed by Kottayam and Ernakulam, in 1971. But in 1981 it was Kottayam (71.79%) that came first in literacy followed by Alleppey (67.95%) and Ernakulam (63.10%). It is not the same district that maintains the same standard in literacy during the period. The general trend is that there is an increase of literacy rate among the scheduled castes in the course of 10 years and it can be
seen in the table given above. It should be remembered that many factors have played a role in the increase of literacy among the scheduled castes in Kerala.

For having a closer look at the progress of literacy among the tribes in Kerala during 1971 and 1981, the following table is given.

**TABLE: 5**

**General Literacy Rate of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala 1971 and 1981**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy%</td>
<td>Literacy%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>42.14(3)</td>
<td>62.5(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>32.59(6)</td>
<td>65.0(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleppey</td>
<td>60.60(1)</td>
<td>70.4(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>38.44(4)</td>
<td>72.9(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>26.87(7)</td>
<td>56.4(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>45.12(2)</td>
<td>65.3(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>35.72(5)</td>
<td>61.6(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palghat</td>
<td>7.13(11)</td>
<td>46.7(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>13.68(10)</td>
<td>47.9(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>23.24(9)</td>
<td>58.8(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyanad</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannanore</td>
<td>25.23(8)</td>
<td>55.3(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>31.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** N.A. = Not Available.

Rank orders of the Districts are given in the brackets.

**SOURCE:** *Census of India, Kerala, 1971 and 1981.*

Among all the districts in Kerala, it is Alleppey (60.60%) that stood first in 1971 in the matter of literacy among the tribes followed by Ernakulam (45.12%) and Trivandrum (42.14%). In 1981, it was
Kottayam (73.63%) that stood first in the sphere of literacy among the tribes followed by Trivandrum (58.06%) and Alleppey (53.71%). As a whole, in the course of 10 years literacy rate among the tribes has remarkably increased in all the districts in the state of Kerala in spite of the fact that the tribes were inhabiting in inaccessible areas of the state.

**Progress of Literacy and General Development of the State, 1947-1991.**

This Chapter shows that literacy development in the state was the result of the efforts made by the communities on the one side and the Church on the other. In the initial stages the state had very minimum role in the spread of literacy among the people and it was only on the eve of independence that the princely governments of Travancore and Cochin began to take initiative in the spread of literacy. Conviction of a few educated people belonging to certain communities that literacy alone would lead to progress and development encouraged them to initiate a movement for the spread of literacy for overall social development. As a result of these, movements and efforts, there has taken place rapid increase of literacy, which is testified by the Census of India.

According to 1991, Census, the districtwise difference in literacy in Kerala was only marginal, compared to other states in India. For a clear understanding of a gradual increase in literacy in the state, the following table is given below:
TABLE: 6
Trend in Literacy Kerala, 1951-1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Level of Literacy</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
<th>Percentage Male Literacy</th>
<th>Percentage Female Literacy</th>
<th>Percentage SC Literacy</th>
<th>Percentage ST Literacy</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>19.15</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>40.47</td>
<td>89.64</td>
<td>49.79</td>
<td>31.41</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>56.85</td>
<td>40.47</td>
<td>54.97</td>
<td>38.90</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>60.42</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>66.62</td>
<td>54.31</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>70.42</td>
<td>16.55</td>
<td>87.74</td>
<td>75.65</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>90.59</td>
<td>28.64</td>
<td>94.45</td>
<td>86.93</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table gives very interesting trend describing the literacy development between the period between 1901 to 1991. The total literacy in the state in 1951 was increased to 40.47% with male literacy being 49.79% and female literacy 31.41%. The year 1961 showed further increase and in 1991 the total literacy was 90.59% with male literacy being 94.45% and female literacy 86.93%. Thus the table brings to light a gradual increase in literacy development in the state of Kerala during the period between 1951 and 1991.

Though in the sphere of literacy Kerala comes first in comparison to other states in India, economic and industrial development has not taken place here. To quote Robbin Jeffrey, “Though the growth of formal education systems from the end of the 19th century created large new categories of people (teachers and...
students), introduced different forms of organization and suffused Kerala with challenging ideas, economic development has not been an obvious result. The widespread provision of a sound formal school system helped to demolish structures of old Kerala, but it has not contributed noticeably to the construction of a strong new economy.”

What is important is the level of political consciousness and an awareness about health, proper nutrition and other related matters which have formed an integral part of Kerala life. This is definitely the outcome of the literacy development and it may be remembered that there has also taken place social mobility of communities and an increase of per capita income. It is this aspect which the present study refers to the social development which has been brought as a result of the literacy development of the state.

Another impact of the literacy development over the years is the development which has taken place among women. Robin Jeffrey further argues that education system is the integral part of the Kerala model. Another remarkable feature of the literacy development is the crystallisation of cultural identities and emergence of political competition as an integral part of even rural life. However, the trend in the literacy development has not created any positive outcome which may lead to powerful expansion of the

---

71 Robbin Jeffrey, 1992, op.cit., p.150.
72 Ibid, p.159.
economy of Kerala. A close observation of Kerala society and polity shows that education, economy, political development and political processes are indispensable aspects of Kerala life.

**Conclusion**

The achievement of literacy in the state of Kerala cannot be treated as an isolated phenomena but it is a product of the socio-economic and political context in which literacy has evolved and transformed the life style of various communities. This is different from other states in India in many respects and that is the reason why most of the scholars refer to it as Kerala model of development. The term “Kerala model” refers to the “positive achievements of the distribution adopted in Kerala”.73 The important aspect to note here is the emphasis given to literacy development by the people as a whole as landmark of social mobility and other forms of development in social and individual life. In spite of industrial and economic backwardness, people’s initiative to send their wards to schools and college irrespective of their class affiliations and community affinities is something to be investigated further in order to examine the motive surrounding this phenomena. Community leadership, Church, political parties and state authority have played their part in the development of literacy in Kerala. In pre-Independent Kerala, the role of the State in the sphere of literacy development was marginal.

and it was in this context that various organizations mentioned above came forward to initiate the movement for the spread of literacy and education among the people. A close examination of the development of the state reveals that casteism, which had subverted the social progress before independence as a part of the Hindu social hierarchy has vanished, and it took different forms in society. Caste is now being used for bargaining opportunities and position in life. Moreover, there emerged a new stratification based on income and the quality of life has improved and it is explicitly seen in the urge of the people to read newspapers everyday. The communist movement has rather pushed back casteism and brought to the social front the class consciousness, which is played a progressive role in having a balanced outlook towards religion, caste and communities. The interplay of various forces at work in society have begun to be moderate because of the literacy development in the state.