CHAPTER IV

TRADE UNIONISM IN KERALA

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References
4.1 Introduction

The social revolution of great magnitude that occurred in Kerala was never seen as part of the general, national mainstream of changes in the same period. Historians and sociologists are reluctant to recognise the importance of the momentous awakening in Kerala and they refuse to connect this with national history. At the end of the 19th century, Kerala presented a dismal picture of the social and religious life. A silent revolution was set in motion by Shri Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan and its upshot was the rise of a variety of social, political, economic and intellectual groupings, all progressive in outlook. This socio-religious movement was confined within the bounds of Kerala, on account of the special and peculiar needs of this land which made it almost an indoor affair, attention of people outside scarcely being drawn to it. But judging from the impact it exerted on the people, this great historical process had revolutionized the life of a larger number of the people than the combined forces Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Parthana Samaj and other organizations could effect on people all over India.

“All north Indian reformists Samajas originated in areas under British rule. And their success depended, to a great extent, on government support. They presupposed an enlightened Government in their near, to act opportunely to implement changes without producing violent fraction in society. But in Kerala,
especially in Travancore and Cochin, that favorable climate was totally absent. Here, orthodox Hindu rulers, under the direction of prejudiced Dewans and an unscrupulous priestly class, were not prepared to allow even a slight change in the recognized customs. It was against this background that the reformers had to work in Kerala.

Compared to the reform movements of northern India, this movement was certainly more fundamental, deeper and richer in point of incidence and impact. “Kerala had always remained outside the main current of Indian national life, so also her history.” The social movement has greatly contributed to the uplifting of the oppressed classes in Southern India and its activities have in a measure been allied to those of Gandhiji.

As Sree Narayana Guru left his permanent imprint on the religious and social life of Kerala, his lieutenant, Kumaran Asan put his stamp on the social and literary faces of Kerala. Through his literary masterpieces and active social work, Asan sowed the seeds of a great but silent social revolution in Kerala. The literary renaissance, in fact, made it easy for the society to review its past, made its ways for admitting changes, and recognize the time spirit. Literary renaissance coincided with social renaissance and both resulted in the growth of political consciousness in Kerala.
Freedom can flourish only where equality prevails. The essential and necessary prerequisite for freedom is social harmony, tolerance and spirit of mutuality. The social and political atmosphere of Kerala, not unlike other parts of India, was waiting to be influenced by a new, refreshing spirit of renaissance.

"In Travancore, the great reform movement starting from below, from the traditionally depressed classes, have transformed the whole social structure producing a remarkable intellectual and social awakening."³

Newspapers, books and literary works which had started appearing in large numbers in Travancore during this period played a major role in accelerating the growth of a very powerful radical trade union movement. Newspapers and journals especially brought out with the intention of educating the working class were numerous during the period. Thozhilali (The labourer) was the most important of all the newspapers published for the purpose of educating the labourers. This newspaper was established in 1926 by the Labour Association itself.⁴

The printing and distribution of pamphlets among the labourers was another method which accelerated the growth of ideas and latest information regarding day-to-day developments among the working class and created a class consciousness among themselves.
4.2 The Historical Growth of Trade Unionism in Kerala

The trade unions in Kerala started during the time of the trade expansion. James Drm, an English man started a factory “Deras Mail Company” at Alleppey in 1958. Many workers came to the factory from five to six miles away. They came early in the morning and returned at night. Children also worked in the factory.

"The appointment of the factory workers was made by the supervisors. They could send away the workers without any reason. There was no relation between the factory owners and the working class. The supervisors were "autocrats" in the factory. There were also women workers.

The supervisors punished the workers for simple reasons. Once a supervisor gave a worker five rupees fine accusing him that he went for the ceremony of his temple without his permission. The poor workers suffered a lot under these factory owners. They were not allowed to give employment to those who came well dressed".

Vadapuram Bhava

"In Bombay Sri. M.M. Lokhande a follower of Sri. Jyothi Rao Phule who was a Maharashtrian social revolutionary, organised labour unions for the first time. Bombay history repeated in a smaller scale in Alleppey. When Lokhande
drew inspiration from Mahatma Phule in Bombay to become father of the Indian trade union movement, his counterpart in Kerala, Sri. Vadapuram B.K. Bhava got inspired by the great Sree Narayana Guru and is considered father of trade union movement in Kerala. Like Lokhande he was also born in a lower strata of society-in an Ezhava family. Bhava was impressed by the message of Sree Narayana Guru, like Young Lokhande who was attracted by the message of Mahatma Phule. He engaged in the activities of SNDP just as Sri. Lokhande was involved in the activities of Sathya Shodhak Samaj.  7

With the arrival of the British, not only the administration but the monopoly in trade also passed into their hands. Gradually British capital found its way to Kerala and began establishing factories and investing in plantations and banking. Quite a few factories were established at Alleppey, Quilon, Kolachal and other places in Travancore. Along with foreign firms the native bourgeoisie also started establishing factories and banks. At that time P.K. Bhava was appointed as the "Muppan" and yard superintendent of Empire Coir Works. About 300 workers were in the factory. Making use of this opportunity he told about his plan to the factory owner Amber Sett and he also allowed to start a labour association in the factory. 8

On March 31st, 1922 the first meeting was summoned under the chairmanship of Advocate P.B. Muhammed. They formed a Workers Association
named “Labour Union”. This was the first approach to a trade union in Kerala. Then under the chairmanship of T.C. Kesavan Vaidyan an executive committee was formed. An opinion was brought forth that the labour union must be made as “Thiruvidancore Labour Association”. Afterwards this union grew as “Thiruvidancore Coir Factory Workers Union”.9

The membership to the union was made on August 1922. At that time the workers were hesitant to join the union. They looked upon the union as an enemy. As the superintendent of the company Bhava had certain authorities on workers. He insisted the workers to join the union. A large number of Coir factories sprang up especially at Alleppy and Cherthala.

During the first decade of its existence, the Association functioned more as a welfare organization rather than as a radical trade union. The labourers were not keen on joining the Association. However, they joined the Association just to please the Moopan.

It was in 1934 the first general strike of the coir factory workers was organised by the labour Association at Alleppy. A very strong progressive and radical section was steadily growing within the Association.
“The workers were exploited both by agents of owners of factories and local entrepreneurs. Although the production was increased by the hardship of the workers, the workers did not get any increase in wages”.

This agitated P.K. Bhava. This convinced him of the need of a labour association in Kerala. There is some obscurity among the historians regarding the origin of trade union movement in Kerala. According to some historians attempts at organizing labour in the coir mats and mattings industry in Alleppey began as early as 1920. The organisation was known as the Travancore Labour Association (TLA). The TLA was registered under the Travancore Trade union Act of 1937. On registration, TLA was renamed as the Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFW)\(^\text{10}\).

The demands of the TCFWU were a wage increase, improvement in the working conditions, a guaranteed minimum earnings, abolition of contract labour and prohibition of unauthorized deduction from wages by Moopans\(^\text{11}\) and labour contractors and recognition of the union. The Dewan of Travancore had taken a personal interest in the settlement of this strike and the government appointed a Board of Conciliation.

Towards 1938 the condition of the labourers became pathetic. The police beat up the workers mercilessly and produced the first martyr of the labour, movement in Travancore - Bhava was killed in this lathi-charge.
The death of Bhava and the police Lathi charge made the situation explosive. The government immediately issued prohibitory orders against the holding of meetings and processions in the entire Quilon district. But the labourers not only struck work on the next day but also walked nine miles towards the north to reach Kanjikuzhi which fell under the Kottayam district.

Later the activities of the C.S.P become strong among the workers. Many people still do not know the fact that the most important strike and lockout in the history of Kerala were led by the C.S.P. during 1938-1939 period. Later on the All Travancore Trade Union Congress was started in Kerala. During that time most of the trade unions were guided by the communists.

The growth of trade union in Kerala has a kind of revolutionary success. History shows that only with unity the workers overcome all those difficulties confronted them. In 1948 there started another union named Kerala Trade Union, Mr. Karunakaran guided the union which started in Sitaram Mills. In an interview with Karunakaran he said that the trade union was a decisive factor in making him a successful politician and leader.12

After the general strike of 1938, the TCFWU was revitalized. Factory committees were set up for each unit and operated virtually on the lines of the present day works committees. It also acted as machinery of grievance settlement and promoted the spirit of collective bargaining at the level of the factory and
joint consultations at the level of industry. The TCFWU instilled in its members strong consciousness of their rights and privileges so that a contractor or a Moopan was no longer able to abuse his power.\(^\text{13}\)

The trade union movement that originated at Alleppey soon spread to the other parts of the state. The first trade union to emerge at Quilon was the Quilon Labour Union (QLU).\(^\text{14}\)

In contrast to the active unionism, which was practiced in Alleppey, Quilon offered a good model of “Sunday unionism”. Its early leaders were drawn from the class of legal practitioners known as Vakils inspired with the spirit of selfless social service. The office of the QLU provided a common meeting ground for active social and political workers particularly from the Travancore state congress which was spear-heading the movement against the Dewan and Maharaja. The chief activity of the QLU was to hear the grievances of workers and help them to submit memoranda to the employers.\(^\text{15}\)

The QLU was registered as the Quilon Factory Workers Union (QFWU) in 1936 incorporating the workers from the cashew industry, cotton mills, saw mills, tile factories and engineering workshops in the Quilon area. The workers were fed up with the miserable working conditions in the factories and the very long working hours which extended from 6 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. with half an hour lunch break.
The employers resorted to every means to terrorise and check the activities.

Leaders of the QFWU were harassed in their factories, beaten up by goondas and were subjected to extreme form of humiliation.\(^{16}\)

Along with the Travancore area Cochin and Malabar areas were also having their own share in Trade Union activities\(^{17}\). In organising some of the unions in Malabar, the founding members of the communists movement played a very significant role; union struggle became part of the freedom struggle\(^{18}\).

The development of the trade union movement and the emergence of the communist wing in it must be considered as part of the mainstream of freedom struggle and the subsequent growth of political democracy. A number of Malabar leaders of the communist party started a youth league and carried its message to Travancore. Meanwhile, a division known as the progressive group emerged in the state congress in Travancore. It particularly emphasized the need for mobilizing workers for the freedom struggle and openly alleged that the state congress was trying the line of Gandhism and non-violence and that it was not agitated enough. Subsequently, a rift in the state congress between left and right came to limelight.
The formation of the progressive group and its activities came to the knowledge of the Dewan of Travancore and he put the leaders in jail. Later, the Dewan released the leaders but he was determined to break the movement. The police and black legs were let loose on workers in Alleppey and TCFWU office was raided. As a part of this development, there emerged the “Radical Congress”. The young blood in the youth league and state congress considerably enhanced the strength and popularity of the new Radical Congress. It really marked the emergence of communist party in the state. At Quilon session of the state Congress, the communists decided to chalk out a separate path.

These developments influenced the Trade Union movement also. The all Travancore Trade Union Congress (ATTUC) provided a platform for all left wing unions in the state. Following the stand taken by the communists in the Quit India Agitation, the union movement split into two, one led by the radical left and the other by left socialists. The operations of the communists concentrated on the working class and the student community. They widely spread the messages of the class struggle, violent agitations, and even mass armed revolt. Alleppey was the chief centre of the Communist.

The Punnapra-Vayalar revolt of 1946 is considered as important landmark in the history of trade unionism in Kerala. The workers in Alleppey declared a general strike in September 1946. The police and the workers clashed and the
police got the worst of it. On October 24, 1946 the bloodiest of armed conflicts, a battle between organized group of workers and police took place. Though started as a trade union agitation, the Punnapra-Vayalar revolt was part of a political struggle for achieving freedom and responsible government¹⁹.

The Dewans’ attitude to trade unionism and Industrial Relations was ambivalent. Personally, he had a soft corner for the working class. He used to encourage the growth of unionism, by influencing employees to give recognition to major unions. He strongly held the view that Industrial disputes should be settled through joint consultations. He took initiative in setting up a tripartite system and formed a labour department as well as Industrial Relation Committees (IRCS). But Dewan was strongly opposed to the mixing up of unionism with politics. Therefore, he held that Punnapra-Vayalar Revolt was a political struggle against the established government. Considering the many aspects of Trade Union involvement in politics, at last, Dewan had ordered the imposition of a ban on the communist party and pro-Communist trade unions in the state.

4.3 Trade Unionism : Post-Independent Period

The objective basis for the trade union movement and the struggle by the working class of Kerala was provided by the extreme economic hardships and the poor and inhuman conditions of work particularly during the pre-
independence period. But with independence of the country, the cause of the struggle reverted again to economic demands.

In 1948, the ban on 29 out of 35 unions that was imposed by Dewan, was lifted. Industrial unrest was revived. Unionism began to spread to new areas like plantations, agriculture and even to service sectors. The AITUC and INTUC made its roads into plantations. The United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) also emerged on the scene. The Hind Mazdur Sabha (HMS) was another late entrant into the trade union scene. The states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated in July 1949 and preparation for the first general election was being made when the industrial relations scene was turning turbulent.

The emergence of an independent unionism in Alwaye, a fast growing industrial town in 1940’s is considered as a significant turning point in the history of Trade Unionism in Kerala. Modern industries and security of employment brought a refreshing influence on the union movement in Alwaye. The new movement stood for two principles: (a) non-affiliation to political parties and (b) one industry one union. This new movement has checked the growth of pro-Communist unions. But very soon, it was realized that the independent unionism could no longer survive in the highly complex state politics and politically conscious working class.
The first popular ministry came to power in 1948. But it was short lived. Later, coalition politics became the order of the day. Industrial unrest followed. The need for trade union unity was felt by all. In this context, the principle of one union in one undertaking and the use of secret ballot to select representatives were suggested by experts. But this happened to be a failure and it led the way for inter-union rivalries, especially among the left oriented unions. Industrial unrest appeared all over the State.

The first communist Ministry, which came into power in 1957, introduced three controversial legislative bills; the Agrarian Relation Bill, the Education Bill and the Industrial Relations Bill. But this resulted in anti-Communist unrest all over the state in the form of the *Vimochona Samara*. The president of India dismissed the ministry. But political instability and industrial unrest continued.

Gradually a new era of trade unionism has emerged in Kerala. Following the split of the Communist Party in 1964 the AITUC led unions began to split all over the state. The trade union arena in Kerala has become completely politicised. Each political party formed and nourished its own trade union wing. This resulted in unhealthy inter union rivalries. It is clear that trade unionism in Kerala has been entering into a new phase of growth which continues till now.
4.4 Causes for Trade Union Growth in Kerala

With the increase of industrialization, expanding labour force, growing trade union consciousness, increasing rate of literacy among the workers are some of the causes that led to a tremendous growth in trade union in Kerala. Trade unions have increased enormously both in number and membership during the period 1951 to 1999. Table 4.1 shows the number of trade unions and membership in Kerala.

Table 4.1
Trade Unions and Membership in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of workers union on register at the beginning of the year</th>
<th>No. of workers unions newly registered during the year</th>
<th>No. of workers unions cancelled during the year</th>
<th>No. of workers unions on register at the end of the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8803</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9264</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>9620</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9857</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>10141</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>10034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>10034</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>10218</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>10504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>10504</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>10795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>10795</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>10914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office File of the Labour Commissioner’s Office, Trivandrum
4.5 District Wise Variation of Unionism

It is to be noted that Ernakulam emerges as having the highest number of unions. Total number of trade unions in Kerala is 10914. Total number of membership is 661767. Shows the increase of trade unions and its membership.

Table 4.2

District- wise Total Number of Trade Unions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District code</th>
<th>District name</th>
<th>Total No. of trade unions</th>
<th>Total No. of members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>92960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>1450</td>
<td>101076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>1816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>4114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>46309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>2105</td>
<td>72009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Thrissur</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>36016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>27918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>3776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>64324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>187287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Wynad</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>7802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kasargod</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>14367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>10914</td>
<td>661767</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office File of the Labour Commissioner’s Office, Trivandrum.
More industrialised districts have more unions and more members. Backward districts like Idukki and Wayanad have lesser number of trade unions and members.

4.6 Labour Problems and Wage Rates

Kerala is now witnessing less of militancy in its labour movement, which was its bane in the past. Strikes and agitations for increase of wages and improvement of service conditions are on the decrease.

Statistics on industrial disputes in 36 different types of industries in the state indicate a declining trend. The number of industrial disputes handled in the state decreased from 11477 in 1994-'95 to 8266 in 1997-'98. Out of a total of 8266 industrial disputes handled during 1997-'98, 4422 cases (53%) could be settled during that year itself. Number of disputes that led to strikes and lockouts decreased from 53 in 1996-'97 to 50 in 1997-'98. The total number of man days lost due to strikes and lockouts indicate a substantial decline from 14.33 lakhs in 1996-'97 to 7.11 lakhs during 1997-'98. The welcome sign of change in Kerala’s Industrial Climate (KIC) is noticed from the statistics collected, presented in the table 4.3.

Details of distribution of industrial disputes arose and settled according to cause during 1995-'96 1996-'97 and 1997-'98 and distribution of industrial disputes settled according to type of settlement during the corresponding period are also given in the table.
Table 4.3

Industrial disputes arose, handled, settled etc., in Kerala

(1994-95 to 1997-98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No. of disputes pending at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>5324</td>
<td>4861</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>2811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No. of disputes that arose during the year</td>
<td>6155</td>
<td>5874</td>
<td>5274</td>
<td>5455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No. of disputes handled during the year (1+2)</td>
<td>11477</td>
<td>10740</td>
<td>8577</td>
<td>8266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No. of disputes settled during the year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. By voluntary negotiation between parties</td>
<td>2725</td>
<td>2381</td>
<td>1340</td>
<td>1183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. By conciliation</td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>1621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. By withdrawal</td>
<td>1787</td>
<td>2538</td>
<td>2150</td>
<td>1303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Referred for Arbitration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. Referred for adjudication</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f. Total number of disputes settled (a to e)</td>
<td>6616</td>
<td>7437</td>
<td>5766</td>
<td>4422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Number of disputes pending at the year (3-4)</td>
<td>4861</td>
<td>3303</td>
<td>2811</td>
<td>3844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Number of disputes that led to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Strike (including pending previously)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Lockout including pending previously</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Total (a+b)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No. of workers affected due to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Strike</td>
<td>41230</td>
<td>21224</td>
<td>20063</td>
<td>69898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Lockout</td>
<td>17068</td>
<td>14861</td>
<td>14313</td>
<td>5285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Total (a+b)</td>
<td>58298</td>
<td>36085</td>
<td>34376</td>
<td>75183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Man days lost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Strike</td>
<td>1265380</td>
<td>561283</td>
<td>185822</td>
<td>497-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Lockout</td>
<td>1836990</td>
<td>1807195</td>
<td>12575530</td>
<td>214043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Total (a+b)</td>
<td>3102370</td>
<td>2368478</td>
<td>1433352</td>
<td>711121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Labour Commissioner, Thiruvananthapuram
The statistics indicate that the climate is improving, but much remains to be done. The problems relating to loading and unloading, workers’ “attimari”- still continue to be a major irritant to industries. Often many industrial projects are not completed on time due to the intransigence of this class of workers.

4.7 Kottayam District Profile

Introduction

Certain indicators pertaining to geography, population, resources and infrastructure of Kottayam district are explained in this chapter.

Geographical features

Kottayam district is situated in the South Central Kerala. It is surrounded by Eranakulam district in north, Idukki district in the east, Pathanamthitta in the south and Alleppey district in the west. The district occupies approximately 5.6% of the geographical area of Kerala. It has got no sea coast but is having ample backwaters lining by Vembanad lake in the western side.

As per the usual topographical classification applicable to the state, the district has three distinct regions viz. The low land, mid land and high land. There are three major rivers in the district. They are Meenachil, Moovattupuzha and Manimala. The low land region mainly consists of Madapally, Pallom and Vaikom blocks where the land is plain and sandy. Main crop in this area is coconut. The mid-land of the district is constituted by community development blocks of Pampady, Lalem, Uzhavoor, Kaduthuruthy and Ettumanoor. The high
land region is constituted by Kangirapally, Erattupetta and Vazhoor blocks. The
district consists of 5 taluks viz. Kangirapally, Changanacherry, Kottayam
Vaikom and Meenachil.

**Population**

As per the 1991 census, Kottayam district has a population of 18.20
lakhs. Out of this 9.07 lakhs are male and 9.12 lakhs are female. The total
geographical area of the district is 2203 sq.kms and based on this, the density of
population is 826 persons per sq.kms. The growth rate of population of the
district was 7.20% during 1981-91 against the state growth rate of 13.98%. The
sex ratio in the district is 1005 females for 1000 males against the state ratio of
1040 females for 1000 males.

The literacy rate of Kottayam district works out to 85.48% as against the
state rate of 90.59%. The male literacy rate for the district is 86.70% against
94.45% for the state. For females, the literacy rate is reckoned at 84.27% against
the state average of 86.93%. 27.2% of the population is the working class. Out of
this 17.70% are cultivators, 25.10% are agricultural labourers, 3.70% household
industry workers and 53.50 other workers.

**Administrative Set up**

The district consists of 5 taluks, 95 revenue villages and 11 community
development blocks. The district has 6 municipalities and 73 panchayats.
Present Status in Industries

Introduction

Kottayam is classified as a non-backward district as far as industries are concerned. However, the district's economy is predominantly agro-based and it has not made much headway in the industrial sector when compared with activities in adjoining districts like Ernakulam. An analysis of the present industrial structure will give an idea about the progress of industrialization in the district.

Large and Medium Scale Industries

At present there are 16 large and medium scale industries in the district. They comprise mainly of rubber-based units, Newsprint factory cement plant and a few chemical and textile units. The list of large and medium scale units in Kottayam district is given in Appendix 1.

Ancillary Industries

There are 16 large and medium industries in Kottayam district. Some of the major units are Hindustan Newsprint Ltd., Travancore Cements Ltd., MRF Limited, Travancore Electro Chemicals Ltd etc. These units require a variety of raw materials and packing materials for their daily production programmes. At present the companies from various sources outside the state procure these items.
Infrastructural facilities

Infrastructural facilities play the most important supportive role in the industrial development of a region. Kottayam district has well-developed infrastructural facilities in power, roads, communication etc.

Industrial Relations

The labour force of the state has always been underrepresented in all forums. The industrial relations of the state have been rated improving. An attempt was made to collect the opinion from entrepreneurs of the district regarding the industrial relations situation existing in their unit. The opinion of these entrepreneurs could be taken as a basis for generating an opinion regarding the industrial relations in the district, as these opinions come out of their first hand experience.

4.8 Trade Union Growth in Kottayam District

Alappuzha is considered as the cradle of trade unionism and from Alappuzha leaders were deputed to many other places for the formation of trade unions. In the case of Kottayam, though no industries were started during that period it had developed a reputation as a cultural centre. The trade unions that took birth in the early periods, worked in the areas of beedi, printing, rikshaw pulling etc. First labour union was of beedi workers. It was on the initiative of Sri C.S. Gopala Pillai and Shri B. K. Nair, a messenger from Alappuzha, Sri Kottayam Bhasi was elected as the first leader of Beedi Workers Union. In those
days the wage for making 1000 beedies was 10 chakram. Following a strike by beedi workers union they could secure an increase in wages by 75 percentage. This achievement of beedi workers through organisation attracted workers in other areas also to organisational field. Thus rikshaw pulling labourers also started their unions.

In the surrounding areas of Kottayam town and suburbs the agricultural labourers also started organising themselves. In the forefront to organize agricultural labourers were Sri. S.K. Das, Varghese Vaidyan, P.K. Madhavan, P.T. Narayan etc.

In 1930 in Mundakayam an association was formed under the banner “Coolevela Sangam”. Although this association was started for the welfare activities of the workers there is no clear evidence on the association which related to trade union movement.22

In 1946 Travancore Cement Factory was established at Nattakom near Kottayam. On December 1 1950 Travancore Cement workers union was established. The union was started in 1950 after several earlier attempts failed. Leaders were deputed from Allapuzha to Kottayam in order to give leadership for the union. They were Vayalar Pappachen, Mr. Cleitus , Antappan and B. K. Nair.

In 1946 High Range plantation labourers union was formed with K.V. Mathew as president. In 1951 two more unions took birth in Kottayam. One
called Highrange Estate Employees Association with P.K. Sreedharan as President and another known as All Kerala Plantation Workers Union with P.P. Wilson as president. In 1952 a plantation workers union was registered at Kottayam under the leadership of Sri. P.C. Cherian, Dr. T.T. Chacko, Rosamma Chacko, K.M. Chandy and P.C. Kurian.

In Kottayam, Sri. P.D. George worked among plantation workers in the early stages. As per his own description he started union work in the year 1946. He joined the High Range plantation labourers union presided over by Sri. K.V. Mathew by paying four chakram. The conditions of the laboures were very pathetic then. Employers were not employing labourers directly. Selections were made by Muppan who was some sort of agent. They were paid commission at the rate of Rs.5 for an employment with salary Rs 100/- Before 1946 labourers wages were as following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>5 Anas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4 Anas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other work</td>
<td>3 Anas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from the above Moopans there were subagents who brought labourers from Manglore, Tamil Nadu and other places outside Kerala. There was neither guarantee of employment nor fixed working hours. The recruiting agents were invariably an exploiter. In 1946 labourers in estates at Munnar, Pathanamthitta, Punalur etc started strike demanding wage increase, Medical
benefits, Bonus etc. K.V.Mathew led the struggle in Mundakayam town. (K.V.Mathew, freedom fighter had come to limelight by conducting a strike in the estates of his own brother and uncle). Government formed a minimum wages committee with B.K.Nair, K.Karunakaran and P.P.Wilson as members. In 1951 Indian Parliament passed the Plantation Labour Act. In 1952 Kerala Legislative Assembly also passed the Plantation Labour Act.

According to him today there is no need for frequent strike because the workers were protected and gained every amenity of their life through collective bargaining.

In Meenachil Taluk Sri. K.M. Chandy started a union, which came to be known as “Meenachil Taluk Motor Workers Union Then under the auspicious leadership of Mr. P.T. Chacko, Mr. Karunakaran and Mr. K.M. Chandy published a daily newspaper from Trivandrum called “Thozhilali”. The main areas of the circulation of Thodupuzha were Alleppey and Quilon which were the main centres of Coir and Cashew factories.

Mr. B. K. Nair was deputed by the INTUC from the centre to organise INTUC in Kerala. B. K. Nair started his work with Alleppey as centre.23

Most of the well organized trade unions in Kottayam district are affiliated to major political parties in the country and as such can be called “labour-wings” of political parties. Almost all political parties have attempted to bring under their influence as many workers and unions as possible. The policy pursued by the
political parties is reflected in the policy followed by the unions that are sponsored by them. The unions and their members usually support the political agitations of their parent party. The unions INTUC, CITU and AITUC are the leading trade unions in Kottayam District. More than 70 percent of the union members are under these organizations. Among the three INTUC, which is affiliated to Congress, was holding the top position in both number and membership till 1986. But its position has been taken over by CITU, an affiliate of CPM, since 1990. It is also obvious from the data that the trade union operations in Kottayam district are dominated by the two communist factions namely CPI and CPI(M). It is seen that Kottayam’s labour is highly unionised. The cost of living and employment are the significant factors responsible for the growth of trade union members in the district during the past years.

The trade union movement took deep roots in Kerala in course of time and without exception Kottayam also started bearing its fruits with reinforced vigour and vitality.
References


2. Ibid


6. Interview With B.K. Nair dated 3-3-2000 at Allappuzha


8. Interview with B. K. Nair, dated 3-3-2000 at Allappuzha


11. Moopans The leaders of the groups of workers who worked in the coir industries of Kerala in the early periods were known as moopans. They were very influential among the workers and were usually negotiating with the employers regarding the wage and other issues.


Industry, 1945 Labour Investigation Committee Govt. of India, Delhi


17. The Present State of Kerala came into existence in 1957. Before its inception, Kerala was consisting of two princely states namely, Travancore and Cochin and Malabar, Part of Madras Presidency.

18. K. Ramachandran Nair, op cit., pp.48-69


20. Ibid

21. "*Vimochana Samara*" refers to the anti-Communist liberation movement that took place in by the anti-Communist political and social groups of the state to show the protest against the actions of the first elected Communist Government of Kerala. The struggle ultimately came to an end.

22. Interview with P.D. George dated 25-2-2000 at Chenganoor

23. Ibid.