CHAPTER IV

THE ABSTENTION MOVEMENT

The Constitutional Reform of 1932 did not satisfy many sections of the population. It complicated the socio-political condition of Travancore. Various religious groups and communities looked upon these reforms from the viewpoint of respective benefits for their communities. The reform of 1922 and 1932 provided an electoral scheme based upon the property qualification. It was beneficial to the Nair communities because they formed the major land owning class in Travancore. It created apprehension in the minds of the people that the Nairs would secure more seats in the Council than they really deserved on the population basis. On this ground the Ezhavas, the Muslims and some sections of the Christians opposed it. They demanded the institution of communal electorates or reservation of seats to different communities strictly in proportion to their population.

4.1. The Joint Political Congress

Soon after the announcement of the constitutional reform, the S.N.D.P. Yogam (Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam) convened a meeting at Alleppey under the presidentship of K. Ayyappan on 27th

---

November 1932. The meeting proved against the reform. It appointed a committee to chalk out a programme of action in association with likeminded political and communal organisations. They formed the Ezhava Political League. The Ezhava League, State Council League, All Travancore Muslim Service League and Latin Catholic Mahajana Sabha came out with open support. On 26th November 1932, various Christian denominations met and opted for reservation on the basis of population. They argued that they alone would bring relief to the Christians, Ezhavas and the Muslims. E.J. Joseph, Joseph Kunju Padiyara and K.T. Thomas were the masterminds behind the meetings and the decisions taken. In an attempt to make their demands more effective, all Christian denominations joined together and formed the All Travancore Political Congress. Immediately after the formation, the All Travancore Political Congress submitted a memorial to the Dewan reiterating their demands and prayed for an early solution to the defects of the 1932 constitutional reform which was the brain child of Dewan C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer, the constitutional adviser to the Maharaja.

---

3 S.N.D.P. Yogam Golden Jubilee Special Issue, 1953, p. 27.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
The Muslims were also not satisfied with the reform. Hence, the working committee of the Muslim Service League met and expressed the dissatisfaction of the committee and decided to submit a memorial to the authorities and decided to join hands with the likeminded associations and fight. Thus the Christians, the Ezhavas and the Muslims decided to fight for their right in proportion to their population. Dissatisfied with the attitude of the Government, the Ezhavas, the Muslims and the Christians met in the L.M.S. Hall at Trivandrum to chalk out a common programme. In the course of the meeting the representatives decided to form Travancore Joint Political Congress in December 17, 1932. The formation of Travancore Political Congress gave a new dimension to their demand. In January 1933, a deputation under N.V. Joseph submitted yet another memorial to the Dewan. In the Memorial the leaders submitted that gross injustice was done to the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims. They also made it clear that nomination was a poor alternative to election and it was against the democratic principles and gross violation of human rights. The memorialists were further of the view that non-official seats should not be filled by nominations. It should be open to rural multimember constituencies with adequate reservation for

---

7 Jamal, Kunju Sahib, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-68.
10 Kusuman, K.K., *op.cit.*, p. 32.
considerable communities. The same principle of reservation should be made applicable to the State Council also.\footnote{Menon, P.K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 32.} Understanding the graveness of the situation, the Government expressed their willingness to re-group the constituencies. But the representatives felt that the time was not ripe for a meaningful dialogue. Matters were heading towards deep crisis.\footnote{Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 32.} Hence on 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1933, the delegates of the Joint Political Congress assembled in the L.M.S. Hall.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} The delegates of the various political organizations of different Christian communities, Ezhava and Muslim communities decided to abstain from taking part either in voting or by contesting in the election as candidate or accept nominations to the Council.\footnote{Narayanan, P.K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 342-343.} Thus the Travancore Political congress decided to abstain from all sorts of election. This was called as the Abstention Movement.\footnote{Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 32.} A.K. Gopalan described the movement as a new chapter in the history of Travancore.\footnote{Gopalan, A.K., \textit{In the Cause of People}, Trivandrum, p. 100.}

Thus a Joint Political Congress was the first popular movement which had state-wide organisation and the emotional backing of the common man. Also this was the first instance when leaders of various castes and religion
forgot their communal differences for attaining political rights. The demands of the Joint Political Congress deepened the crisis and the government was put into dilemma and it decided to react strongly.

4.2. The Government Reaction

The government viewed the situation very seriously and decided not to remain as a silent spectator. The situation was going from bad to worse. In an attempt to restrict further deterioration the government banned meetings throughout the state. The call for abstention was a great success. Very soon it earned wide publicity. On the other side the government argued the cry for allocation of seats on the basis of population could not be put into practice for the allocation of seats on the basis of property qualification still persists. The Government further declared that Travancore was a land where more than 73 castes live. It was impossible to make territorial adjustment to do justice to all. The Hindu in a letter warned the government for its attitude in the following words: "There is no virtue in ignoring the movement or dismissing it as factious. What the abstentionists want that no single community should be allowed to enjoy a position of predominance in no way justified by the numerical strength. On this particular allegation the communiqué issued by the Travancore Government

\[\text{\cite{19,20}}\]

18 Magistrates Order, 18 April, 1933.
do not appear to have thrown sufficient light. Nevertheless it seems to us unwise to ignore the feelings of considerable sections of the population honestly and firmly held, even if they are based on misconception. To seek to work a reform meant for the people with four fifth of the population opposed to it, to take too great a risk of failure.\textsuperscript{20}

The government took steps to persuade and delink the Ezhavas and the Muslim communities by granting some concessions.\textsuperscript{21} At the outset the government attempted to persuade the Ezhava community and delink them from the struggle. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer,\textsuperscript{22} the Legal and constitutional advisor of the Maharaja had talks with C.V. Kunjiraman and Mr. Govindan, the leaders of the Ezhava community. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer, on behalf of the government assured them that provisions would be made for in the constitution allotting seven seats for the Ezhavas in the Assembly and two seats in the Council. Convinced of the promises of the government, the two leaders convened a special meeting of the S.N.D.P. Yogam at Changanasseri. But the members who attended the meeting taking into consideration of the previous experience rejected the offer of C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer and the

\textsuperscript{20} The Hindu, 23 March, 1933.

\textsuperscript{21} Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 35-36.

\textsuperscript{22} C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer was born to C.R. Pattabirama Aiyer, and Smt. Seethalakshmi Ammal at Wandiwash on 12 November 1879. He worked as a lawyer at Madras. He became advisor to princes of India on constitutional matters. He was appointed as constitutional advisor in 1932 to Maharaha Sree Chithira Thirunal on 1936, he became the Dewan of Travancore.
Maharaja. Dissatisfied and disgusted at the outcome of the meeting Kunjiraman and Govindan withdrew from the movement. The abstentionists felt that by delinking the affected communities, the government planned for ringing death knell to the movement.\(^23\)

4.3. Appeal to the Viceroy

Austin, the Dewan convinced of the demands of the abstentionists, went to the extent of giving assurances to the leaders such as T.J. Mathew, K.C. Mamman Mapila and P.S. Muhammad. He stated that the government was ready to issue supplementary communication in case the proposed election justified the arguments of the agitators. In such an eventuality the Government was prepared to give representation to all communities proportionate to their population.\(^24\) But Ramaswami Aiyer, the constitutional adviser, dropped the idea and changed his opinion.\(^25\) The last chances of the abstentionists who were ready for a showdown was thwarted by the constitutional adviser for he was in sympathy with the Nair community.\(^26\)

The leaders of the Joint Political Congress decided to appeal to the Viceroy. They took this stand that by the treaty of 1805, Travancore joined the subsidiary system of Lord Wellesly. From that time onwards a Resident

---

23 Kusuman., K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 36.
26 Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 36-37.
was appointed to look after the political as well as administrative matters in Travancore. The abstentionists thought that the impasse could be surmounted with ease. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer reacted seriously. He took strong exceptions in passing on the issue to the Imperial Government. He felt that it is a tactics of the agitators to supersede the ultimate authority of the Maharaja. But as per the treaty of 1805, the Maharaja was bound to respect to guidance and directives of the British. But finding no alternative, the abstentionists decided to enter into direct action.

4.4. Direct action

The Joint Political Congress decided to enter into direct action without minding the tactics of the government. The agitators thought of carrying the news to the masses. Hence they conducted mass meetings throughout Travancore. The meetings were conducted at Thiruvalla, Kottayam, Vaikkam, Hozhencheri, Chengannur, Quilon, Palai, Kottarakkara, Kalkulam in South Travancore and in many other places. The government at the same time undermined the progress of the movement. They did not notice that the abstentionists had more than seventy percent of the

28 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 37.
29 Aitchison, C.U., op.cit., p. 150.
population. But the government unmindful of the popular support, proceeded for election as per the Constitutional Reform of 1932.

4.5. The Election of 1933

The government and C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer planned to counter the actions of the Joint political congress. In an attempt to camouflage the abstentionists, the government picked up some people from the Christians, the Ezhavas and the Muslims and projected them as candidates. It was an attempt of the government to prove that the abstentionists or the Joint Political Congress did not have the full support of the people. The government agreed that the boycott of election was not fully supported by the people. In spite of the hard work of the abstentionists, unknown people to public life from and among the Christians, Ezhavas and Muslim communities accepted the candidature that the Government offered them. Some of the abstentionists condemned the candidates of the above communities but the weight of the government was on them and hence they were not disheartened by the threats.

30 Namboothiripad, E.M.S., op.cit., p. 150.
31 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 38.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 39.
The government unleashed threat and intimidation on the supporters of the movement. Freedom of expression and action were curtailed. Public meetings were banned. Government servants were directed by C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer and the government persuaded the Christians, the Ezhavas and the Muslims to contest in the election. But their pressure and persuasion did not bear fruit as they planned. Many candidates withdrew their candidatures. In the later stage, many withdrew their candidatures by letters. But the government continued its oppressive attitude.

On 30th March 1933, the Commissioner of Police who was camping at Quilon reported to the Dewan that he was convinced of the premediated move of the abstentionists to vilify the Nayar community and provoked them to resort to violence. The speeches of the agitators evinced general tendency construed to generate in the public mind contempt and disrespect for the lawful authority of the government. They made loud and pompous speeches, published pamphlets and the resolutions passed. All these clearly indicated that the government favoured the Nayars against the claims and whims and fancies of all other people. The agitators pressurized the young and the old, the illiterates and the enlightened have brought a wave of unrest and tension among the general public.

---

36 Letter from the Commissioner to the Dewan, 30 March 1933, D. Dis. 773/35 Judicial.
37 Ibid.
In the meantime the agitators issued a pamphlet. It extorted the people to march forward united aiming to establish equality, unity and peace. The agitators decided to conduct a meeting at Paraur on 3 April, 1933. But the District Magistrate of Kottayam issued a ban order.\(^38\)

On 28\(^{th}\) March, 1933, a meeting was conducted at Paraur in Kunnathunad Taluk under the presidency of M.A. Chacko, a retired Excise Commissioner. M.S. Joseph, K. Ayyappan, A.C. Kuriakose, Thankappan and T.I. Pyli Ponnuli and Ittiachan moved a resolution, that the people of kunnathunad taluk had nothing to do with the election to the reformed Assembly or Council. None of them should contest either in the reformed Assembly or to the Council or accept nominations from the Government or is take part in the election or register vote by any other means.\(^39\) Kunjukose Tharakan, another abstentionist moved a resolution demanding the termination of C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer as legal and constitutional advisor to the Maharaja. The reason he stated was that in this hour of economic depression, this type of appointment was unwarranted.\(^40\)

In the meanwhile, P. Viswanatha Aiyer, the District Magistrate was collecting evidences to prevent the abstentionists. The Deupty

---

\(^{38}\) Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 40.

\(^{39}\) Report of K.J. Cherian, Assistant Dewan Peishkar to Vaidyalingam Pillai, Dewan Peishkar, Kottayam, 30 March, 1933.

\(^{40}\) \textit{Ibid.}
Superintendent of Police of Quilon received a letter from the Magistrate that two meetings, one at Quilon and the other at Mavelikkara were planned by the agitators on 2nd and 6th April 1933. It was reported that the agitators used highly intemperate language against the Nayar and other communities and against particular incidents and the government. He also advised the leaders like E. Kesavan, Jacob Kurien, Editor, Keralasevakan, P.S. Mohamad, H.P. Mohamad Rowther, K.M. Kesavan, S.N.D.P. Yogan to desist from promoting, organizing or taking part in any public meeting throughout Quilon area. To this effect the District Magistrate issued a prohibitory order against holding meetings and demonstrations. But he did not ban the social and religions meetings.

In the meanwhile prohibitory orders were enforced in Quilon and the abstentionists of Mavelikkara cancelled all the proposed meetings. Now the agitators planned to circular placards and pamphlets. In an attempt to stop that too, the D.S.P. of Quilon wrote to the Magistrate to issue orders against them also. But the people of Mavelikkara, Ariyankavu and other places were eagerly waiting for the expiry of the orders to conduct meetings. Leaders like K.C. Thomas, C. Kesavan, Thazhava Kesavan were indulged in

---

41 Letter from District Magistrate, Quilon to the D.S.P., 1 April, 1933.
42 Ibid.
43 Prohibitory order of the District Magistrate, Quilon, 1 April, 1933.
44 Letter of D.S.P. to District Magistrate of Quilon, 4 April, 1933.
hectic campaign in support of the movement and thus created an uncommon situation. As the District Magistrate could understand that soon after the expiry of the prohibitory orders, the agitators might continue the prohibited meetings. Hence, the Magistrate wrote to the Chief Secretary to extend the prohibitory order till the elections were over.\textsuperscript{45} As the request of Magistrate was granted, the magistrate immediately extended the prohibitory order till the election. But the agitators and the people felt that the repeated imposition of the prohibitory orders were aimed at creating fiasco in their programmes. Hence, they had decided to continue their programmes only after the repressive measures were withdrawn.\textsuperscript{46} With the blessings of the Chief Secretary, that the agitators did not stop abating the abstention,\textsuperscript{47} the prohibitory order was extended upto 17\textsuperscript{th} June the day of election to the new Legislative Assembly and Council.\textsuperscript{48}

While situation was embroiling like this, the people of South Travancore organised themselves under the leadership of A. Nesamoni, A. Gunamoni and Lopez, Ex. M.L.C., Neyyattinkara, conducted a mammoth meeting at Thuckalay on the eve of the election. A. Nesamony was the president of the meeting. They declared that their decision to abstain from

\textsuperscript{45} Letter from the District Magistrate, Quilon to the Chief Secretary, 10 April, 1933.
\textsuperscript{46} Letter from D.S.O., to District Magistrate, Quilon, 18 April 1933.
\textsuperscript{47} Letter from District Magistrate, Kottayam to Chief Secretary, 24 January 1933.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}
elections would continue until adequate representation to the different communities on proportion to the population was guaranteed. The Malayalees in a letter, warned against proportional representation, "To demand representatives according to the strength of the population of communities is nothing but a selfishness of a handful of leaders on behalf of the ignorant masses." 49

It was under this murky situation the election of 1933 took place. The government believed in the prejudicial reports of the officials. Hence they did not understand the real situation. They underestimated the popular discontent and indignation. Vast majority of people boycotted the election. Thus they recorded their protest in the face of repressive and democratic methods of the government. 50 P.K.K. Menon pointed out that "It was a tragic irony that the constitutional reform of 1933 acclaimed as progressive had to be worked out in an atmosphere of political mistrust, communal vilification, police shadowing and intimidation and gagging of mouth." 51

The members of the Assembly were declared by the returning officers. 52 Some became members without voting. Government officials intimidated and put up their own candidates, that too from their own

49 Letter from D.S.P. to District Magistrate, Quilon, 18 April 1933.
50 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 43.
51 Menon, P.K.K., op.cit., p. 355
52 Ibid.
communities. And thus the election was conducted to the new Assembly far below the expectation of the leading members of the Joint political Congress.  

The election results proved that what the Travancore Joint Political Congress feared was correct. The Christian had a population of 16 lakhs. But they got only 10 seats. The Ezhavas had a population of 8.69 lakhs could secure only 8 seats. The Nayars with a population of 8.68 lakhs got 36 seats and the Muslims with a population of 3.53 lakhs got 3 seats only.

Thus, the number of seats secured in the election was thoroughly disproportionate to the strength of the population. The Travancore Joint Political Congress thought that struggle was the only alternative to get their grievances redressed and thus they had decided to pursue that course of action in future.

4.6. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer Plan

After the election on October 1933, there was a rumour that the Viceroy had planned to visit Travancore. In the wake of the visit of the Viceroy, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer wanted to bring a settlement. So he sounded Philipose, one of the elected members to find ways and means for

53 Menon, P.K.K., p. 355.
54 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 45.
55 Ibid.
exploring ways and means to bring an amicable settlement. He made it clear that the dissolution of the newly elected Assembly was not possible. Hence the leaders felt that the government was not sincere and trying to freeze the agitation by means of conciliatory talk. The agitators further felt that the government planned this so that the Viceroy could be received in an atmosphere of political peace and tranquillity. In spite of doubts, the agitators did not show disagreement.\textsuperscript{56}

4.7. Debate in the Assembly

Meanwhile the agitators who were elected from the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims raised questions regarding the representations to various communities in the public service. This indirectly helped the abstentionists. K. Sankaran of Kartikappally demanded caste-wise statement of number of officers in the Huzur Secretariat.\textsuperscript{57} The Chief Secretary presented the following statements.\textsuperscript{58} Not satisfied with this Mr. Sankaran demanded a caste-wise statement of teachers in Government Vernacular schools. On 14\textsuperscript{th} August 1933 it was another attempt to convince the

\textsuperscript{56} Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{57} Travancore Assembly Proceedings, 10 August, 1933, p. 514.
\textsuperscript{58} (Add pp. 45-46)
abstentionists. The government provided a castewise list of employees to the abstentionists.

The abstentionists could understand that in the public service they got a share which was far below their expectations. They felt that it was a gross injustice done to the Christians, Ezhavas and the Muslims. This could make no impact upon the people's expectations and impact on the agitators. In spite of all these provocations, the Joint Political Congress restricted the sentiments and feelings of the agitators. They were prepared to wait and see how long the government would neglect the legitimate right of the people under one pretext or the other. This gave an opportunity to All Travancore Youth League to take up their cause.

4.8. All Travancore Youth League

The All Travancore Youth League was formed before the election of 1933. But it did not come to the scene till date. After the elections the abstentionists thought of ventilating their grievances through them. The All Travancore Youth League met at Trivandrum on 17th November 1933. Kelappan presided over the meeting. In the meeting Kelappan remarked that "For a handful of seats in the Assembly communal tension reached such

59 Travancore Assembly Proceedings, 10 August, p. 780.
60 Ibid.
61 Kusuman, K.K., op. cit., p. 47.
62 Ibid.
an extent that it seems rather impossible for adjustment and mutual agreement among the contenders. Even the students, who usually did not allow casteism to interfere with their unity are found to be divided into activists and abstentionists and fighting among themselves.⁶³ The agitators formed difference of opinion because mostly they had opposition from their own community under the instigation of the government officials. Thus they planned for their own arrangements.

4.9. Anti-Abstention Move

The District Magistrate of Kottayam reported that one Parayil Sankaran and others jointly self styled as the leaders of the Ezhavas convened a meeting. They published a pamphlet stating that abstention movement was the action of the self-centered Christians who wanted Ezhavas, Christian and Muslim alliance. The reason they stated was that they were not happy with the reform of 1932.⁶⁴ They aimed at getting support from the people. On 23rd October 1933 they assembled at Tambalakad temple and extended support to the government.⁶⁵ Some of the Muslims also came for the support to the government. They criticized that the abstention movement was the agitation of a handful of self seeking Christians. They recurred the support of some agitating Ezhavas and short

---

⁶⁵ Letter from District Magistrate to the Chief Secretary, 23 October, 1933.
sighted Muslims. A Handbill was published by twenty nine Muslims in support of the government. Meetings were conducted at Nedumkunna, Chennappadi, Tanipalnat and Palapara to condemn the movement. The Nationalist party in the Legislature mainly dominated by caste Hindus extended their support to the government. Thus, the government and the non-supporters of abstention movement locked horn.

4.10. The Liberal Party League

Some of the members of the Nationalist party, who had taken a balanced view towards the two rival parties were not ready to be deaf and dumb to all the happenings. They could not allow the struggle to go indefinitely. Hence, they dropped the Nationalist party and formed the Liberal Party League on 17th December 1933. It aimed at solving the present deadlock. P.K. Narayana Pillai, Rtd. High Court Judge and K.C. Abraham were elected leader and deputy leader respectively. The new party claimed the support of 27 legislators. Even then, it was not a popular party. In the election of 1933, mostly the participants were either the supporters of the government or supporters of the Hindus but they did not have the support of abstentionists. Most of the supporters were the Liberal Party members. This step the government took due to the prolonged agitation and the impending

---

66 Letter of Inspector of Police, Kanjirapally, 27 October, 1933.
67 Kusuman, K.K., *op.cit.*, p. 49.
visit of Wellington, the Viceroy. This was a makeshift policy of the
government to nullify the progress of the abstentionists.

The liberal Party League stood for communal harmony first then
stood for communal representation to the unrepresented communities in the
public service. The Liberal Party League met at Thirunakkara maidan at
Kottayan on October 1933 and passed a resolution. The third and the
seventh resolutions were contradictory to each other. The third resolution
stood for representation to the unrepresented communities whereas the
seventh resolution was against it. It further stated that it was necessary for
the progress of the democracy and systematical political improvement.
There was no difference between the Nationalist Party and the newly formed
Liberal Party League.\(^68\) The Liberal Party League personified the
perspectives of the moderates of the period. Moreover, it lost the popular
support of the period. As it lost the popular support, it did not serve the
purpose for which it was organised. Moreover it lost the confidence of the
abstentionists. Had it supported the views of the abstentionists it would have
been a great success.\(^69\)

\(^{68}\) Kusuman, K.K., *op.cit.*, pp. 50-51.

\(^{69}\) *Kerala Kaumudi*, June 1936.
4.11. Repressive measures

The government did not stop the repressive measures. It gave problems to the abstentionists. The abstentionists arranged a meeting on 15th October 1932. This meeting was postponed to 12th November 1933 due to the prohibitory orders of the Magistrate. The organisers could easily postpone the date because the meeting was arranged by the people of Meanachil taluk. The meeting was organized against the suspension of teachers because of A.C. Kuriakose, one of the abstentionists. Near Palai market a large pandal was made ready. But the local village officer interfered and objected to it under the pretext that it was constructed in a poramboke land. The abstentionists changed the venue to an open place in front of the poramboke land. K.C. Chandy was the chairman of the meeting. As the weather did not favour the abstentionists, thirteen resolutions were passed. The first resolution was regarding loyalty to the throne. The resolutions were published in notice and all of them were passed. The District Magistrate on the other hand reported to the Chief Secretary that for want of speakers, the resolutions were red out and passed.

---

70 Malayala Manorama, Kottayam, 12 November, 1933.
71 Prohibitory Orders of the District Magistrate, Kottayam, 14 October, 1933.
72 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 51.
73 Letter from District Magistrate, Kottayam to the Chief Secretary, 16 November, 1933.
On November 1933, the abstentionists planned for two meetings in Kottayam district. The Tahsildar of Vaikkom pressurized the leading and influential people to disassociate themselves from the meeting.\textsuperscript{74} The Tahsildar further warned that if any meeting happened overlooking the influences of the local leaders there would be serious danger as there was a strong party to oppose it. This would endanger peace and tranquillity in that area and he hinted the possibility of issuing prohibition orders.\textsuperscript{75}

But the abstentionists surprised the authorities by circulating notices and announced that a meeting will be held at Kaduthuruthi as planned. The Vaikkom Tahsildar reported that there was nothing unlawful and objectionable in their activities. But the spirit of defiance to the authority was felt very much.\textsuperscript{76} The District Magistrate of Kottayam visited the place and found that the report of the Tahsildar is true and hence directed to report the matter to the Chief Secretary.\textsuperscript{77} The government never showed a flexible and lenient attitude towards the Abstention movement. The government planned to do nothing that would aggravate the situation because the visit of Viceroy was on the anvil.\textsuperscript{78}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{74} Report of Vaikkom Tahsildar to the Dewan Peishkar, Kottayam, 18 November 1933.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 23 November 1933.
\textsuperscript{77} Letter from District Magistrate, Kottayam to the Chief Secretary, 24 November, 1933.
\textsuperscript{78} Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 53.
\end{flushright}
4.12. The Viceroy's visit and Government Offer

The Viceroy's visit to Travancore was planned to December 1933. The Government became nervous. The government cleverly planned to identify the Abstention Movement with the non-cooperation movement so that the Viceroy might not hear the abstentionists in full mood. The Government took all possible means to suppress the movement before the arrival of the Viceroy. C.K. Kesavan, N.V. Joseph and P.K. Kunju, the abstentionists were prevented from making public speeches.\footnote{Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 53.}

In the midst of the repressive measures there were signs of cancellation and negotiation. The plan of the government was to make the abstentionists to withdraw their attempt to meet the Viceroy and explain their stand to him. This might dispel, the misgivings that the government had fabricated against the Abstention Movement. The government offered to withdraw the actions initiated against the Abstention Movement. It thought that in case of withdrawal of cases against the abstentionists there will be peace and tranquillity in the state. The abstentionists discussed the pros and cons of the government's suggestion at length and finally decided to welcome the suggestion of the government. Hence the abstentionists announced the withdrawal of the struggle hoping to get a negotiated
settlement. The two parties were exploring the possibilities of a satisfactory solution. Since the suspension of the struggle there was lull in the agitation.

C.P Ramaswamy Aiyer, the constitutional advisor advised C.P. Mathan and E.J. Philipose to explore possible methods to ease the political tension. He wanted

a) The abstentionists should abandon agitational tendency and approaches.

b) They should not exercise pressure tactics.

c) They should submit their demands and grievances before the Maharaja.

d) The agitators should not demand the dissolution of the legislature.

e) The Maharaja would give oral assurance to the agitators that their demands would be conceded.⁸⁰

Even though C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer’s promises were a misconception and erratic in all respects, the agitators empowered Mathan and Philipose to continue the dialogue with the government. But there was all possibilities in the attitude of the government. This encouraged the abstentionists to submit a memorandum to the maharaja. On 7th December 1933, a memorandum was submitted. It was signed by the stalwarts of the

⁸⁰ Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 54.
They met the Maharaja at Pattom Palace and submitted the memorandum. They preferred election to nomination. They prayed to drop all cases registered against individuals, institutions and newspapers from the beginning of the agitation. They also requested the Maharaja to drop the restrictions of the Travancore state forces.

As expected the Viceroy's visit was expected on December, 1933. Telegrams were sent to the Viceroy about the political situation due to Abstention Movement. The Viceroy listened the abstentionists and warned against the social changes but at the same time he did not dismiss the Abstention Movement. After the departure of the Viceroy on 12th December 1933, C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer advised them that things will become clear only after the new Dewan, Sir Mohammed Habibulla took charge. It was in these circumstances the Joint Political Congress met at Thiruvalla on 30th January 1933 and assessed the situation. T.M. Varghese who assessed the situation gave proper ideas to the Abstentionists. He alleged fear that the well-to-do wing of the Christian might withdraw their support to the agitation for fear of intimidation from the government. The supporters

---


82 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., pp. 54-55.

from Nayar community wanted to form a communal organisation to ease the communal rivalry. T.M. Varghese responded favourably.\textsuperscript{84}

On February 1932, the abstentionists submitted another memorandum to the Maharaja. It was signed by the office bearers of the executive committee of the Joint Political Congress. It highlighted the educational progress and economic differences of various communities. It requested the Maharaja to remove the economic inequalities of the past.\textsuperscript{85}

Now the New Dewan Sir. H. Habibulla took charge on 5\textsuperscript{th} March, 1934. The hopes and aspirations of the abstentionists rose high, for they believed just treatment for all their causes. They met the Dewan at Munnar on 2\textsuperscript{nd} May 1934 and submitted a memorial signed by the Ezhava, Muslim and Christian communities.\textsuperscript{86} All these communities were anxious to find a solution to the prolonged agitation and felt that should be ended earlier.

In the meanwhile, the fight for temple entry proclamation of the backward communities, the formation of S.N.D.P. Yogam, i.e. Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalaya Yogam, disturbed the agitation. In the meanwhile Changanasseri Parameswaran Pillai and E.V. Krishna Pillai attempted for a

\textsuperscript{84} Kovoor, E.M., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{85} Menon, P.K., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 368.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 364.
reproachment between the abstentionists and the Nayar community. Mannath Padmanabha Pillai escorted for the Nayar and Ezhava alliance.  

In January 1935, the abstentionists achieved a major victory. On 4th January the government passed new orders regarding the recruitment to the public services. They won another victory in April 1935. The government reorganized the Nayar Brigade. The practice of the recruitment to the army from certain communities were done away with. The recruitment became open to all.  

On 113th May 1935, a Joint Political Congress meeting was convened. It let loose a storm of political reaction. The meeting was chaired by C.K. Kesavan. He made the presidential address. The government felt that the speech was seditious and made to suffer the fair name of the Congress. The government found that he was guilty under Section 117 of Travancore Penal Code Act for sedition. On 7th June 1935, Kesavan was arrested. The court declared that his speech was highly seditious.  

The tide of agitation underwent a sudden change following the arrest of C.K. Kesavan, one of the stalwarts of the movement. On 13th May 1935 the Joint Political Congress held a conference at Kozhencherry in central

---

87 Kerala Kaumudi, 23 April, 1936.  
88 Kusuman, K.K., op.cit., p. 66.  
89 Ibid., pp. 66-67.  
90 Ibid., pp. 38-39.
Travancore with C. Kesavan as President. The conference demanded the dismissal of C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyer from the office of Legal and Constitutional Adviser to the Maharaja. In his presidential address C. Kesavan attacked the monopoly enjoyed by the Nayars in the general administration and condemned the policy of the government. Consequently he was arrested on charge of sedition and sentenced to undergo two years imprisonment and fined Rupees 500/-.

This impolitic step further strengthened the unity of the Joint Political Congress.

As the agitation continued, the government decided to accept the principle of reservation of seats. On the basis of a report submitted by E. Subramonia Aiyer, the Commissioner for Franchise and Delimitation, the government passed orders on 20th August 1936. Accordingly franchise was widened by reducing the property qualification and the electorates were reconstituted to provide for multiple seats. A specified number of seats was reserved for the Latin Catholics. Introducing single non-transferable vote system, everyone who paid one rupee or more as tax was given the right to vote for the Assembly. On 23rd August 1936 the abstentionists welcomed this scheme and decided to withdraw all agitational programmes.

---

91 S.N.D.P.Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir (Malayalam), Quilon, 1953, p. 228.
92 The Hindu, 20 August 1936, p. 12.
93 Ibid., 21 August 1936, p. 6.
94 Ibid., 26 August 1936, p. 56.
In the Abstention Movement the government faced an organised agitation aimed at securing equal political rights and privileges for all the people. Though the joint Political Congress was formed with the declared objective of securing political rights for the backward communities, it ultimately paved the way for more organised movements. Communal leaders understood that political parties could be constituted on the basis of common principles and rights could be wrested through organised opposition. It should be recognized that the Abstention Movement created communal rivalry between the Nayars on the one side and the Christian, the Ezhava and the Muslim communities on the other. However, realizing that communal rivalry would weaken their cause and strengthen the authority of the Dewan, they felt it not prudent to quarrel indefinitely for a handful of government offices of representation in the legislature. The Nayar leaders too saw it unwise to disassociate themselves from other communities. Taking this favourable occasion, E.V. Krishna Pillai took steps for bringing different communities together under a common platform. Ultimately, the Joint Political Congress gave way to the State Congress and the attainment of responsible government became the common objective.

---

95 Kusuman, K.K., *The Abstention Movement*, p. 84.
4.13. Debates in the Assembly

The political movement led by the Joint Political Congress assumed a peaceful turn when the new legislature met. With all their demands conceded, it called off the agitation in August 1936. When the elections were held under revised scheme in April 1937 Joint Political Congress led by T.M. Varghese captured twenty six out of the fifty eight elected seats in the Assembly. The new Assembly met with high expectations and on 21\textsuperscript{st} June 1937, T.M. Varghese was elected Deputy President.\textsuperscript{96} As before the Dewan continued to be the President of the Assembly.

On 24\textsuperscript{th} August C. Kesavan was released from prison. He was accorded rousing receptions on behalf of the S.N.D.P. Yogam and the Joint Political Congress.\textsuperscript{97} C. Kesavan addressed these meetings, making reference to the 'substitution of the present government by responsible government.'\textsuperscript{98} The administration became uneasy at his utterances. At a reception given to him at Alleppey, T.M. Varghese welcomed C. Kesavan on behalf of 'the fifty one lakhs of the people of Travancore'.\textsuperscript{99} This public speech had its repercussions in the Sri Mulam Assembly. The Government

\textsuperscript{96} The Hindu, 22 June 1937, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{97} District Magistrate, Kottayam, 6 November 1937, report to the Chief Secretary to Government, File No. D.Dis. 1912'1944/C.S.
\textsuperscript{98} Report of the Deputy Superintendent of Police (hereinafter referred to as D.S.P.), Kottayam, 14 November 1937, report to the District Magistrate (hereinafter referred to as D.M.), Kottayam.
\textsuperscript{99} Kusuman, K.K., \textit{op.cit.}, pp 72-73.
and the National Party which opposed Joint Political Congress in the Assembly, asserted that Varghese misused his position of Deputy Presidentship for having welcomed Kesavan at Alleppey. On 25th November 1937, P. Sivarama Pillai of the National Party tabled a non-confidence motion against the Deputy President. Members spoke on the motion both for and against. However, for fear of this drastic step would alienate the communities whom Varghese represented, the Dewan-President desired for a compromise. In a statement he hinted that the resolution would be withdrawn if Varghese would formally regret in the Assembly for 'having gone out of his way.' But Varghese refused to yield. In consequence, the motion was put to vote and carried by forty two against twenty four votes.

Accepting the verdict Varghese resigned the office of Deputy President on 26th November 1937. The National Party, certain independents and the official bloc in the Assembly voted in favour of the motion while the members of Joint Political Congress as a bloc voted against it. However, the action against its leader alienated the Party from the administration and drove the party again to the road of agitation.

103 Ibid., 27 November 1937, p. 403.
104 The Hindu, 26 November 1937, p. 2.
The march of events moved in quick succession in the Assembly. On 18th November 1937, P.K. Kunju of the Joint Political Congress moved a resolution in the Assembly suggesting the government to take steps for the immediate establishment of responsible government in the state. The Dewan-President disallowed the motion for discussion. On 1st February 1938, T.M. Varghese, now a member, moved an adjournment motion for discussing the urgent need for taking immediate steps for the establishment of responsible government in the state subject to the powers and prerogatives of the Maharaja. The Dewan-President allowed this motion for discussion. However, before taking it for discussion, the Dewan-President made a lengthy statement mentioning certain legal obstacles in the way of granting responsible government. The principal impediment, he pointed out was, the relation of Travancore with the British Crown, which he summed up as: "...There are certain rights and obligations arising from paramountcy relations which can apply and be enforced only between the ruler and the British Crown . . . The maintenance of these treaties in their present form is inconsistent with any grant of real responsible government . . ."

---

105 The Hindu, 18 November, 1937, p. 5.
107 Ibid., No.2, 2 February 1938, pp. 801-803.
This statement had its echo in British Parliament. In the House of Commons, Captain Frank Heligers, a Conservative member, sought for clarification of British policy in view of the Dewan’s explanations in the Assembly. Replying on 21st February 1938, on behalf of the British Government, Earl Winterton, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, explained: “It is not the policy of the Paramount power in ordinary circumstances to intervene in the internal administration of full-powered states. In particular... Paramount power would certainly not obstruct proposals for constitutional advance initiated by a ruler. The consent of the Paramount power has not been required before such advances have been approved by the various princes, nor, has it been sought in such matters. The Paramount Power would, in the ordinary circumstances, confine itself to tendering advice when consulted.”

Earlier on 23rd January 1938 Lord Lothian, a member of the House of Lords, expressed a similar view. He observed: “Paramountcy certainly cannot be interpreted to mean that Great Britain has the duty of supporting a ruler in denying to his own subjects the very rights which have been established by the authority of Parliament throughout British India.”

In support of their argument the members cited this observation too in the Assembly. The Dewan, however, dismissed the issue saying that ‘Lord Lothian is entirely a private individual for whose...”

---

109 The Madras Mail, 24 January 1938, p. 4.
actions and utterances nobody takes responsibility."\textsuperscript{110} Nevertheless, these deliberations in the Assembly made it clear that the supposed obstacles to constitutional progress was removed and the entire discretion was left to the rulers concerned to take decisions in the matter. In the light of these observations, newspapers wrote articles and editorials, urging upon the princes to grant responsible government in their states.\textsuperscript{111} The leaders considered it essential to mobilize popular support and to present it in the form of a demand before the government.\textsuperscript{112}

4.14. The Haripura Resolution

While the political situation in the states was changing fast, the Indian National Congress found it necessary to formulate its policy in relation to the former. The Congress had already appealed to the people of states to organize Congress committees in their states. Accordingly in October 1937 the Congress minded people of Travancore organised a committee at

\textsuperscript{110} Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol. XI, No.1, 2 February 1938, p. 807.

\textsuperscript{111} In an editorial, The Hindu commented; "... Indian princes have thus, it is conceded, the fullest powers of initiative in the matter of modifying or altering the form of constitution in their states ... if any apprehension is entertained in any quarter that the Paramount Power may place a veto on any constitutional reform the states may desire to introduce, such apprehension is entirely baseless ... Indian princes should have no further hesitation in pushing through with constitutional reforms calculated to satisfy the legitimate ambitions of their people." (The Hindu, 23 February 1938, p. 10)

\textsuperscript{112} State Congress Memorandum, 30 May 1938, submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore, D.Dis. 306/1948/C.S.
Trivandrum called the Travancore Provincial Congress Committee. Under its auspices, a political conference was convened at Trivandrum on 27th November 1937. Presided over by Pattabhi Sitaramayya, a prominent Congress leader, the conference adopted a manifesto outlining the party programmes in Travancore. It asserted that its objectives were the creation of a responsible government on the basis of fully elected popular legislature and the formation of a Kerala province consisting of Travancore, Cochin and Mabalar.

Notwithstanding, the Congress laid down afresh its policy towards Indian states. The congress Working Committee that met at Wardha on 6th February 1938 adopted a moderately worded resolution declaring its general policy of non-intervention in the internal political struggle in native states. It reads: "The Congress, therefore, directs that for the present, Congress Committees in the states shall function only under the direction and control of the Working Committee and shall not engage in any parliamentary activity, nor engage in direct action in the name of or under the auspices of the Congress, nor undertake internal struggles of the peoples of the states in the name of the Congress."

---

113 A Thanu Pillai, M.R. Madhava Warrier, K.T. Thomas, E.V. Krishna Pillai, G. Ramachandran, Changanassery K. Parameswaran Pillai, V. Atchutha Menon and G. Sreedhar were some of its prominent members. (The Hindu, 4 November 1937, p. 11).

114 The Hindu, 28 November 1937, p. 23.
the name of the Congress. For this purpose independent organizations should be started or continued, when they exist already within the states."

The Abstention Movement was first of its kind in modern India. British India met with many social, religious and reform movements. But, the Abstention Movement in Travancore was characterized by virulent socio-political agitation. The abstentionists presented their own grievances and fought for the same. They fought against the government with the strong backing with bureaucratic forces. But, when with true spirit, the people and the leaders alike fought bravely. Hence the Government could neither cow them down nor coax and cajole them. This was the real spirit of the fight. Had the abstentionists fell a prey to the snares that the bureaucrats spread with various tactics. In that case their demands would have been postponed or dragged on. Thus the abstentionists felt that the social and political justice that they demanded was a matter of right and not a gift. That is why they handed over the agitation to State Congress.

---

115 *The Hindu*, 7 February, 1938, p. 10.