Chapter V

COMMUNALISM - INTERTWINING OF ECONOMY (CLASS) AND POLITY (POWER): 1947-1956

Eisenstadt writing of stratification in newly independent societies or societies which had undergone a major revolution suggests that the system there is likely to be 'monolithic' and dominated by the political factor. The "power variable", he says, "has an autonomy of its own", and in certain circumstances "the holders of power tend to establish it as the most important criterion of stratification to which all other criteria and rewards should be subordinated". On another level, political factors determine the nature of modernisation. That is to say, economic (class stratification) and social (secularisation-modernisation) developments are inextricably intertwined with political power.

By the time India got independence the people of Travancore were sufficiently politicised to rise up and demand their rights. The way in which it happened was through the awakening of their primordial sentiments. In the ultimate analysis, they were becoming conscious of their fundamental right to govern themselves and shape their own destiny. The agitation for responsible government was a milestone in this political process.

Travancore's freedom struggle was led by the three political leaders who belonged to the three main communities - Pattom Thanu Pillai (Nair), T.M. Varughese (Christian) and C. Kesavan (Ezhava). They were the big three of Travancore and were able to carry with them the three large influential communities, Nairs Christians and Ezhavas. To achieve the goal of freedom they
were together. But once they reached the goal, differences of opinion were glaring and each went his own way. It was the result of each community vying with one another for larger share in the cake - social, economic, political - to be distributed by the state.

On 25 July 1947, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar was attacked by an unknown assailant and he resigned the Dewanship of the state on 19 August 1947. Perhaps, it was the Christians who, as a community, hated Sir C.P. most. Nairs saw in him an ally. Ezhavas were happy that he took the initiative to open the temples for them. Of course towards the end of his term, Nairs also became his enemies as he did not fulfil some of the promises he had made to them.

On 22 June 1947, the Managing Committee of the A.K.C.C. had issued a press communiqué listing the deeds of the Dewan against Christians. It is interesting because they give us an idea of the communal perception to problems from the community's angle.

(1) Liquidation of a flourishing Christian Bank. The National Quilon Bank was owned by Christians and hence it was known as the Christian Bank.

(2) Imposing agricultural income tax. It affected the flourishing, hard working Christian agriculturalists.

(3) Eviction of farmers from government lands and cardamom gardens. The farmers were mainly 'Christians'.

(4) Plan to take over primary education by the state. This meant, depriving Christians of one of the main sources of their
power and prestige.

(5) Denying concessions to converts from backward classes. The conversion was to Christianity.

(6) Denying some of the communities their legitimate share in the state service. Christians believed that they were the most affected community.

(7) Laws against establishing places of worship and cemeteries. This was directly against Churches and Christian cemeteries.

Christians came to believe that the need of the hour is protection of minority rights and establishing responsible government. One can notice how these issues, when blown up beyond proportion, will not only crystallise communal identity but whip up communal passions. They create in the community a communal consciousness than the larger societal consciousness.

On 24 September 1947 the King proclaimed that definite steps will be taken to give responsible government to the state. The State Congress was independent of the Indian National Congress but it had sufficiently grown in its ability to undertake negotiations about the transfer of power from the monarchy to elected representatives. The state Congress had gone through the mill at the vanguard of agitations with the people. But when power was in sight, it slipped into a communal syndrome.

Pattom was the President of the State Congress and he was in charge of negotiations with the then officiating Dewan P.G. Narayanan Unnithan about the transfer of power. In his anxiety to become the first 'prime minister' of Travancore, it was
alleged that Pattom did not even take sufficient notice of the 6 Congress workers who were in jail. Leaders like Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan and Sri C. Kesavan were in jail at that time.

As a result of the talks between the State Congress and Government, an administrative reforms committee was appointed. The government in its notification has said that in the committee minorities and other different sections should be given adequate representation. As a result, many who were not members of the Congress got in. The Congress workers were dissatisfied about it because it flouted all principles of secularisation process for which the State Congress was trying in its 10-year history. This is an important aspect. The question at stake is the tension between 'accommodating' or 'broad basing' vs. 'secularism'. The Congress had assured that the interests of different communities and minorities will be safe in the hands of Congress and why should there be a separate representation of minorities and communal organisations? Besides Pattom, Varugheese and Kesavan (leaders of the Congress who naturally keep the interests of the three communities of which they are members) the N.S.S., the SNDP Yogam, the Latin Catholics, the Muslim League, the Scheduled Caste Federation, the Hindu Mahajana Sabha and the Chamber of Commerce got representation in the committee which was a crucial one in terms of dispersal of power. As a result, Congress did not get a majority in the committee. This showed that the communal organisations were taking the secular forces for a ride. R. Ramakrishnan Nair makes a pertinent point about this crucial juncture.
in Travancore history when he says

The point stressed here is not that the government did not transfer power to the Congress Party but the party itself did not show the courage, or confidence or political wisdom to insist that the power be transferred to its leaders. It showed that the party was not sure of its popularity among the people independent of the support of various communal organisations. (8)

This is the inevitable consequence of the communal roots of the Congress Party.

There was another reason for the anger of the Congress workers. Most of the communal organisations which now got representation had once opposed responsible government and wanted to destroy the State Congress. They were allying with the despotic Dewan. But when power was in sight they easily changed their positions.

The Committee recommended adult franchise and reserved constituencies to protect the interests of the minority communities. The committee had serious reservations about the 'reserved constituencies' because they felt that it will only perpetuate communalism. The point to be noted is that once primordial loyalties are the instruments to demand larger share in the resources of the state, it naturally takes a larger than life size when the resources to be distributed by the state itself increase.

R. Sankar an Ezhava member of the A.R.C. added a dissenting note to the Report. He did not agree with the idea of reserved constituencies having members of other communities too. That is, if a particular constituency is reserved for
Ezhavas, according to Sankar the Ezhava candidate must win with the votes of Ezhavas alone. This was a very parochial view as far as others were concerned. They argued that when members of all communities vote for a particular candidate of a reserved community, it will pave way for communal harmony. It may be recalled here that thinking above narrow communal outlook was there in the Travancore social ferment. In fact in 1934, Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai had pointed out that "no elected member really represents any community as such but only his constituency which is made up of all communities". But R. Sankar's was an argument catering to primordial loyalties with all its manifest evils. C. Narayana Pillai comments "One cannot blame Sankar for his views. Congress had never closed its doors for communalists. Sankar was never shy of his communal stance too". It is not surprising that in the fertile 'communal' ground of the Kerala society, Sankar became the leader of the Congress Party in later years and finally the Chief Minister of Kerala for about 3 years.

Kumbalathu Sankara Pillai, a doyen of Travancore struggle writes in his memoirs

From the very beginning of the election, fortunately or unfortunately the State Congress adopted a policy of communal colour...so much for SNDP, so much for NSS, so much for Catholics - such demands arose from all parts. The State Congress faced the election succumbing to all pressures. (11)

Thus the State Congress which was formed in response to the evils of communal infighting, itself began to succumb and gradually legitimise the communal organisations at the crucial
period in Travancore's transformation. This almost determined the mould in which the society and politics would be taking shape in the days to come. In effect, it meant that the communal loyalties of the leading personalities would be playing an important role in the future set up.

T.M. Varughese was considered as a man who could attract towards him people of different communities. According to his biographers and political observers of the time, he could see things above the narrow communal boundaries but basically he was a man of Christian community and moreover a 'Marthomite'. Pattom nurtured doubts about Christians and even Nairs who were close to Varughese. Even during the abstention days, he could not take into confidence the leadership of joint political action. Therefore, it was natural that Pattom wanted to cultivate a communal base for him in the emerging power struggle, in the Congress Party. According to his and other leaders' perception communal base was the only stable, reliable base. Therefore, Pattom welcomed Nair Service Society leadership - the one time arch enemies of Pattom and State Congress-enbloc into the party when the first election (1947) was approaching.

Although an erstwhile arch critic of NSS but he had to welcome NSS with open arms because he hoped that would strengthen his hands in the power-struggle of 'communal' factions led by T.M. Varughese and C. Kesavan. Consequently, he began to trust the "new converts" into the party than the old cadres who suffered with him. It may look ironical because he was the undisputed leader of the most popular 'secular' party. But the powerful
hold of the community into which one is born cannot be forgotten. It was mentioned that his primordial loyalties were such that he could not even tolerate severe criticism of his community (Nair) by others. Keeping an eye on the elections he even addressed a protest meeting organised by the NSS held in Trivandrum against Changanacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai who said that NSS is a reactionary organisation. The question relevant here is: why did Pattom accept the invitation of a known communal organisation and speak in their meeting to appease a particular community when he was the leader of a party of all communities, which was listed as a 'progressive' organisation? As Narayana Pillai puts it, "he was not willing to put the wrong doings of a Nair, Ezhava and Christian in a balance and pronounce an impartial judgement". C. Kesavan was the most progressive of the Travancore trio. He was a rationalist and a sympathiser of Marxism. But the glaring discrimination shown to the community in which he was born led him to make use of Ezhava community as his platform. His vision of the total society was beyond the communal boundaries and its religious sentiments.

The point to be emphasised here is that the community into which a person is born, has normally an upper hand in his scheme of thinking. The incapacity to trust members from a different community smacks of communalism and it needs the force of secular values to consider men of all faith equal. Sociologically it was impossible to think in a different form when secularisation was only at its incipient stage. Apparently one may not be a communalist or a protagonist of communal organisation but
basically one's sense of security may be rooted in the primordial group to which one belongs. This security consciousness and its correlation with primordiality is a sociological fact.

Congress paid a heavy price for admitting enmasse the Nair communalists into its fold. State Congress had a parliamentary board to allocate seats for its candidates. As Pattom, as its chairman, gave undue importance for the communal organisations, NSS and SNDE got their share by virtue of being communal organisations. Pattom gave the right to decide their candidates to the communal leaders. This happened at a time when the Congress had the strength and capacity to fight the election and win an absolute majority in the Assembly. State Congress, through its long drawn struggle for responsible government had created an atmosphere where the people of different communities could work together, live together and forget their communal identities. That was a secularisation process. But when the common enemy (King or the Dewan) disappeared from the scene the communal factor took the upper hand. According to Narayana Pillai, Pattom's going all out to please the communal leaders damaged the secular structure the party was ardously trying to build up. For several years to follow it was nothing but a legitimisation of communalism in politics. State Congress collusion with SNDE and NSS reminds us of the inevitable basic group-identity in terms of religion/caste becoming a permanent idiom in the emerging secular politics.

The first democratic election to the constituent assembly
of Travancore was held on 4 February 1948. Congress got absolute majority - 96 seats out of 120. Pattom was elected leader and T.M. Varughese, deputy leader. This constituent assembly was converted into a legislative assembly on 24 March 1948 by a proclamation of the King. (Palace, the Royal family and Devaswam were excluded from the jurisdiction of the assembly). An interim government was formed. Pattom was the Chief Minister; T.M. Varughese and C. Kesavan were the other members of the cabinet.

The first ministry was beset with problems of communal nature. Since Pattom had a feeling that the Christians may rise against him with T.M. Varughese as leader (may be with the support of Ezhavas) he was always suspicious of his colleagues, Varughese and Kesavan. He calculated that Nairs will support him without any reservation. The politics had come to a stage when even a leader of Pattom's stature could not do without a communal anchor. Pattom ministry fell within months of it being in the office. Pattom believed that it was the conspiracy of Christians which was responsible for his downfall. But the facts were otherwise. It was the discontented T.K. Narayana Pillai (popularly known as T.K. - a Nair himself) who was mainly instrumental in pulling down Pattom ministry. T.K. could muster the cooperation of the Nair community for this action. Of course, the Christians supported it. But the irony was that the very community in whom the 'prime minister' put all his trust was conspiring against him. Later, Pattom left Congress and joined PSP and accused the party as a Congress of
Christians in the same vein as Sir C.P. labelled the party, when Pattom himself was the leader. Thus, 'communal' labelling became a convenient tool in the power game of the state.

C. Narayana Pillai makes some penetrating observations about the style of functioning of Pattom and the 'communal' tinge with which he went about it. According to him, what Pattom did was the repetition of Sir C.P.'s communal game. That was, to make dominant communities suspicious of each other, divide them and beat each other's head. Pattom wanted to separate the Nairs from those who oppose him. He thought that it will bring double results.

1) Christians alone cannot topple him.
2) If Christians continue their efforts in that direction, he can win the support of other communities and isolate the Christians.

In the process of trying to find shelter in the primordial collectivity, whatever non-communal approach had developed in the party organisation and in the larger society, was thrown to the wind.

The first problem which took the communal colour was the education tussle. The private school teachers in the state approached the government for a parity in their salaries with the 'sirkar' schools. During Dewan's time the private school teachers were paid only half the salary of the government school teachers. The reason was that only limited grant was given by the government to the private management. The private school teachers could perceive injustice in this and they posed
the question: how can there be two different pay-scales for the same job in the same state? Inevitably, it acquired a communal colour because most of the schools were owned by the Christian management and the chief executive of the state was a Nair.

The problem took an intriguing turn. Pattom, even during the 1946 agitation against Sir C.P. on primary school education question, had supported the nationalisation of educational institutions. But Christians always wanted absolute freedom to run the schools as they liked it. Any interference by the state was interpreted as an infringement of their minority rights, as well as an attack on their freedom to propagate their religion. But there was a sociological question. Nairs alleged that most of the teachers in Christian schools were Christians because of the communal nature of appointments. So the non-Christian communities began to ask why should the state spend public money for education under private management? Isn't it in effect dividing the resources of the state to a particular community?

The private school teachers struck work and took out a procession through the streets of Trivandrum during Pattom's prime ministership. The demands of Christians and the objection of other communities to this demand led to a conflict on communal lines reminiscent of the abstention movement period.

People were forced to look at things through a communal eye. Papers which supported Christians wrote articles saying that it was ungrateful to reject the demands of Christians who
had helped the Congress in its independence struggle with men and money. Those who opposed were of opinion that if Christians wanted to run school to train their children in the Christian atmosphere, then let the Churches and missions spend money; the government should not spend even a single paisa.

Pattom did not move. He gave the struggle a communal colour by saying that the agitation which began within such a short-time of popular rule had in it a sinister aim and was ill conceived. But the Christian members of the Assembly strongly supported the demands of the private school teachers. In the Congress Parliamentary party also the Christian members' stance created sharp cleavages. Christian members arrayed against Pattom.

It is remarkable that a party which was formed transcending communal considerations and fought for years communal interests within weeks after it getting power fell an easy prey to the very evil it fought; the members began to express their primordial loyalties with claims and counter-claims. The question of economic advantage was uppermost for each communal segment in the party in whipping up communal feelings.

Nothing was seen independent of the communal vision. For instance when Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, a close associate of T.M. Varughese led a march to Trivandrum to erect a statue of Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai (Pattom had earlier rejected the request), K.C. Mammen Mappillai in his old age and ill health came all the way from Kottayam to address the meeting. Although Mammen Mappillai did not speak a word against
Pattom, his coming was interpreted as the opposition of Christians to Pattom.

The bureaucracy always had a role in encouraging communalism. When C.P. dubbed Congress as a party of Christians, the bureaucracy repeated the chorus - because most of them were Nairs. When Pattom came as the head of a popular government, they changed the tune to suit the democratic situation and context.

In the crucial voting in the Assembly, the Nairs who supported the 'prime minister' were only those elected through the NSS banner. Later, when T.K. Narayana Pillai took over the reins of administration, the NSS started the same old accusation that it was T.M. Varughese (Christian) who was responsible for the downfall of Pattom and that Congress is Christian Congress. But soon the very NSS MLAs who opposed T.K. switched over to T.K's side after he assumed power. After all T.K. was a Nair! To support those in power is always advantageous to communal organisations.

When T.K. was on the saddle, one of the social problems which assumed communal colour was the encroachment of Reserve Forests by agriculturalists. Government was urged to evict the illegal occupants of those forests. But V.O. Markose, a Christian minister, was against that move because it was the Christians from central Travancore who had occupied the forest areas for agriculture. So when a Christian minister objected to eviction, naturally other communities gave a communal twist to it.
The unification of Travancore and Cochin during T.K.'s period also had its share of religious-communal factor in it. The Travancore monarchy was not willing to give away the autonomy of Travancore on religious grounds. Their argument was that the Maharajas of Travancore are the servants of Sree Padmanabha and the country which was conquered by Marthanda Varma cannot be transferred. It will be a violation of the accepted religious norms according to the palace sources. They feared that since it is a state surrendered to Sri Padmanabha, if its independent personality is not kept in tact, they will be inviting the wrath of God. The transfer of the properties of the Church under Westphalia was an expression of the secularisation process in Europe. In Travancore the rulers were not willing to accede to the secularisation process which had begun to overtake some spheres of social life - a separation of Church and state.

When the process of secularisation was threatening to challenge the then existing power structure, every inch of social life, especially the one pertaining to one's self-interest was being defended in religious terms, religious categories and communal clothings.

Pattom, Varughese and Kesavan could pull the struggle for responsible government through the medium of communal representation. But, after the independence, the people who were 'taught' to think and see everything in terms of community and religion could not but count more accurately the gains of each group. A communal balance sheet became an important exercise.
The logical extension of the demand for proportionate representation in the public services and legislative assemblies after the popular government came into being was the demand for 'communal representation' in the ministry. The ministership being important, the direction of the fight in each successive periods centred around this vital point. Not only the three major communities, but its sub-groups also began to count the fishes and loaves.

For instance, when T.K. became the chief minister, T.M. Varughese had to be accommodated with a ministerial berth. But then Philipose, another Christian and a towering political leader was wanting to be a minister. Both were non-Catholics. It could not be done. Therefore T.M. Varughese had to be content with the speakership. It was the same about Accamma Cherian the 'heroine of 114'. Since she was a non-Catholic, she could not be taken. To give Latin Catholics representation, Annie Mascreane was given ministership. This also shows how each denominated group within the Christian fold considered themselves as separate communities. The proper Malayalam usage for a Church is samudayam, the connotation of which is nearer to the meaning of community. When each community like Roman Catholic (Syrian and Latin), Jacobite, Mar Thoma or protestants wanted proportional representation, it created a chaotic situation in a small state like Travancore. According to C. Narayana Pillai, this type of division of power among vocal communities was a foolish step as later events proved.

Nairs and Ezhavas began to assert their communal presence...
in the new atmosphere created by the popular ministry. Mannam and R. Sankar were the leaders of NSS and SNDP respectively at that time. Both had reservations about struggle for responsible government led by the Congress at different times. From the time of Malayali Memorial the two communities were at logger heads. Ezhavas had identified Nairs as the main enemy. But as time went on, Ezhavas and Nairs began to find a common enemy in Christians. Hinduism was handy for them to unite against Christians. The Christian domination of the Congress which was wielding considerable power could not be tolerated by Sankar and Mannam. They wanted to make use of the new atmosphere for their advantage. For that the best way was to join the Congress. They did join the Congress and fought for positions of power.

Mannam and NSS were antagonistic to T.K. as they believe that T.K. was a pawn in the hands of Christians in overthrowing Pattom - a Nair chief minister who was more amenable to Nair communal feelings than T.K. As days went by, however, in the new Travancore-Cochin state ministry, T.K. found that he cannot simply ignore the Nair communal organisation viz. the NSS. To assuage the feelings of Nairs, T.K. began to appease communal interests. He made Mannam a member of the Devaswam Board. Some Nair advisers had convinced him that if only the chief minister takes the undisputed leader of Nairs - Mannam - to Devaswam Board, the hostile posture of Nairs will disappear. This action of accommodating the communal elements in the power structures was one of the main reasons for the weakening
and breaking up of the party. Similarly, Ezhava leader, R. Sankar also got a seat in the Devaswam Board. Thus leaders of the two erstwhile warring communities came together. And their coming together created a communal atmosphere in its most ugly form in Kerala's social history. According to C. Narayana Pillai the coming together of Sankar and Mannam were doubly poisonous as joining the cobra poison with chemical poison. Sankar had even said that this Christian Congress should be buried in the six-feet grave. Both started a crusade against the 'Christian dominated' Congress Party and finally broke away from it. Sankar's view on the events could be seen in the following passage:

Soon the board (Devaswam) fell out with the new State Government headed by Shri T.K. Narayana Pillai, the chief minister. The Hindu population of the state generally complained that the government and the state assembly which were domineered by Christians were going against the interests of the Hindu community especially in the matter of enacting new legislation for the future governance of the Hindu devaswams which should be left to the wish of the Hindu members of the legislature. The government opposed this view. The two Hindu representative organisations namely the Nair Service Society and the SNDP Yogam joined hands and created the Hindu Maha Mandal to work for the interests of Hindus. Shri Mannath Padmanabhan was the President and Shri R. Sankar the General Secretary of the body. (28)

The formation of Hindu Maha Mandal was followed by the birth of its political wing - Democratic Congress. R. Sankar was its leader and Kalathil Velayudhan Nair the deputy leader. A section of the Hindu Assembly members left the Congress and joined Democratic Congress.
This had obviously created uneasiness among the Christians who were the target of attack by the Hindu Maha Mandal. The President of AKCC issued a statement which said:

Under the leadership of Sri R. Sankar and Sri Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, the prominent members of the Ezhava-Nair communal organisations, with the blessings of Devaswam Board, an organisation called Hindu Maha Mandal is active now. The meeting of this Mandal accuse a minority community like Christians, threatens them and challenges their inborn patience. AKCC views this with grave concern. (30)

Thus the communal organisations began to clash openly. When accusations and counter-accusations happen, it only solidifies and strengthens the communal feelings of ordinary members of the community. And that was what had happened in Travancore.

When communal feelings were boiling all over, the Congress Party could not insulate itself from it. It became a serious victim of the communal poison. On 26 November 1949, the All Travancore State Congress Committee met at Jubilee Town Hall, Trivandrum and passed two resolutions.

The first was condemning the direct and indirect political work of communal organisations like NSP, SNDP and Catholic Congress even after their resolve to keep away from politics. The Congress had barred the members of communal organisations from holding any office in the organisation.

The second resolution expressed concern at the work of two Devaswam Board members (Mannam and Sankar) who by their speeches were creating religious intolerance among the people.

On 21 December 1949, AKCC working committee issued a statement saying that they have always abided by the resolution
of the Congress Party, but it was the Nairs and Ezhavas who had taken advantage of the Christian 'non-interference in political matters' to gain advantages of high posts in the Government and the party.

Because of the venomous communal propaganda of Sankar and Mannam, they were expelled from the Congress at a meeting held at Alleppey and it was after this expulsion that they formed the Democratic Party.

In spite of the cut throat competition and occasional allegations and counter-allegations, and accusations of the communal groups, Travancore was relatively free from communal riots resulting in blood bath. One reason was that all the arguments relating to the social, economic and political issues were openly put forward and the leaders knew each other. Their relationship on personal, friendly level was never severed to generate hostility. Very seldom it touched the sensitive aspects of beliefs, holy places or holy men. Members of different communities respected the sentiments of others and their religious symbols.

But what followed the formation of Hindu Maha Mandalam was potentially dangerous. In the surcharged atmosphere of communalism the rumour spread that Hindu temple at Sabarimala was set on fire. That was a sufficient provocation during those days of communal conflict, especially when Nairs and Ezhavas were united against Christians to soak the soil with human blood. No Hindu could take this incident with a sober mind. Earlier there were reports that many Churches were
looted. But Christians did not seem to have given much political significance to those thefts. Hindu communalists viewed the Sabarimala incident as an act of Christians and a retaliation. But C. Kesavan, the Ezhava leader said "if one temple is destroyed that much superstition also is destroyed". Since he was the president of the Congress, the anger of Hindu communalists was diffused and directed against the Congress than on Christians.

But when directly and indirectly they were accused of this crime, Christians also raised their voice. They retorted saying that it was a calculated attempt to discredit the government of T.K. and to tarnish the image of Congress which was nicknamed as Christian Congress. As far as the Christians were concerned, they had no reason to discredit the government which was said to be their own government.

All this show how communal passions were fanned by each community and their leadership to seek their own ends. Temples and Churches became handy 'resources' to achieve political ends. But men of secular vision could save the society from its self destruction by their penchant remarks. This factor should be taken seriously.

After the fall of T.K. ministry it was the turn of C. Kesavan, to be the chief minister. The Ezhavas rejoiced as they got the turn. After Kesavan, in 1952 came A.J. John, and the Roman Catholics also got their chief minister. It took only less than 40 years for M.M. Varkey's efforts to bear fruit. A.J. John was a devout Christian and a Catholic to the core and
he was keen about getting due share for his community. He opposed whatever was against the interests of Christians, especially the Catholic community. Thus, within five years, all the three dominant communities got their turn to lead the government. In many cases they grabbed the leadership by pressing into service the permutations and combinations of communal forces.

The communal intrigues of the time is graphically described by Kalathil Velayudhan Nair in his biography. Sri Kalathil was taken into the cabinet of A.J. John (1952) after obtaining Mannam's approval. According to Kalathil, he was reluctant to join the cabinet but Mannam took the decision for him. It is stated that on the previous day Mannam and prominent Nair leaders had decided to stall the formation of a ministry with A.J. John as chief minister. But when the Nairs got a berth they withdrew their objection. According to him, in the ministry he was looked at as a representative of the Nair Service Society only. A.J. John believed that Catholics must have a monopoly in the education and he was a confident of Catholic bishops.

The story of communal infighting continued even after the three rival communities, Nairs, Ezhavas and Christians got their representatives in turn to occupy the chief minister's chair.

After A.J. John, Pattom Thanu Pillai became the chief minister again as the head of a minority government led by P.S.P. Panampally Govinda Menon, a Cochin leader was a rival
to Pattom and the latter toppled the P.S.P. ministry. Panampally ministry was ousted by six prominent Nair and Christian MLAs. Christians and Nairs of Travancore disliked Govinda Menon. The Catholic Church feared that Panampally's continuance will threaten the powers of the managers of private schools. The Nair Service Society group of Congress men did not like Panampally because, "though he was also a Nair, he was not amenable to the dictates of the NSS High Command. The dislike was so great that the leader of the NSS, Mannam, was reported to have once asked him to quit the office" (of the Chief Minister). They wanted to defeat him even in the general election that followed the formation of Kerala State, in 1957. Chalakudi was Govinda Menon's own formidable constituency. The dissidents in the Congress led by T.M. Varughese sponsored an independent Christian candidate, A.P. Muthedath. T.M. Varughese in his old age campaigned as a Christian leader among the Christians in that constituency. It is said that he could take away some 4,000 Christian votes from the traditional supporters of Govinda Menon. This resulted in the defeat of Panampally and victory of PSP candidate C.G. Janardhanan. As Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin state, Panampally had nurtured the constituency through several development projects including a coveted thread mill factory. But communal passions ensured his defeat.

On 23 March 1966, President's rule came into force in Travancore and Cochin on the fall of Panampally ministry. About 7 months later, on 1 November 1966, Travancore-Cochin state disappeared from the map of India and Kerala state came
into existence. With the coming into being of Kerala with three distinct regions merged together, the communal equation took a new turn.

The 9 years from 24 March 1947 till 23 March 1956 saw the rise and fall of six ministries at Trivandrum. They rose with permutations and calculations based on communalism and they fell on the same account. Perhaps this was the glorious time for leaders of Nairs, Ezhavas and Christians to arouse the communal feelings of the ordinary people in the state and cement their primordial loyalties to the maximum, hoping that this was the sure way for each community to ensure the sharing of the new found opportunities to the maximum. But what they could not foresee was that along with the democratisation of political power, increase in economic opportunities, and modernisation, secularisation of the society was happening at the subliminal level. They themselves were 'unconscious' partners in the acceleration of the process through their schools, newspapers, discussions and debates. The well-knit communal organisations were indirectly helping politicisation. The communities, as communities wanted to pick up all the advantages that came on the way. They fought what was unfavourable and bargained for things which were favourable. Fighting and bargaining the state power in the forums were the two sure instrumentalities of these three communities which paid high dividends.

It is interesting to examine the course of one communal organisation in its attitude and thinking as an illustrative case. We take the case of All Kerala Catholic Congress through
a content analysis of their decisions and resolutions. The AKCC working committee, first of all, wanted to protect the near monopoly of Christians in educational institutions in the private sector. They wanted the Catholics to go ahead unhindered in the agricultural, industrial and business expansion which will ensure a high status in society and powerful voice in politics. They also wanted to keep their share in public services and ministries. They asserted that "we do not want to get our rights as a charity from others with a begging bowl in hand, we will take on our own strength all legitimate rights due for us." This fighting spirit was evident not only in Catholics but in Ezhavas too.

Christians opposed C,P's ideas of an Independent Travancore mainly because, they knew that it will seriously jeopardise the opportunities of Christians in agriculture, business, industry and so on. On the other hand, a big country like India will ensure more opportunities for their economic ends. Although there is apparently a contradiction here, Christians were one of the dominant communities in Travancore. In India, they are reduced to a marginal group. But it shows how the quest for economic success got primacy over religion/community pride at that time.

AKCC was opposed to the formation of a Christian political party. They had sufficient hold in the Congress. But they never wanted the members of their community to be in different political parties which will weaken their strength and reduce political effectiveness. It was decided that AKCC
should enter politics as and when their communal interests were affected.

AKCC wanted all Christians to exercise their franchise and thus ensure political participation. To ensure that all adult Catholics were listed in government’s voters list, AKCC asked the parishes to re-check the entries with the parish membership register. This shows the various ways and means by which very high political participation was made possible by the communal organisations in Travancore.

When the Congress decided to ban entry for those who were members of communal organisations, it posed a problem for Catholic Congress. They wanted to participate in politics but their loyalty to the community was more deep.

Another protest move of AKCC was on the school text books. They started protesting against text books prescribed by the government, saying that some portions wounded the sentiments of Catholic Christians. Government appointments to high places continued to agitate the minds of Catholics. The 25th annual meeting of AKCC held at Olloor had passed the resolution saying that the Travancore-Cochin Government is ignoring the legitimate rights of Catholics for high posts in the government. They cited the case of the high court judges saying that there is not a single judge for a community whose population constitutes 18.4 per cent in the state.

Another issue which took a communal colour was the question of backward class Christians in Travancore-Cochin state. Their demand was to get the state aid and other facilities to
the Christian converts from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, on a par with their Hindu brethren. Christian members of the assembly tried to project this demand for grouping themselves into a separate block.

The T.K. Narayananpillai government had a scheme to levy taxes from the agricultural produce. But the landed gentry which controlled the AKCC opposed it.

Even when people knew to think only in terms of their religious and communal interests there was class formations cutting across communal boundaries. One form in which it found expression was the landed and business interests coming together. The land and business interests in the state was in the hands of the rich Syrian Christians and Nairs. When they joined together, they could make noise. The opinion makers in these two communities could make things appear as if the government was trying to 'finish' the interests of the two communities although it affects only a microscopic minority. The Nair-Christian papers played an important role in this respect.

The PSP government under Pattom Thanu Pillai had a land reform act. The Christian and the Nair landlords opposed it tooth and nail. They argued that there were no appreciable disparities in the wealth caused by landholdings. "Indeed there are no rich men among the landholders in the sense the word is commonly understood", said a petition of the landlords. It further said "There is no one who is absolutely landless in Travancore-Cochin". They said the new bill in essence meant "rewarding the idle and punishing the industrious" (emphasis added).
Another objection by the landlords was that the backward communities had no interest in cultivation and if they are given land, they will alienate it.

Although there were formidable communal structures like Hindu Maha Mandalam which had created cleavages between Christians and Nairs, the common interests of the richer sections of these communities united them against the common enemy, namely the PSP government. This was also part of a reaction against another emerging sociological phenomenon namely the coming together of the workers through unions. Nairs and Christians joined hands to fight the bill. V.K. Velappan, President of the NSS said -

The restriction on possession (and ownership) actually deprives the owner 5/8 or 3/4 of his rights in the property. This is a very serious matter. (50)

He was of the view that any dislocation of the rights of ownership of land would precipitate an economic crisis in the country.

Thariath Kunjithommen who could see things only from the eye of the Catholic community's interest had said "to divide the agricultural land is more unjust than dividing the bank deposits".

By now, most of the wet lands of Kuttanaadu and vast hilly regions of western ghats were with Syrian Christians. The law enacted by the Travancore sirkar almost a century ago was a shelter for the landlords, and Nairs and Christians wanted the law to continue. The leading Malayalam dailies like Malayala Manorama, Deepika, Malabar Mail (all these were known as
Christian papers), Desabandhu and Malayala Rajyam (Nair dailies) controlled by land and business interests wrote editorials opposing the bill introduced in the assembly.

On the eve of every election AKCC used to meet and consider how many Christians (out of them, how many Catholics) were given tickets in the election by the political parties. They wanted to make sure that the interests of the community will be sufficiently safeguarded and bargained for the newly constituted Assembly. This was true of Nairs and Ezhavas too.

The 1952 general election was of special importance to the three communities because it was the first election in Independent India. AKCC was angry with the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) as they did not consult the Catholic leadership before nominating the candidates. Their point was that KPCC had entered into an agreement with Hindu Maha Mandal leaders and no similar gesture was made to the AKCC. They wrote about it to the state leadership as well as to Jawaharlal Nehru. They said that AKCC would not put up candidates but it expected a good number of Catholics in the Congress list; proportionate to its population. It went to the extent of asking the Catholic common man to vote only for Catholic candidates. 1951 December issue of AKCC bulletin had a list of candidates whom the Catholics should vote. This was approved by the AKCC sub-committee. When AKCC openly demanded all these by appealing to the communal passions, Nairs and Ezhavas did not lag behind. So the KPCC tickets were divided according to the strength of the community. This showed that the moment
democratic institutions especially universal adult franchise came into being in the state, the communal organisations wanted to legitimise their communal interests and claims. This conscious effort from the leaders of various communities gave added vigour to the communal passions.

Just like land and business interests, whenever any government tried to touch education, it was interpreted as axing the interests of Christians. While Panampally Govinda Menon was the minister for education in the second Congress ministry in Travancore-Cochin state in 1951, he brought a scheme by which he wanted to give equal pay for private and Sirkar school teachers provided the right of appointment of school teachers was vested with the government; that is, the Public Service Commission. 80 per cent of the fees collected should be deposited in the treasury and the headmasters will be appointed by seniority. In the appointment of teachers, care will be taken to give adequate representation to all communities. This was a boon to the teachers and the teachers as a class welcomed it.

But in effect, it meant the taking away of the rights of the Christian management to appoint teachers as they desire. A spate of protests and outcries began from all sections of Christian community. Nairs and Ezhavas directly and indirectly welcomed the Panampally scheme because it would create a favourable channel for their community members for employment in Christian schools. Christians immediately saw the hand of Hindu Maha Mandal in this sinister move.
The study of the AKCC resolutions from 1947 till 1957 show that they could effectively convey to the people that loyalty to their community is primary and all other things are secondary. To a great extent they were successful in keeping the people under a spate of 'communal demands'. Impressive meetings, processions, conventions could keep the communal passions aflame. Nairs and Ezhavas competed with the Christians in the same line and this decade was a period of triangular pulls on democratic institutions for maximisation of each community's rewards in the social life of Travancore and Cochin.

Another significant point which needs mention here is that this decade saw the establishment of several schools and colleges, by the three communities. Ownership of colleges and institutions of higher learning enhanced the power and prestige of the community to which it belonged. This strength in terms of power and prestige did whet the appetite for more and more.

Christians continued to lead in the educational field with their primary and secondary schools along with institutions of higher learning like the colleges. 1950s also saw colleges being granted for each denomination (thereby each smaller community) within the Christian community.

Ezhavas could establish three important institutions of learning between 1948-57, which were considered centres of prestige for the community.

Nairs had an edge over Ezhavas in the matter of educational institutions because they could tap the dormant wealth of the Nair community. The decade immediately following
independence saw a spurt in the educational institutions of Nairs.

Perhaps one development which the communal organisations could not comprehend or even if they could, failed to analyse and find an effective answer, was the increasing pauperisation and proletarianisation taking place in the Travancore and Cochin state.

The capitalist development in Travancore saw a large number of people being drawn from the rural agrarian setting to the plantations and factories. As mentioned earlier, Alleppey, the port town of Kerala, was the centre of business and industry. The coir factories saw large influx of workers from the rural areas. The first Trade Union also was born in Alleppey in 1922 March - The Travancore Labour Association. Its organiser was a Muslim - Vadappuram Bawa (P.K. Bawa). Quilon also became a centre of workers' unions. The increasing number of workers, when they got organised, were exposed to socialist and communist ideologies. They could see the utter bankruptcy of communal leadership in providing them any benefits. However, even the workers unions were not free from communal feelings. The SNDP Yogam had taken active interest in the early days of the industrialisation in Alleppey to organise the workers. Most of the workers in the coir factories were Ezhavas. Coir Factory Labour Unions had SNDP's blessings in the early days. At a meeting of the Travancore Labour Conference held on 23 May 1937, at Alleppey, V.V. Giri who presided over the meeting had to remind the working class that
there is no room for communal thought in labour movement.  
Agrarian movements also began to take shape. Although in 
Malabar the intensity of the agrarian movement was higher,
Travancore also had its share. The struggle of peasants 
and workers at Punnnapra-Vayalar (1946 October) at the flag end 
of Dewan Sir C.P's reign in Travancore proved beyond doubt the 
emergence of working class with militancy. The leaders of 
the communal organisations were the owners of the plantations, 
factories, business houses and they proved to be task masters 
in their quest for greater profits. This feeling came to its 
climax in 1966-67 when the united Kerala state was preparing 
for a general election. AKCC had identified Communism as its 
main enemy. As early as 1948, the AKCC organised a fund 
called 'anti-communist fund'. AKCC president had said that 
since most of the workers unions are controlled by Communists 
we will have existence only if we organise an independent 
labour organisation. But this move carried little conviction 
with the labourers.

When capitalism grows, workers' movements also become 
stronger because of the pauperisation and high level conscious-
ness raising activity of the political parties. But in Kerala, 
this had an added impetus. That was the prevailing communal 
organisations and their leadership.

Conclusion

From the above study, it is clear that the economic and 
political factors were complementing each other for the rise
of a new level of social consciousness. The class formation—those who owned the means of production and the working class who sold their labour on wages—came to the surface with the formation of planters' and farmers' associations on the one side and workers' and peasants' unions on the other. When party politics became an accepted norm, the class formation got an added impetus which in turn determined the future developments in the newly formed Kerala state. The above two phenomenon—formation of voluntary associations, workers movements and political parties were signs of a faster secularisation process, but the important thing to be noted was the persisting communal loyalties within these instruments of secularisation. A civil society was in the making but it was being shaped within the mould of primordial loyalties.
Notes and References


5 The office of the chief minister was known as 'prime minister' in Travancore in the beginning.


7 Ibid., p. 21.


11 Kumbalathu Sankara Pillai, 'Jeewitha Smaranakal' (Mal.), Kerala Sahdam, Quilon, 3 April 1936 (P.R. Collection).


14 Ibid., p. 27.

15 The editorials appeared in the leading dailies of Kerala on his death are revealing. See Appendix to Jeevitha Samaram II.


17 Ibid., pp. 78-79; see also p. 71.

18 Ibid., pp. 83-86.

19 Ibid., p. 87.

20 Ibid., p. 91.

21 Ibid., p. 100.
Ibid., p. 119.

23 See *Ilante Kathe* (Mal.)


27 Ibid., p. 162.

28 *R. Sankar - His Career* (Pamphlet), Souvenir Committee *R. Sankar Shastriabapoorthi Celebrations*, Quilon, p. 3.


36 Ibid., p. 122.

37 Ibid., p. 125.


40 AKCC Managing Committee Resolution, 22 June 1947.
41 Ibid.


43 Ibid., 30 September 1947.

44 Ibid., 21 November 1948.

45 "We are now prompted to this move as we feel at this injustice done to the weak, unfortunate and underprivileged on the basis of religion, and as a result of our awareness that if we do not at least now raise our voice on their behalf we cannot any longer claim justice for ourselves in the spheres of governmental actions? Backward Christians in Travancore-Cochin State (Pamphlet) Changanacherry: SJO Press, 1955, p. 3.

46 AKCC throughout defended the landed interests. The 25th annual meeting held at Olloor had opposed the move by the government to levy agriculture income tax and limiting the area of agricultural holdings owned by a single individual. AKCC Bulletin, April/May 1950.

On 2 January 1955, the AKCC assembly had passed another resolution, of course this time not pleading for big estate owners:

"AKCC representing the Catholic community in Travancore and Cochin and Malabar views with anxiety the hostile attitude assumed by the government of Madras towards colonists from Travancore and Cochin in the Koothali Estate who cleared forest areas and converted them into fruitful agricultural gardens. If further requests to stop the proceedings of forcible eviction from their garden settlements which is their sole earthly possession and to have the lands registered in the names of the tenants".


47 During T.K.'s period, a Christian-Nair (and one Muslim - Thangalkunju Musaliar) landlord association called 'T.C. Chamber of Agriculture and Industry, Kottayam' was formed on 29 June 1950 at the Skinner puram estate of CM Anthraper. Anthraper in his presidential address on 12 September 1950 said "We have reached a grave situation in which the agriculturalists, industrialists and businessmen either organise or perish".


See also editorials of
The Chief Minister made some statements on 8 October 1950 at Vandiperiyar against the vested interests of agriculturalists and industrialists saying, such associations were 'conspiracy-moves' (goodehalochana sangam). This did flare up a series of protests. See the editorial of Malayala Manorama, 13 October 1950, entitled "Muthalali Bhalsanam".

Memorial submitted to the Government of India, New Delhi regarding the "Restrictions on Possessions and Ownership of Land" Bill of the Travancore-Cochin Government. Kottayam: CMS Press, 1955, p. 3. Nine associations came forward to oppose this move. They were:

1) The Central Travancore Agriculturists Association, Kanjirapally.
2) The Trivandrum District Planters' Association, Trivandrum.
3) The Travancore Chamber of Commerce, Alleppey.
4) The Travancore-Cochin Land Owners' Association, Kottayam.
5) The Kuttanadu Agricultural Cooperative Society, Alleppey.
6) The Oil Millers Association, Alleppey.
8) The Kuttanadu Karshaka Sangam, Alleppey.

P.J. Mathew, ed., T.C. State Land and Land Policy, Kanjirapalli: Central Travancore Agriculturists Association, 1954, p. 31. Thariath Kunjithommen was a Catholic legislator who was one of the most vocal Catholic MLAs who dominated the scene for several decades. He was never tired of pleading the Catholic cause and spared no efforts to get
benefits for his community. There is a popular story which some of my informants narrated. One day in the Assembly a minister was replying to a question about the Trivandrum Zoo. He said three giraffes will be brought to the Zoo soon from Africa. Thariath Kunjithommen who was sleeping woke up and having heard only the last part of the minister's reply shouted that one of them should be a Catholic! It may be fictitious but it conveys how every issue had a communal angle and the degree of communal commitment with which the MLAs came to the legislature to plead for their community's share in the cake.

For the landed gentry, the "Magna Carta" of the ryots is the sirkar paattam lands: Royal Proclamation of 2 June 1865. It provides for the enfranchisement of sirkar paattam lands and for making them heritable, saleable and otherwise transferable property.


AKCC Bulletin, November 1951. For the Parliament, Catholics identified Kottayam, Meenachil, Ernakulam and Kodungallor to put up their own belonging to Catholic community. For the state assembly they demanded 22 seats.

Ibid., p. 7.

This scheme is known as the 'Private Secondary School Scheme' popularly known as "Panampally Paddhati" (Mal.)


The move for appointment in schools through public service commission continued. In the beginning of 1955 the Annual Meeting of AKCC passed a resolution saying:

"This meeting views with concern the resolution passed by the NSS Budget meeting that the teachers' appointments to private schools be held through Public Service Commission. It strongly opposes the decision to hold appointments through PSC".

The Jacobite Church obtained a college at Pathanamthitta (1952), the Mar Thoma Church got permission to start two colleges; one at Tiruvalla and another at Kozhencherry, all the three were within a distance of less than 30 kms in the central Travancore, with a high density of population. The establishment of the colleges, in the wake of new social forces, on communal lines was another instance of consolidating the communal solidarity in these areas in an ethnic sense. Because, churches like the Mar Thoma and Jacobite could be considered more as ethnic groups. They had a more unifying base in terms of blood relationship - family kinship - faith and customs. Their marriages were endogamous. The schools and colleges run by the respective churches sponsored communal organisations, conferences and meeting to foster the loyalty of the young men and women to the parental church (community). The new generation was supposed to be grateful to their community which gave them this facility for higher learning. The predicament here was, the university education was secular, broad based with 'revolutionary' ideas. The churches or for that matter, any communal organisation wanted to invest and develop them not because it gave a wider vision to the younger generation, but because it created employment opportunities for their people, enhanced prestige and power as owners of these 'temples of learning'. But how to counter the inevitable secularisation process? It could be done only by invoking the loyalty of the recipients of new knowledge, to the community and its leadership. This was done by a kind of indoctrination through the dogmas and articles of faith of the community and their forefathers. Religious heads and leaders of the communities frequently visited these colleges and schools to cement the faith of the children in the community, in the unblemished way, unaffected by the secularisation of the higher education to which they themselves were instruments. That was an attempt to compartmentalise the new ideas emanating from education and communal loyalties.

This dichotomisation of religious (communal) and secular (modern education) continues even today in the Malayalee society.

The Ezhava institutions of higher learning were

1) Sree Narayana College, Quilon, 1948
2) Sree Narayana Women's College, Quilon, 1951
3) Sree Narayana Poly-Technic, Kottayam, 1957

In 1954, SNDP had 12 High Schools and 18 Middle Schools. This is besides several schools owned by Ezhava individuals.
62 NSS management of educational institutions as on 1957

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1954</th>
<th>1957</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six colleges were: M.G. College, Trivandrum; N.S.S. College, Changanacherry; N.S.S. College, Pandalam; N.S.S. Women's Perunthanni; and 2 training colleges at Changanacherry and Pandalam.


64 N. Sreekantan Nair, Kazhinja kalachitrangal-II (Mal. - Memoir), Kottayam: NBS, 1976.

65 Freedom Movement in Kerala, p. 436.


69 There were attempts, even earlier by Catholic priests to organise the coir-workers so that the workers may cooperate with the owners of the factories. One such meeting took place at Alleppey on 9 February 1936 in which the labour leaders saw the move by the parish priests dampening their spirit to fight for the rights. V.A. Simon, "Catholica Thozhilali Union Veendum" (Mal.) in the Coir Factory Workers Union Souvenir, pp. 237-8, 249.