Chapter III

COMMUNAL MOBILISATION FOR STATUS: 1890-1930

When inequality based on ascription is the order of the day, a collective action becomes feasible if the people are mobilised on the issues that hurt their sentiments and feelings. T.K. Oommen makes a pertinent observation about the origin of social movements when he says that what disturbs men is their distance from the centre of the system. As long as they occupy only positions at the periphery of the system they may be deprived of wealth, power or privilege or all of them. "In this sense", Oommen observes, "social movements are mechanisms through which men attempt to move from the periphery of a system to its centre. That is, movements are conscious efforts on the part of men to mitigate their deprivation and secure justice".

This has two necessary conditions:

(1) Creation of the consciousness among the disadvantaged people that they are deprived of their legitimate rights or make them conscious of the fact that they are at the periphery as Oommen puts it.

(2) Create structural possibilities to ventilate their grievances to make their voices heard.

Both are complementary; one cannot take place without the other. Associations come up as an instrument to voice the grievances.

Here we have to take note of an important hypothesis. That is; when a group is discriminated against on the grounds
of their ascriptive nature, that group retaliates or rebels against the discrimination on the ascriptive level itself if other ideological tools are absent. To put it differently, if communities are discriminated on the basis of religion, then the tendency will be to unite to fight on the religious level. For, they have very little access to the other instruments like an ideology transcending the narrow division of religion or a political party of that nature to give any effective reply to the discrimination. Even if they have, it needs a higher level of consciousness than primordial loyalties, to make use of it. Thus, as Gomme put it, "membership in ascriptive groups invariably facilitates the development of primordial collectivism due to the heavy weight of tradition inculcated through socialisation process." In a feudal society these primordial collectivism is based on kinship at the micro level and religious values at the macro level. Mobilisation happens on the level of the community based on religious faith, sentiments and vocabulary. This was what happened in Travancore in the course of three decades following 1890.

There is yet another pre-requisite for men to unite and act even after creating a consciousness of deprivation. This aspect can be explained only by certain factors for which men should aspire. Status, class and power can explain this to a great extent. There comes an urge on the part of people in unmistakable terms for gaining status, power and economic
mobility (class factor). These three are not independent units, but closely inter-related. At certain points in time a community may go for status by trying to capture the indicators which they thought are sufficient to get status. But unknowingly, questions of power also play a part. At another point in time a community or communities want to get more power (political, economic) but covertly they are going after status too. Intertwined in this process is a quest to move up on the economic stratum from employee position to employer; from a position of receiving command to give command, from a position of giving respect to receiving respect and from a position of selling labour power to owners of means of production.

But, this was not possible under a system of negative religious sanctions, feudal structure and primitive social system. Secular forces come handy in such a situation to break the shell. Thus process of secularisation is a very important variable in the development of society to its next stage. For instance, in Travancore, English education became an important index in the secularisation process as an instrument to achieve higher status, economic mobility and access to power.

Travancore for Travancoreans

'Travancore for Travancoreans' was the slogan of an epoch-making agitation in Travancore in 1891. This was led by G.P. Pillai an English educated middle class Nair youth. This had been described as "the famous political crusade
against the autocratic administration of the state". It began with a series of articles in newspapers, publication of pamphlets. The agitation finally led to the presentation of the Travancore-Memorial (popularly known as Malayali Memorial) to the Maharaja of Travancore protesting against "the denial to the Travancoreans of a fair share in the government of their country and their systematic exclusion from the higher grades of the service". G.P.'s attempt was to urge upon the government "the inherent right of the Travancoreans for a due share in the service of the state". The Memorial was widely circulated and signed by 10037 persons from different religious communities. It was submitted on 2 July 1891 to the Dewan by a six member delegation in which five were Nairs and one Syrian Christian. Undoubtedly it was the first sign of political awakening in Travancore. There were a number of political meetings in this connection at Parur, Kottayam, Alleppey, Quilon, Trivandrum and Nagercoil. It is said that the government in Travancore, for the first time, realised that the voice of the people was a power to reckon with.

The mobilisation of the people on the basis of religious communities cannot be overlooked. On a wider plane, it was whipping up sentiments of 'sons of the soil' against outsiders. Here, in one sense, narrow communal feelings had not been awakened although within the broad framework, narrow communal loyalties were the effective factor in the mobilisation of the people.

The common enemy was the Tamil Brahmins. The community
that had been affected most was Nairs. But they could not go
it alone. They wanted the support of other communities. Nam-
boottiris, Christians and even Ezhavas signed the memorial. The
meetings at different places and the persons who presided over
the meetings give an idea of a particular community's support
wherever they were influential.

Parur - Rev. Fr. T.C. Hilarion, Vicar of Parur Church

Kottayam - Rt. Rev. Mar Athanasius, Metropolitan of
the Syrian Church

Alleppey - Kumaramangalath Nilakantan Nambudiripad

Quilon - Kavalam Nilakanta Pillai

Nagercoil - Sivan Pillai

Trivandrum - T.F. Loyd, an Anglo Indian leader.

The simple truth was that in the political awakening
the primordial loyalties of the people had to be exploited;
enlightening them about the injustice inflicted on their
community. Those who signed the memorial signed it first as
Nairs, Ezhavas and Christians, and 'Travancorean sentiment'
came only next to it. Organisations based on community loy-
ties were vehicles to enlighten the people as to what was
happening at the apex of the society. It was the work of a
Nair Association called "Travancore Malayali Sabha", successor
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to the 'Malayali Social Union' (1885) which gave inspiration
to the Malayali Memorial. It was obvious that the underlying
interest in the Malayali Memorial was that of the Nair commu-
nity, because theirs was the community on the verge of decline
because of the Brahmin domination. Christians had organisational
platform for expressing their grievances much before the Malayali Memorial agitation. At Mannanam near Kottayam in 1866, Nazrani Jathyakya Sangham was formed for the social upliftment of Syrians with special emphasis on their education, civil duties, and share in the government. In 1887 the newspaper Nazrani Deepika came out as its official tongue. The editor was Nidhirical Mani Kathanar who played an important role in the community's agitation for its due share in government. It may be noted here that the paper had a communal title 'Nazrani' meaning thereby, belonging to Syrian Christians and edited by a priest.

Ezhavas also did not lag behind in realising the value of organisation. Although the breast cloth agitation in the South Travancore (1850s) was mainly confined to the Shanars its impact made even those above the pollution line to realise the utility of organised action.

At Parur and Mayyanad, Ezhava samajams had been formed by the time of Malayali Memorial. However, the beginning of systematic organisation among the Ezhavas was when Dr. Palpu started an uncompromising struggle to get Ezhavas their due share in the government. The known form of agitation in those days was submitting memoranda or memorials (petitions) to the higher authorities. Dr. Palpu - an Ezhava - was the third signatory to the Malayali Memorial.

Another situation which accelerated the agitational approach was the Legislative Council created in the state by
Sri Mulam Thirunal Maharajah in 1883 for the purpose of making laws and regulations. Of the nine members, the President was the Tamil Brahmin Dewan. Except one European Christian and three Nairs, all others were Brahmins.

The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam

The Malayali Memorial had taken up the discrimination against the Ezhavas too briefly. The reply from the government, noted that they were a content lot and if the government was to take a deliberate policy to give them share in the education and administration, it would be unproductive. That is, it would create tension and strain in the communal 'harmony'. But Palpu did not rest. He started massive signature campaign for an Ezhava Memorial. On 3 September 1896 it was submitted to the Maharajah with 13,176 signatures. This was a milestone in the organisational history of Ezhavas. One important thing to be noticed was that people from all other communities, including those of Nairs had worked for its success. The Memorial demanded Ezhava share in education and government jobs. The religious factor came in conspicuously. Their question was: if the government gave all facilities for those who changed their religion, why not these be given without change of religion?

The reply to this Memorial had mentioned religious beliefs as existing in Travancore as the stumbling block for bringing about justice to the Ezhavas. Travancore is an ancient Hindu state and the customs of such a society cannot be
Dr. Palpu availed of all the channels to raise the question of Ezhavas. Meetings, petitions, comments in newspapers, pamphlets, letters to the authorities, did not bring the desired results. He went to the British authorities through Madras government and sent G.P. Pillai to raise the issue of Ezhavas in the British Parliament. People like G.P. Pillai raised the issue of Ezhavas in the National Conferences too; like the one held in 1895, of the ninth Indian National Social Conference.

As a result of the Malayali Memorial, and the tireless efforts of Dr. Palpu, there was an awakening among the Ezhavas. They were becoming conscious of their rights. They began to attract the attention of the centres of power. But things were moving only on the upper echelons of Ezhava society. And the methodology was also in attempting to get favours from the top (from the government). There was very little participation from below. The common man in the Ezhava community did not participate. After ten years of work, Dr. Palpu realised that there was something radically wrong with his approach and it was not bringing the desired results. He had education, power, status and access to resources but the achievements in mobilising the Ezhava community was minimal.

His eyes were opened when he met Swami Vivekananda. Palpu explained to Swami his frustrations in the attempt to awaken the Ezhavas to their rights. Swami told Palpu that he should organise the movement centred around a spiritual leader. According to Swami, India can rise or fall only with a religion.
Dr Palpu was not a firm believer or admirer of religion. Therefore all his attempts were to build a movement keeping aloof the religious factor. However, Swami Vivekananda showed him a great sociological truth about the importance of primordial loyalties in terms of religion. That is, to use religion as an instrument to mobilise people and thereby to bring about social change, in the secular plane - access to English education, jobs in the civil services and so on. Thus Dr Palpu began his search of ways and means to touch the primordiality of the Ezhavas. And that led him to Sri Narayana Guru Swamikal of Aruvikkara who was emerging as the spiritual leader of Ezhava community. The secular (Palpu) and the sacred (Narayana Guru) streams of Ezhavas met and the result was the formation of "Aruvippuram Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam" (hereafter SNDP) on 16 May 1908. Later 'Aruvippuram' was dropped from its name. Its permanent president was Sree Narayana Guru and General Secretary, Kumaran Asan. Dr Palpu was the vice-president.

SNDP was the first organisation of its kind, a voluntary association of a particular community in Travancore established with the aim of securing the rights of members by invoking the religious sentiments of the people.

Kumaran Asan gave a religious rationale for the formation of the SNDP in his introduction to the aim of SNDP. The most significant argument was that unless they are organised as a community, they cannot progress. If religion does not under-
gird the organisation; however good the organisation would be, it cannot achieve its goals. Religion has distorted and debased human society in many ways but only a religious approach can change the situation. Being the most oppressed community socially because of religious sanctions, having an enlightened and articulate leadership, it was but natural that they came up first with a strong organisation for self interest and advancement.

**The Nair Service Society**

The second community which organised themselves in a big way was the Nairs. It was 11 years after SNDP came into existence; on 31 October 1914 that the Nair Service Society (hereafter NSS) was formed at Chengannur at the house of Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai. The success achieved by the Malayali Memorial led by Nairs gave added inspiration to organise the Nairs. Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai (hereafter Mannam) became the full time worker of the Society in 1915. He gave up his profession as a lawyer to serve the 'community of Nairs'. It is said that he left his home to serve Nairs and made the Nair community his home.

The Nairs were also organised on the basis of religious factor and primordial loyalties. In the early meetings of the Nair youth under the leadership of Mannam before NSS was formally organised, reading Ramayana was an important programme and interpreting it was a regular feature. According to C. Narayana Pillai, a veteran freedom fighter and prolific
Political history writer of Kerala, it was the Nairs and Christians who had the advantage of organizing on the basis of religion because Ezhavas were not owned by the upper castes in the Hindu religion and they could not resort to Hinduism for organisational strength. This vacuum was filled partially, only when Sree Narayana Guru emerged as the spiritual leader of Ezhavas. As we saw earlier, it was Sree Narayana Guru's coming to the centre of the movement that gave Ezhava primordiality dynamism.

As far as NSS was concerned, Nairs had already in their community the tradition of religious protest. Nair affinity to tradition and their memories of the bygone glorious days were strong enough in terms of primordiality. It was not necessary to have another religious teacher or spiritual leader to awaken them to their past religious heritages. Therefore, Mannam with his oratory and commitment to the vision of making the Nair community powerful again, could combine in him the roles of a spiritual leader and an able organiser.

The main issue which made Nairs to come around NSS were:

1. Their exploitation by Brahmins (Namboottiris as well as Tamil Brahmins),
2. Their own decadent system of inheritance (Marumakathayam) and expensive anachronistic social customs like Thalikettu-kalvanam, Thirandukuli, untouchability.
3. Need for educational and economic renaissance of the community to compete with the other rising community.
The All Kerala Catholic Congress

The Christians had a well-knit organisational set up with the parishes as the base and the Metropolitans at the top. It had good communication system too, to respond to any social situation.

"The Church provided them with unity, aid, advice and leadership. Christian community was the only one community in Kerala at one time, to have a strong organisation and all other communities emulated them some time or other" says a contemporary political scientist.

Since the first higher education institutions like CMS College were run by Christians, a rapid growth of educated middle class was relatively faster in that community. As the British were the rulers and their power over Travancore was high, the Christians thought it wise to support the rulers. They had accepted more or less the fact that Nairs were the bureaucrats of Travancore.

The importance of Christian middle class as a reference group for others in the community cannot be over-emphasised. This led to the rise of Christians in social positions. When the Christians were favoured, naturally by the British power because of their common religious affiliation, the rulers in Travancore could not discriminate them very much. Those Syrians who allied with the Anglican Church (the Church of the ruling Britishers in India) got preferential treatment because of power equations. The other Syrians in the Roman Catholic, Jacobite and Mar Thoma churches could not get access to government
jobs proportionate to their strength or educational capabilities. So, as a whole, majority of Christians took it in their stride that the sirkar jobs will be for Nairs and Brahmins. This continued till about 1920s.

This had an important sociological implication. They took to entrepreneurial activities on their own - an old version of modern self-employment scheme. The vast resources of land was beckoning them. The possibility of exploiting them was shown to them by the English planters. The inherent capabilities along with the instinct to survival among the rest of the communities made them to take to agriculture in a big way. They cleared forests for cultivation under extremely adverse conditions. They had to fight wild animals and resist the hostile climate in the uninhabited regions of Travancore; often falling victims to fatal diseases like malaria in those days. But their cash crops fetched money and they were self reliant. Some sections who had a tradition of trade, commerce, running of chitty, kuries stayed in the plain areas of the state, while others slowly moved to western ghats. Among the Christian community one can find a clear line of division in terms of this movement. In the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century the Syrian Roman Catholics took to agriculture while the Syrians associated with the CMS and later the Anglican Church, went for education and government jobs. Jacobites and Mar Thomites used the educational opportunities they got to enhance their trade, commerce (banking) small enterprises like printing press besides agriculture.
Whoever got average education or came to know of the western liberalism among the Christians were mobile, forward looking, profit seeking. The family organisation and the system of inheritance and succession were also conducive to the growth of individual initiative. The puritan ethics of the churches helped the process. Worldly success was considered as blessing of God. It also meant thrift and abstention from unnecessary, unproductive wastes of resources. With the available facilities like chitties and kuries, saving habit was prevalent among the Syrian Christians. The profit seeking, savings oriented enterprising Syrian characteristic is often expressed through a popular saying in Malayalam, "Kamannu veenal kaal nanam" in case a Syrian Christian happens to fall on the ground, he will search even in that crisis whether he can pick up a quarter coin from ground. The European contact brought them nearer to capitalist economy. They knew that the Nair landlordism with its absolutist nature will crumble. The conspicuous consumption and unproductive expenditure of Nairs was bound to lead to impoverishment of the community gradually. Finally, when the Nair landlordism crumbled under the weight of the crushing capitalism, the Syrian Christians were there to take advantage of it with the hard earned liquid cash. Overnight, Nairs realised that their power is eroded and Syrians were fattening by sucking the blood of the feud of their own community.

Once the strong middle class emerged and came up in the social ladder it was natural that they wanted to assert their rights. For that, parishes and church bodies were not adequate.
'Officially' the Christians were not willing to displease those in power at that time. They thought it foolish to destroy the good things accruing to them as a result of the patronage from the rulers. Moreover, there was not one leader who could unite the Christians focusing on their proportionate share in the government employment. Metropolitans of each church considered his church as his private property and unquestionable domain.

The most aggrieved section within the Christian community was Roman Catholics. As we saw earlier, when Syrians of non-Roman Catholic churches had more access to British rulers and thus with the Travancore sirkar, Roman Catholics were deprived of their share of influence in the government. Therefore, it was natural that the first movement among Christians aiming at their due share in the government took place in Syrian Roman Catholic community. The formation of 'Keraliya Catholic Mahajana Sabha' in 1918 at Changanacherry accelerated the movement began at Mannanam in 1866 and later centred around Nazrani Deepika. Later, its name was changed to All Kerala Catholic Congress (hereafter AKCC) at Shertalai in 1930. It began to pioneer in politics the rights of Roman Catholic Christians in Travancore. But on more than one occasion, it had stood for the entire Christian community in Travancore and later in Kerala. For a long time, their demands were through resolutions for proportional representation of Catholics in government services, representation in the legislature, right to build churches, and have cemeteries.

However, it may be wrong to think that Christian voice was heard only when AKCC came into existence. Although it had not
taken a movement character, Christian community's grievances got expression through two early Malayalam Newspapers: the \textit{Nazraani-Deepika} (1887) and the \textit{Malayala Manorama} (1890) both from Kottayam area. While the former was an outright Catholic tongue, the latter gave an appearance of transcending particular communal division. However, both were perceived as Christian papers. These two papers were powerful instruments to argue for Christian community. \textit{Deepika} in its editorial supporting the Malayali Memorial had said in 1891, "These days, we wonder whether there is anybody among the Syrians who have no complaints about their exclusion from government service." As late as 1927, \textit{Deepika} exhorted Catholics to awaken and to establish organisations, powerful enough to achieve their legitimate rights." On 30 March 1928, \textit{Deepika} wrote another editorial that "because of the influence of Nairs on government and lack of organised effort of communities who suffer injustice, Christians and others have no place in Nair army."

The \textit{Malayala Manorama}, though an enterprise of a member of the Syrian Christian community, tried to transcend that narrow communal approach because otherwise it would hurt their business interests. We may recall here that this newspaper too was started by the Christian family which started modern business enterprise. However, it tried to protect the interests of Syrian Christians. Progress was understood only in terms of each community's progress. Awakening the Syrian Christians to take active part in the affairs of the state was one of the interests
of the founder editor Shri Varughese Mappillai. The editorial in *Manorama* about the Malayali Memorial strongly pushed the case for representation in government jobs for each community according to its numerical strength. When Shri Mulam Assembly was constituted, quick came from *Manorama* a strong protest that a community (Syrian Christian) which had its stakes in agriculture and trade than government jobs (thereby helping the state exchequer through their big share in tax, and those who want the support of law) was totally excluded from the membership of Assembly. This tone continues throughout the early editorials of Malayala Manorama. Everything in those days had a communal colour.

Thought, sentiment and perception are shaped by groups in which people take part. But as Merton puts it, "men frequently orient themselves to groups other than their own in shaping their behaviour and evaluations." In societal actions it is a crucial aspect and it is necessary for us to take into serious consideration the processes through which individuals relate themselves to groups to which they do not belong. This is the crux of the reference group theory. It has relevance to our discussion. When Ezhavas and Nairs were organizing themselves to keep pace with the changing times their reference group was Syrian Christians. For Syrian Christians the reference group was British. Ezhava and Nair leaders often spoke of the advancing Syrian Christian community and their organisational structure. For instance, *ANDP* and *NSS* got inspiration from the Christian organisational set up to bring together the 'warring' factions (regional and
sub sect) of communities. Regionally and sub-caste wise, they were fighting within to finish. On the contrary, the leaders in Nair and Ezhava communities could see that the Christians as a community could progress because of their organisations in the parish level, diocese level and the church as a whole. Christian obedience to authority and a dedicated band of workers (priests, nuns) were considered as the necessary instruments of progress. This was a challenge to Mannam and he wanted to create similar structures within the Nair community too. His principle was to take everything good from any religion. In this, Christian community was a model for him. He admits in his memoirs it was the Christian evangelists who gave the Nairs the inspiration for public speaking in defence of the community and its interests. T. K. Madhavan, the organisational genius of SNDP Yogam had attributed the success of Christian community in the field of education and economic progress to the organisational religious network of Christians, and exhorted the Ezhavas to emulate the Christian model.

Thus, the enlightened Nairs and Ezhavas attributed all the progress Christians had made to their religious institutions. It was evident that the support of their parishes helped the growth of numerous schools which in turn helped the poor and needy in the community to get education free or on a concessional rate. When all these resulted in an overall development of the Christian community with the religious institutions at its centre of activity, Nairs and Ezhavas began to learn lessons from this
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reference group. Briefly, the ideas they tried to bring into their community were:

(a) A religious institution is very important for the growth of modern educational institutions, spread of modern education among the members of the society and to level their status with the proximate superior groups in the hierarchy.

(b) The amazing progress of their rival community (Christians) is the result of the redistributive economic function of their religious centres. Whereas degeneration of Hindu religious institutions was directly proportionate to the degeneration of their community. The Hindu religious institutions have not encouraged 'a culture of sharing' with the community. They are only centres of 'darshan' for the bhaktas.

(c) If religion (in the spiritual sense) is for the welfare of the people, it could be achieved only through religious institutions.

This realisation led in both Nair and Eghava communities to focus the attention on renovating and improving the places of Hindu religious institutions. The belief was that it will help to cope with the new forces. In substantive terms, it meant starting modern educational institutions by the community organised around religious institutions.

As noted earlier, one of the aims of Nair Service Society was to liberate the Nair community from its out-dated, meaningless religious observances. They realised that these superstitious/superfluous rituals were the main reason for the backwardness of
the community. It drained away their scarce wealth. Hitherto, status was in spending more. The new ethics began to dawn on them that the new status symbol was in saving more and 'building up'. They wanted a religious reformation to take the community forward on this line. The early history of NSS is replete with instances of fighting these superstitions by an enlightened group of Nair youth. Within a year of the formation of NSS, Mannam and a band of young Nairs entered the Subramania Swami Temple at Perunna violating a custom of 'pula' prescribed for sudras. He ascertained that one community has no power over other community. So Namboottiri community has no authority to give rules to Nairs. "Whatever may be the tradition, the people of each community has the freedom and right to reform and change the tradition" said Mannam. It was with the same principle that he vehemently opposed the untouchability in Hinduism and led the march of the touchables from Vaikom to Trivandrum demanding the right of all Hindus to enter all the temples. Earlier, not only that the lower castes could not enter the temples; they could not even use the roads near the temples. The story of Vaikom satyaagraha in 1924 is an important chapter in the upward status mobility of lower castes in Travancore. By championing the cause of lower castes against Brahminism, Mannam got an image of social reformer which was necessary to organise the Nairs on a community basis. It may also be recalled that Mannam wanted to unite the entire Hindus from the lowest to the highest to challenge the rising power of Christians. Karayogams were the instruments in carrying out this social reformation. Karayogam buildings were
essential to be a focal point of organisational activity (just like palli or church buildings in each parish for Christians). Ezhavas also started building SNDP yogam buildings in villages.

Structurally the Hindu temples have no big halls for assembly whereas the Christian churches could be used for meetings of the parish to discuss their common programmes and problems. This necessitated the building of separate Karayoga mandirams and SNDP yogam mandirams for the strengthening of each community. But temples had their important roles to play in NSS and SNDP in touching their religious sentiments and feelings which had to unite the community. Mannam says Ayroor was the first Karayogam to have a building of its own and carry out social reforms.

Those who are closely associated with the NSS believe that the source of all their blessings is a temple at Perumna. Maaranathu Kaavil Bhagavathi or Perunna Ambika was Mannam's deity. When Mannam began his organisational work one of the priorities was to renovate this temple. Breaking all the traditions, a Nair became the poojari of the temple. The temple was dedicated after the renovation by a Nair Swamy—Shri Bhaktananda Swamy. Several irrelevant rituals were stopped.

This was a revolt against Brahmin supremacy. It was done by staying within the religious framework and gradually protesting against the domination of one community - although that had religious legitimacy. The genesis of it was the realisation that religious oppression was central to the backwardness
of the community. The efforts of NSS against untouchability and opening temples for all castes spring from this sociological compulsion.

Once this was understood and effectively met in the consciousness and structural level, a movement to modernity was not difficult. Education was the instrument for that. NSS started its first school in 1915 at a village - Karukachal - near Changanacherry.

Perhaps temple as a symbolic unity was more needed for Ezhavas than the Nairs. Whereas Nairs could enter the temples under certain restrictions, they were out of bounds for Ezhavas. From Brahmins, Ezhavas must keep a distance of 12 feet; Nairs only 3-4 feet. Sri Narayana Guru was a revolutionary of his times. He openly rebelled against the Brahminic dominated by dedicating temples (in the model of caste Hindu temples) conducting poojas in the temples by himself and by other Ezhavas to the same gods as that of Savarnas, viz. Shiva. His first temple was dedicated at Aruvipuram to Shiva in 1878. There is an inscription in Malayalam at the temple, reading:

This is the ideal house where all live in full fraternity without distinction of caste or prejudice of creed.

He dedicated in his life time about 60 temples. His model was that of Puri Jagannath Temple where there was no caste discrimination. In 1911, his dedication of the temple to Sharada the goddess of learning was a new chapter in his religious understanding. It is known as Sharada Madham which has close affinity
to a Budhavihar. By choosing the goddess of learning, it is clear that he was moving to a point of giving importance to knowledge. The concrete expression for this was his emphasis on modern educational institutions which he called temples of learning. By 1917, Swamy said "from now on we should not encourage building temples. The main temple should be temple of learning. We should give education to the people. Let them get knowledge. That is the only medicine to make them progressive". Guru's idea was that these temples should become the nucleus around which schools, industrial training centres, halls for discourses etc. should be built up. Dr Palpu has said that these religious institutions (temples) should not only be centres of religious observations, but also places of learning and industry.

It is important to note that two routes were open to Ezhavas (1) Rejection of Hinduism and conversion to Christianity; (2) Building a counter-culture to Brahmanic orthodoxy, yet remaining within the Hindu fold. Why do they opt for the latter? What are the implications? Its implications will be gradually unfolded as we move on.

The 'new' temples were the focal points for preparing the minds of the people in the realisation of revolutionary ideas. Towards the end he began to discard idols. The last temple he dedicated near Shertallai had only a mirror for worship. His famous message "One caste, one religion, one God for mankind" captured the imagination of the deprived and oppressed in the
society. That was an ideology for a movement which could challenge the age old supremacy of Brahmins.

This background of religious liberation was a necessary condition for the community to progress and imbibe the ideas of the changing times. A new outlook was very much evident in Kerala through English education and other modernizing forces. Swamy used his religious tools for a non-religious end, viz secular education. His captivating message for Ezhavas was "Strength by organisation, Liberate by education". This, (i.e. religious basis for organisation) was necessary to awaken the primordial loyalty of Ezhavas. The result was unleashing the energies for a great movement with secularizing ends.

The movement took up the question of entry of Ezhavas into government schools through memorials. That did not meet with immediate success. But after about 15 years of its hard work most of the educational institutions in the state were opened for the Ezhavas. For the earlier representations the reply from the Dewan was that on religious grounds (the strength of tradition) there are serious difficulties in admitting Ezhavas into the schools where students from other communities study. But the Dewan had assured opening of special schools exclusively for Ezhavas. There were a large number of applicants for starting schools but only two primary schools were granted before 1896. So the Ezhava Memorial of 1896 demanded a much more favourable attitude from the authorities to which the Dewan had replied that 'special schools could be granted to Ezhavas whenever they wanted it. However, the SNDP could not
do anything substantial to establish their own schools before 1945. Till then it had only 5 middle schools (no high schools or colleges). But a large number of men and women were being educated in the high schools and colleges run by the government and the Christian communities. This was the basis of the growth of a powerful middle class in Ezhava community.

Mannam, through his hard hitting speeches, was never tired of emphasising the importance of religion and ethics as instruments of progress. And progress was the function of education, industry and entrepreneurship. We saw how NSS tried to invoke religion for all their organisational bases. Along with that he admonished the Nair family feuds, immoral ways of Nair men and women, irrational traditions, ceremonies and celebrations. In short, his idea was to create in them an ethics of hard work and industry.

Mannam used to say that even if Nairs were able to get all the seats in public services proportionate to their strength, that would not be sufficient to lift the community economically. He wanted Nairs to cultivate their own fields. By that time many Nairs have alienated their lands and become paupers. Mannam wanted to tell his people that sky is the limit for those who work hard. He used to say that only those who are working hard will have place on this earth. As against the hardworking Syrian Christians the easy going young men of his community never failed to shave and have bath twice a day; but spent his time in unproductive gossip in tea-shops and neighbours
homes. By that time Nairs had earned a name as beggars of sirkar job and people who do not work. Nairs' craze for peon posts had been subject of ridicule more than once for Mannam.

In one of his public speeches in 1956 he said he was proud of the Nair who could produce the maximum coconuts from an acre in the entire Travancore-Cochin state. For him that was a happier news than a Nair boy getting ICS. The emphasis was in physical labour and on agriculture because the rival community had attained the economic power and prosperity with their base in agriculture.

The same emphasis he gave for Nairs entering trade and commerce too which was monopolised by Christians and Muslims. He wanted young Nair men to join as an ordinary worker and rise to the level of Manager.

This ethics led NSS to acquire large areas with the aim of starting plantations which was a lucrative enterprise in the new economic condition. Several plantations came under NSS. Interestingly the large acrages alienated by Dewaswoms were going to Christians individually; and collectively under the prosperous edavakas. So there were rivalries and competitions between 'Christian priests on the one side and NSS on the other.

All this efforts to create an ethics of hard work did pay rich dividends in the years to come. For the challenges from other communities which were very much there, competition was the only answer. Nairs as Nairs had to rise up and compete.
The appeal to Nair primordial sentiments worked magic.

By 1906, Sree Narayanaguru Swami and Sri Kumaranasan had decided to appoint preachers and teachers to awaken the Ezhavas in the matters of (1) Religion (2) Ethics (3) Education, and (4) Industry. Kumaranasan, the then General Secretary in his letter to all SNDP yogams had pointed out that these preachers and teachers should convene meetings of Ezhavas at least once a month to educate them on the above areas. They were also advised to make use of all social occasions in which people gather to spread this message. Kumaras An's above mentioned letter constitutes a very important sociological document giving the parameters within which a community which was the victim of years of social discrimination tried to rise from its sleep. The first step they chose was on the educational level; preaching and teaching.

On the religious front they wanted to get rid of all superstitions and base their foundations of religion on nobler aspects of Hinduism centred round temples and Madhams as we saw earlier. In ethics they wanted the people to imbibe honesty, cleanliness, courage of conviction, unity, faith, hardwork and abandon all social customs which keep the community backward. In education, the community wanted to open schools and libraries with an idea of all men and women getting primary education.

Perhaps the most important stress was on industry and entrepreneurship. Ezhavas as a community was hard working compared to the easy-going Nairs. But the social sanctions against them and a hostile world around them made it difficult to rise
above a certain level. But when the structural possibilities were within sight, the SNDP wanted its community to improve their skills in agriculture, trade, cottage industries. Thrift and saving habits were to be encouraged. Hardwork should be the hallmark of the community where laziness is a crime. They wanted to start industries wherever possible, study the scientific aspect of industry and propagate an industrial culture.

The second annual meeting of the Yogam held at Quilon in 1906 had an agricultural-industrial exhibition too, along with it. This was the first exhibition of its kind in Travancore which aroused great interest in the agricultural, industrial products and village crafts. It proved to be a milestone in motivating the community to take up occupations which were capable of generating surplus. Capitalist forms of production was the result of these organised efforts of a community. The success of these meetings and exhibitions were powerful channels to awaken the primordial loyalties of the Ezhava community which could be utilised for the advancement of education, economic progress and above all fighting the social injustice.

AKCC as a communal organisation was different from NSS and SNDP. The former was only a tongue of the Catholic community in public affairs. There was no need for AKCC to run schools or colleges or hospitals or conduct marriages or establish economic institutions like banks. All these were undertaken through the powerful organisational set up in the churches. Christians as individuals and families were at the forefront of economic
activity availing themselves of all opportunities. "For the strong religious organisation, AKCC is a support and a shade". In other words, when SNDP and NSS had to work hard for religious reform to create a new ethics for economic and social development, Christian organisation like AKCC had all the time to concentrate on the political plane. Roman Catholics, especially the Syrians, believe that behind all their achievements for about half a century since 1920, AKCC played a crucial role.

After the inception of AKCC the first important movement in which Christians took an active part was the movement for civic rights. Catholics and Jacobites took a very important part in this battle for civil liberties in Travancore. As far as the then Travancore government was concerned, it recognised the Christian community in terms of Protestants only. That is, the converts to the LMS and CMS fold and the Syrians who were with the CMS (Anglicans). To a certain extent Mar Thomites and Jacobites who had a better equation with the ruling British than the Roman Catholics also got recognition. The Catholics used to say that the only high post a member of their community occupied came to an end in 1914 when Rao Bahadur Muthunayagam Pillai retired as a judge of the High Court. Then there was Mr I. C. Chacko heading a rather insignificant department. Not only in higher posts of the sirkar, but also in the legislative assemblies, Catholics did not get adequate representation. In the public services there was religious difficulty in admitting people other than high caste Hindus. Temple and the government feeding houses for Brahmins (Cottupuras) constituted an important subject in state
administration. A tehsildar in his capacity as a revenue officer had to administer the temples and pottupuras. This combination of functions deprived the low caste and non-Hindus in getting jobs in revenue department because of purity-pollution norms. Therefore the objective of the civil rights movement spearheaded by Catholics and Jacobites was to assert the rights of all citizens; especially the avarnas in holding offices in all departments maintained by public funds. They wanted the eradication of untouchability and unapproachability, and elimination of all religious and social differences which undermined the dignity of man. The demand in a nutshell was, as P.K.K. Menon puts it,

Every Hindu must be able to serve the government in all departments and every Christian, Muslim or avarna should get entry into those departments (like the Revenue Department, for instance) which was exclusively monopolised by the high caste Hindus at the time. In other words the leaders were advocating the recognition of social and political rights.69

The distribution of government jobs in 1922 showed the heavy discrimination the avarnas had to bear.

**Table VI**

| Officers caste-wise | Salary up to Rs.20 pm | Between Rs.20 and Rs.50 pm | Above Rs.50 pm | Total Rs.3964 | % |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Hindu              | 3325                 | 388                       | 104           | 3817          | 96.30 |
| (Savarnas)         |                      |                           |               |               |      |
| Non-Caste Hindu    | 99                   | 37                        | 11            | 147           | 3.70  |
| (Avarnas)          |                      |                           |               |               |      |
| Total              | 3424                 | 425                       | 115           | 3964          | 100   |

Source: Computed from the figures given in *Malayala Manorama*, 1922 December 14.
In this situation, Christians (mainly Catholics and Jacobites) Muslims and Ezhavas naturally found themselves allies. Nairs were passive if not opposed to the move fearing that it will loosen their grip and monopoly in high places.

A Civic Rights League was formed with branches all over the state. It got tremendous momentum because it was a matter affecting the fundamental rights of 26 lakh people.

On 21 February 1919 in the Popular Assembly the Dewan stated that the separation of Devaswams is neither desirable in principle or feasible. "Any reform that is proposed must be consistent with the essential features of the constitution under which the sovereign administers his state as an agent of the deity." In essence, this meant that the ruler being Padmanabhadasa - the servant of Padmanabha - he could not divert himself of the management of Devaswam.

K. C. Mammen Mappillai, one of the leaders of the Jacobite community and a member of the assembly presented a Memorial to the Dewan stating that

Land Revenue Department is the backbone of administration and as long as the members of the communities whom we represent in this Assembly do not secure admission to the higher ranks of the Department, we feel we are labouring under a real disability.

The President of the Working Committee of the Civic Rights League was John Chandy. E. J. John was another leader. In a meeting held in 1919 at Kottayam he said that only 20 per cent of the citizens enjoyed true civic rights in Travancore, an injustice ascribable to purely social and religious considerations.
It was not fair that Christians and Muslims should be so excluded on the basis of religion and Ezhavas on the basis of caste. T. K. Madhavan and SNDP Yogam lent its full support to the movement. A deputation was led by E. J. John (1920) to present a memorial to the Dewan referring to the exclusion of law-abiding Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims not only from Revenue Department but also from the Pangode Imperial Service Brigade and Government Students' Hostel. As P. K. K. Menon observes:

This was a memorial to get the civic rights recognized ... and it reflected the intensity of public feeling on a vital issue. It was not a request for the favour of appointments but a demand for the recognition of the elementary right to equality of opportunity.

The important point to be noted for our study is that this most significant civic right was pushed through a primordial medium. Catholic church, AKCC, SNDP Yogam and so on were the platforms to ventilate a purely secular grievance. It was secular in substance but communal in form. Three communities joined hands to fight Nairs and Brahmins. As a result of the prolonged agitation the Maharajah separated Devaswam from Revenue department by a proclamation on 12 April 1922. The proclamation was followed by two memorials of the Catholic community. On 14 March 1924, fourteen Catholic members of the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha submitted a memorial to Sri Mulam Maharajah. The Maharajah passed away soon and again within seven months another memorial was submitted to Rani Regent on 24 October 1924 by the then 35 Catholic members of the Assembly demanding the legitimate rights of the
Catholic community.

The role played by one individual and his small paper published from Trivandrum in awakening the Catholic community to their political rights is significant for our study. He was M. M. Varkey; his paper was Kerala Desam, a four page news comment sheet. The first number came out on 22 March 1924 as a weekly. The aim of this paper was to fight for the rights of Catholics. He started the paper at a time when there were no Catholics in sirkar jobs, there were not many Catholics in Trivandrum and the Catholics outside Trivandrum were not very much concerned about their inadequate representation in the government service. The excerpts from an editorial show how vigorously he advocated communal representation for Catholics:

Many people have apprehension as to whether it is justifiable on the part of Catholics to fight for their own rights as a community, separately. It is our conviction that it is not only just but also our duty. We are sure that whoever studies the political situation in the state cannot but support us. The administration is in a bad shape with the nepotism of the rulers that each one has to defend his rights. Accordingly several communities have prepared their line of action. Even after all these, if some people wish that Catholics must keep quiet, we sympathize with them. (30)

One of the interesting features of the paper was to publish tables every week showing the domination of Brahmin-Nair groups and the inadequate representation of Catholics in sirkar jobs. Some of the tables of Kerala Desam were revealing. This gave the Catholic community the necessary vitality to fight for their 'legitimate' share in government jobs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population in lakhs</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Nairs</th>
<th>Christians</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Posts held</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Nairs</th>
<th>Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts held</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Nairs</th>
<th>Christians</th>
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<td>25</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posts held</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Nairs</th>
<th>Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table VIII

**Catholic under-representation**

**Education Department:** Total Posts 350

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Nairs</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Other Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45838</td>
<td>690495</td>
<td>611312</td>
<td>561622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Post held by each community | 198 | 69 | 5 | 78 |

**Registration Department**

| Post held by each community | 25 | 36 | 1 | 17 |

**Judges**

| Post held by each community | 7 | 7 | none | 5 |

**Government Vakeel**

| Post held by each community | 7 | 4 | none | 3 |

The paper used to give the names of the officials and their salaries too. Its policy was that Catholics would be happy if the jobs are given to anyone in the community. Always their
thrust was "an appeal for justice and fairplay - the grievances of Roman Catholics."

When the government banned Kerala Dasan M. M. Varkey became editor of Dasan and Yuvaharathith subsequently. His aim in the beginning was to awaken Catholics, Ezhavas and Muslims against Brahmins, Nairs and Non-Catholics. He got support from Ezhava leaders like N. Kumaran, C. V. Kunjuraman and T. K. Madhavan. He was arrested on 6 January 1926 for an article entitled "Live and let others live". In his memoirs, he believed that it was the Nairs who were behind his arrest purely on communal basis, that is just for articulating the grievances of Catholics. Varkey's aim was to fight for the legitimate rights of the Catholics through the accepted means of protest. The paper's office became a Catholic centre - where the issues affecting the community were the subject of discussion.

Whenever vacancies arose in the public service, M. M. Varkey was there to fight for the Catholic community's share. Petitions, Memorials, Deputations, resolutions of public meetings were the common instruments to attract the attention of the government and form public opinion. For all these, M. M. Varkey was the pillar for his community. He could urge other papers in Travancore to write supporting the Catholic community's claims. To crown it all, he published a book with all available statistics and details to highlight the condition of Catholics. The pamphlet entitled 'The Public Service of Travancore and the Catholic claims' was widely circulated. The then Dewan Watts had said,
"Wherever I go, I see only the book 'Catholic Claims', whosoever I meet they talk about the 'Catholic Claims'. Who is the wonderful author of this Catholic Claims?"

Catholic community got its reward by this fight. Barrister Joseph Thaliyath was appointed judge of High Court of Travancore. Not only that, many others got opportunity to join the government service.

Could we brand M. M. Varkey as an 'arch reactionary', a 'communalist'? He was a man of his times. What he did was to the best of his conviction that service to his community was service to the country and when all communities get justice from the hands of the administration, the country will progress. The important variable in this struggle was the type of political organisation and its capacity to render justice to all its citizens.

When a community or communities which were suppressed for a long time on ascriptive grounds like religion and if the very same basis is pressed into service to shake off their oppression, serious anomie develop in society. They were expressed in terms of conflicts. The entrenched dominant communities will naturally wage a war to retain the advantages they had enjoyed by opposing the ascendent disadvantaged sections of society. They cannot be silent spectators to the slipping away of their privileges. Grabbing of their monopolised areas by the less privileged will be resisted maximum.

Travancore was no exception when the Ezhavas and Christians began to assert their rights by organising the rank and
Social tensions were evident. We may recall here that the Shanar ladies got the right to cover the upper parts of their body early 19th century only after a series of revolts, many of them ending up with violent conflicts with the high castes.

Similarly, the agricultural and industrial exhibition organised by SNDP at Quilon saw the rising tide of Ezhava self-confidence and dignity. This could not be tolerated by the Nairs. This led to a Nair-Ezhava conflict, around Quilon. The Nair leaders believed that their unquestioned authority in the social sphere were being challenged. They could not tolerate Ezhava women having dressed in the same manner as that of Nair women. Therefore they tore off the clothes of Ezhava women, they were manhandled and raped. Ezhava students going to School could not be tolerated by Nairs. They were beaten up on the public roads saying that they did not give way and keep the required ritual distance. Haripad, Paravur near Quilon and adjacent villages became the hotbed of Nair-Ezhava conflict.

It started on 22 January 1905 and intensified within three months. The SNDP Yogam decided to face it unitedly as a community. Ezhava dwellings were attacked and ransacked by Nairs. Women and children were victims of Nair atrocities. But the Ezhava community more or less stood the test unitedly. That was an occasion when Nair primordiality was raised to the maximum. Sujana Nandini and Kerala Bhushanam press owned by Ezhavas were set to fire at Quilon by the Nairs. Ezhava leaders
like Kumaran Asan urged the community to resist the muscle power of the caste Hindus till they die.

On 19 March 1905, there was a reconciliation meet in Quilon town which saw the end of the conflict between the two communities at least on the surface. However one thing was clear. One community cannot suppress another on religious grounds (ascriptive basis) forever; achievements of individuals and communities must be recognized, respected.

In 1925 the Rani Regent appointed Col. Morris Watts, an English man, as the Dewan. That created quite a lot of restlessness among the upper class. They found out that he was a Christian - that too a Catholic. The question took a religious colour. As Dewan, he had to administer Hindu Temple Devaswams. How could a Christian be in charge of Hindu temples and its properties? The conservatives feared that this was the beginning of alienating the whole state to Christian Bishops and the Pope. It took the form of protests in the columns of papers and finally a protest meeting on 31 March 1925 behind the Trivandrum Secretariat.

The Christians, especially Catholics rejoiced on this appointment, while the Nairs and Brahmans were violently opposed to the action of the Rani. However, there were no violent clashes. He as a Catholic could not do much to favour the Catholics as he was watched closely in the bureaucracy by member of the dominant community. The citizens of Trivandrum gave him a big reception, on 25 June 1925. It was a meeting in which prominent citizens from all communities actively participated.
The importance of this appointment, when communal organisations were active, could be seen as the first important step towards a secularisation process of a bureaucracy and administration in the hitherto theocratic state whose sovereign was the servant of a deity - Padmanabhaswamy. Tensions and conflicts on the basis of religion and primordial loyalties became latent than manifest in the struggle for controlling the resources of the state and sharing its power.

The most important aspect which helped the secularization process was education. The amount of skill or knowledge possessed was an important dimension of status. But the conventional skill and knowledge were not sufficient. The new pattern of education imparted in the schools (vernacular) and the English education secured enormous advantages for their possessors to achieve money, social positions and thereby a new status. The advantages were material as well as social. Those who were educated had the potential to climb in the status axis and get material possessions of a high order.

All the communities considered the new education equally valuable; some discovered it early, others later. This resulted in, by the beginning of 20th century, not an individualistic approach, but a community approach to this new instrument of education. This approach helped the development of educational activities in the state. The NSS as a social reform organisation helped to draw out the Nair community from its own shell of outdated ideas about the superiority of 'peon jobs' in sirkar.
When the change happened in the values, it was translated on the status scale. When they realised that just an entry into lower grades in government will not help in the future, they made a conscious attempt to imbibe the values of trade, commerce and industry. It had a direct bearing to education for the community as well as educational enterprises. Ezhavas too responded to the challenges quickly.

The magnitude of resources mobilized from within the state for investment in education (school buildings, laboratories, libraries, furniture and so on) has very few parallels. If we take into consideration the average income of the people in the state the amount spent by them is something which needs a sociological explanation in terms of status, power and economic mobility. The prospects of getting grants-in-aid, the realisation that their children will get education and could climb in the status scale were incentives. When the Christian communities who were in touch with the CMS missions in and around Kottayam and Nagercoil took advantage of the new educational opportunities; the Roman Catholics realised that they were pushed backward as they lacked educational facilities compared to other Christians. Their status was low in the eyes of other Christians as well as other religious communities as the members of their community could not go into education in a big way.

But, when establishing educational institutions became a norm in the society, the resources for educational institutions were raised through voluntary contributions from a large number
of poor families. Monthly subscriptions from households, both in
cash and kind, helped each parish to start a school. In poor
families, the housewives were asked to save one handful of rice
per day which valued roughly 5 per cent of the consumption ex-
penditure of a poor family and the method was known as '5 per
cent'. The savings were handed over to church every month.

The methods of NSS were not different. They had new
year subscriptions (Vishnu Pirivu), produce subscriptions
(utpanna pirivu) door to door collection in cash. Mannam's auto-
biography records several thrilling experiences of the methods
he adopted to collect money from the first school through the
first college. The SNDP also collected money from common people
to build its schools. When R. Sankar became the General Secre-
tary of SNDP, within a day he collected one lakh of rupees for
building schools and colleges. After a study of education and
economic development in Kerala, Gopinathan Nair comes to the
conclusion that

The efforts made by Christian community, social
organisations like the Nair Service Society and
the SNDP and a number of individuals belonging to
the different communities for raising resources
for starting schools and colleges seem to have
few parallels in the history of any country in
recent times. 100

This mobilisation of resources was possible because the
leadership could touch the primordial feelings of the people
telling them that this is a sure way of moving from the periphery
to the centre of the system. For this the motivation was the
upward mobility on status scale. As a result of this, a new
middle class and a new elite emerged in the three communities and they wanted to protect with zeal whatever they could acquire and expand in which ever way possible. For that too the people and their religious sentiments were the convenient instruments.

Conclusion

Thus, 1920s saw opportunities for Nairs, Ezhavas and Christians to organise and fight for status. Status suggests a range and continuum. We have taken status in the sense Runciman used it when he says,

If we wish to speak of the distribution of status in a large community, or even a nation, then what we mean is presumably the different prestige rankings which people would accord to each other on the basis of their possession or lack of the attributes which merit prestige in the scorer's eyes. 101

The possession of sirkar jobs was the status symbol at the time of the Malayali Memorial. During the period we survey, Nairs developed a feeling that they were being discriminated against by the state administration because the British sovereignty had connections to the local Christians on the religious plane. Although Syrian Christians could have utilized this situation to their advantage they did not take it very seriously in the beginning as they found other avenues in trade, commerce and agriculture. Ezhavas were barred from this status symbol by social, religious sanctions. Therefore, Nairs, Christians and Ezhavas had to fight every inch to get access to the main indicator - the sirkar jobs - which determined social status.
Apart from the social status, economic status too was at stake. By about 1910, among the three communities, Nairs were declining in their economic status, their land was being alienated. Ezhavas were hardworking but they could not make much headway because the possibilities were minimum. As mentioned earlier, social sanctions, lack of resources and an unhelpful administration worked against them. It was the Christian community which was rising in economic status. Therefore, in essence, what continued in the name of communal politics, communal bargaining and communal thinking in Travancore was the problem of levelling the incongruence between social status and economic status. Religion (thereby primordial loyalties) was used as a convenient instrument to achieve an optimum congruence between social status and economic status vis-a-vis other contesting communities or community. This situation gave birth to several organisations between 1900 and 1920 to protect the self-interest of communities.

In the pre-capitalist society, as we noted, the high status index was the government jobs, but when feudalism began to crumble, the status was attributed to economic achievements. Participation in government ensured availability of land, possession of which was a status symbol. But just the ownership of land was not sufficient in the new money economy. Liquid cash, newer economic enterprises and hard work began to be looked upon as pre-requisites for mobility (new status indices). It was inevitable, in this context that the declining Nairs and suppressed Ezhavas began to look up to Christians as their
Reference group.

In this situation 'power' was not an important aspect for Christians or Ezhavas. But for Nairs, power was a latent factor. They were nostalgic about the times when they wielded enormous power.

To sum up, the Nair and Ezhava communities realised that they would be thrown out of the race if some of the reasons for the enviable progress of Christians were not accepted by them also. They identified them as:

(1) The organisational set up. It was based on religious legitimacy but the organisation had important social functions including that of effecting a 'redistributive' balance of material resources on a communal basis.

(2) Ownership of educational institutions as well as the access they offered to government employment. The capacity to make use of whatever came on the way for one's advantage and self-interest.

(3) The initiative and motivation in the harnessing of the resources and facilities which were slowly opening up. Weakening of feudalism provided an ideal setting for the prosperity in newer areas.

(4) The ethics of hardwork; the urge to be successful. This had something to do with thrift; puritan way of life, frugal ceremonies in the families and inexpensive social celebrations. All these summed up the ethics and culture of Syrian Christians which got reward in the newly unfolding situation.

Therefore, the other two competing communities naturally
laid heavy emphasis on these aspects. Sree Narayana Guru, Dr Palpu and Kumaran Asan were the first to recognise the above factors responsible for the success of Syrian Christians. NSS almost accepted in toto the ethics of hard work and success from Christians and Ezhavas.

One question remains to be tackled. The puritanism, the idea of 'calling', individual salvation etc. were the central theme of CMS and LMS missionary work from the beginning of 19th century. The missionaries were the children of reformation in Europe. Weber's thesis of protestant ethic producing 'spirit of capitalism' has validity in Travancore too, for, undoubtedly, the ethics of new preaching produced a new ferment for the development of economic individualism. This was applicable to those communities who came in contact with the new protestant missionaries - viz. Jacobites, Mar Thomites, Anglican (CMS) Syrians and to a certain extent to the members of the LMS church in S. Travancore. But how do we explain the tremendous energies unleashed in this direction by Roman Catholics and later by Nairs and Ezhavas? One explanation is the 'demonstration effect' which M.A. Oommen has advocated; and also the 'reference group' behaviour. While this is true to a great extent, it cannot explain the whole story of the Roman Catholics. One definite conclusion is that they were driven to the corner by other communities and the sheer pressure of circumstances to survive made them to act. Perhaps an equally important explanation is that the Roman Catholics in Kerala, because they belonged to the Syrian Christian community, had the same social
characteristics and outlook like the Jacobites, Mar Thomites and CMS Syrians. But even if we take Roman Catholicism per se, according to Robertson, it had the potentiality to develop 'economic individualism'.

To conclude, the sociological evidences show that the beginning of communal organisations in Kerala had its roots in 'the protestant economic ethic' which preached new status criteria. Here protestant ethic is taken as an analytical category, taken out of its historical context. And in so far as it was assimilated, as Robertson would like to say, 'it hastened the movement towards secularization which Weber believed was the ultimate outcome of the Protestant Economic ethic'.
Notes and References


2. Ibid., p. 16.

3. Ibid., p. 16. "A primitive or 'pre-political' society may mainly express its values in a religious vocabulary, its mobilisational efforts may be based on communal or primordial attachments" says Oommen.

4. This slogan was the title of one of the pamphlets by G. P. Pillai.


7. From the opening sentence in the Travancore Memorial, Ibid., p. 103. The table in the Memorial showed how the foreign Brahmins dominated the services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Monthly Salary in Rupees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malayali</td>
<td>14,36,865</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>14,36,865</td>
<td>1 1 2 1 3 12'18' 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Brahmins</td>
<td>25,224</td>
<td>1 1 1 1 1 2 2 1 2 5 8:26 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian Christians</td>
<td>2,87,409</td>
<td>1 2 1 2 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The right to wear upper clothes for Ezhava women and the lower castes were granted as a result of prolonged agitation in 1859. See R.N. Yesudas, A People's Revolt in Travancore.

Dr Palpu is considered to be the first leader of distinction among the Ezhavas who organised them as a community to get their rights. He and his elder brother P. Velayudhan were denied opportunities in Travancore to study or to get a job. Velayudhan joined the British service and became a settlement officer in South Karnataka. Dr Palpu, when he had second rank in the selection list for medical education in 1884, was not admitted on some flimsy grounds. Then he joined Madras Medical College. After he was qualified, his application for a job in Travancore did not get even a reply. Then he joined the Mysore service. Such bitter experiences led him to think that unless the Ezhavas are organised on their community lines, they cannot achieve status in society. He started publishing pamphlets. The famous one was Treatment of Tivas in Travancore (see P.R. Collections). Some useful references on Dr Palpu are: K. Bhanu, "Doctor P. Palpu, D.P.H.", in S.N.P. Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir Grandham, Quilon, 1963, pp. 27-29; M.K. Sanoo, Narayana Guruswamy, Irinjalakuda: Vivekodayam Printing & Publishing Co., 1976, pp. 150-68.

17 P.S. Velayudhan, op. cit., p. 41.

18 Ibid., p. 45.

19 Ibid., pp. 54-66.

20 Reply dated 1 October 1896 by Dewan Sankara Subbayan, quoted in ibid., pp. 78-80.


22 M.K. Sanoo, op. cit., p. 170. P.S. Velayudhan, op. cit., p. 94. Palipu’s biographers like Pallippattu Kunju-Krishnan (pp. 166-70) and Velayudhan Panikkassery (pp. 94-95) emphasise this aspect.

23 Sree Narayana Guru was born in an Ezhava family, became an ascetic and established a Shiva temple at Aruvipuram in 1883. He began an organisation too for the spirituality of the people in the neighbourhood. His crusade against untouchability and casteism in Kerala has made him one of the top most social reformers of South India. He could attract talented men like Kuraman Asan, the renowned poet of Malayalam in those days.

24 Several ‘communal organisations’ of this nature sprang up later. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam of Pulayas 1906; Vaala Samudaya Parishkarani Sabha 1912 and several others in Cochin and Malabar. See Yogacharitram, op. cit., p. 103.


26 The name of the organisation in the beginning was 'Nair Samudaya Bhuruthya Jana Sangham' i.e. Servants society of Nair community. A year later in 1915 the name was changed to the present one, 'Nair Service Society' (NSS). NSS got its inspiration from the Servants of India Society founded by G.K. Gokhale. See P.K. Parmeshwaran Nair, "Nair Service Society - yude are nouttaandas" (Mal.), Suyaranagrandham, pp. 13-15.

Before Mannam came on the scene Sri Chattampi Swamikal (1864-1924) made a deep study of the religious literature of the Hindus and raised his voice against the existing social order especially against the primacy of Brahmins. He believed that an awakening among other non-Brahmin communities was necessary to check Brahmin supremacy. Commenting on Chattampi Swamikal's work Sreedha Menon says "The activities of Chattampi Swamikal imparted a new life and vigour to the social reform movement among the Hindus and helped a great deal in stemming the rising tide of mass conversions to Christianity". A Sreedha Menon, op. cit., p. 224.


R. Ramakrishnan Nair, Social Structure and Political Development in Kerala, p. 10.

During the reign of Sri Mulam Thunral Maharajah, Lord Wellington and his wife visited Travancore. During the banquet speech he openly appealed to the authorities to do justice to the religious community in which his wife and he were members.

Towards the end of 19th century, there was a large scale movement of people from plains to hilly regions in search of Agricultural lands. The pressure of population was one reason.

Shri Puthupally Raghavan, an intellectually inclined political activist during independence movement made this point in the interviews the researcher had with him. The researcher stayed with him at Quilon during his field work and immensely benefited out of the long discussions held. Sri Puthupally Raghavan's collection of modern Travancore has some rare and valuable materials.

John Pellissey, "Catholic Congress oru sannadha sangam" (Mal) in AKCC Bulletin Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Kottayar, 1973, p. 143. (hereafter AKCC Souvenir). The seeds of it were sown at Mannanam in 1905 by Nidhi-
rical Mani Kathanar and others. Then it was known as 'Catholic Mahajana Sabha'. Since 1907 the meetings were known as Saamochya Sammelana.


In Kerala the papers are grouped according to owner's membership in a community. Christian paper, Nair paper, Ezhava paper or Muslim paper, is a common usage there. This points to an important sociological fact that a Malayali believes that a member of a Nair or Ezhava or Christian community will first protect the Nair or Ezhava or Christian interest respectively. It is not correct to say that they upheld the rights of only the Christians. Both papers spoke for the depressed classes and other communities. It is a significant to note that the first editorial Manorama wrote was about the rights of the Pulayan. Deepika and Manorama supported Malayali Memorial which was led by Nairs. From a perusal of the early copies of these papers, we come to the conclusion that they never said or did anything which will hurt the communal rights of Christians or dislocating the communal harmony. They believed that in supporting the demands of other communities the Christians also stood to gain.


Deepika, 1927 November 14, some other editorials of Deepika in this direction were:

"The present condition of the equality to citizens", 11 November 1919.
"Where is the principle of communal representation", 11 February 1926.
"The Travancore Government's policy of recruitment", 18 February 1926.
"Catholic Memorial to Her Highness the Maharani Regent" 9 March 1926.
"The sorrow of Catholics on discrimination and the sympathy of other communities....", 23 March 1926.

Murkot Kunhappa, op. cit., p. 263.

Ibid., p. 293.

Editorial, 23 May 1894, quoted by Murkot Kunhappa, p. 29.


Ente Jeevitha Smaranakal, p. 126.


N.K. Krishna Pillai, "Thiruvithamcoor Devaswamgalude Dayeneeya Charitram" (Mal.), Karmayugam, pp. 152-53.

If a death occurs in a family, the sudras (Nairs) can enter the temple only after 15 to 16 days. This prohibition is called 'pula'. After 13 days of Mannathu Padmanabhan's uncle's death, he entered the temple for worship and the priests filed a civil suit against the Nairs. This sparked off an interesting discussion about the irrational thinking among the Nairs which has resulted in the degeneration of Nair community. See 'Mannathinte Prasangagal' (Mal.), pp. 19-43 for the court and a review of it. These are now available in Sampoorna Kruthikal.

Ibid., pp. 36-37.


'Ente Jeevitha Smaranakal' in Sampoornakruthikal, p. 119.

Ibid., p. 21.

Ibid., p. 19; Perunna M.K. Ramakrishnan Nair, "Nair Poojikunna Kshetram" (Mal.) in Karmayugam, p. 293.

Sampoorna Kruthikal, p. 235.

Temples could be divided into two categories. The first, for the touchables (savarnas) where depressed communities have no entry. The second was for the lowest castes including Ezhavas where the gods were ugly and ferocious, like that of Muthappan, Chathen,
Madan, Chhamunni, Vankaramadan, Chudalamadan, Poothothan, Isaki, Karinkaali. What Sree Narayana Guru did was to throw out these gods and dedicate in their place gods of the touchables. Prof. P. S. Velayudhan, 'Sri Narayana Guruvum Kshetraastapanavum' (Mal.) in Vivekodayam (Souvenir, International year of Sree Narayana Guru), March 1978, p. 42.

57 Ibid., p. 49.
58 Quoted by P. S. Velayudhan, ibid., p. 44.
60 'Mannathinte Prasangam', Sampoorankruthikal, pp. 83-89.
61 Ibid., p. 146.
62 Ibid., p. 89.
63 Ibid., p. 91.
64 'Ente Jeevitha smaranakal', Sampoorankruthikal, pp. 137-146. Today NSS has plantations of 3500 acres besides irrigated lands for paddy cultivation.
70 Dasabhiman wrote an editorial attacking the hostile attitude of Nairs, vol. 4, no. 38, quoted in P. S. Velayudhan, op. cit., pp. 189-192. However, there were some Nair leaders like Mr Changananacherry K. Parameswaran Pillai who gave their support to the movement when their meeting was held in Trivandrum on 2 March 1918. Freedom Movement in Kerala, p. 283.
Ibid., p. 284.

Ibid., p. 284.

Ibid., p. 285.


Ibid., p. 197. The deputation was dominated by Syrian Christians. The 18 members included 2 Ezhavas and 1 Muslim only. The rest were Syrian Christians.

*Freedom Movement in Kerala*, p. 286.


Back numbers of this paper are available with Shri Puthupally Raghavan at Quilon.

*Kerala Dasan*, 12 April 1924.

*Kerala Dasan*, 26 April 1924.

*Kerala Dasan*, 20 May 1924.

*Kerala Dasan*, 17 May 1924.


*Kerala Dasan*, 20 September 1924.

*Kerala Dasan*, 10 January 1925.

*Kerala Dasan*, 10 January 1925.

M. M. Varkey, op. cit., p. 50.

*The Public Service of Travancore and the Catholic Claims 1931*. AKCC Publication (Puthupally Raghavan collection)

Quoted by M. M. Varkey, op. cit., p. 18.


95 Sampoornakruthikal, p. 238.


98 Sampoornakruthikal, pp. 54ff.


101 W. G. Runciman, op. cit., p. 43.

102 Sampoornakruthikal, p. 114.

103 Robertson prefers 'economic individualism' to "spirit of capitalism". Economic individualism fits closer to our discussion. H. M. Robertson, Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism. New York, Kelley & Millman Inc., 1959, p. XV.

104 Robertson shows how Jesuits secured the reception of new capitalist bourgeoisie into the church in France. Catholics attempted to fit the middle classes into the ecclesiastical scheme. Ibid., pp. 166-167.

105 Ibid., p. 166n.