CASTE, COMMUNITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR MODERN EDUCATION

The social situation in Kerala in the beginning of 20th century showed certain features of continuity from the previous century. However, certain aspects of society gradually changed owing to the activities of various agencies. Many community organizations came into being and they tried to renovate the caste-ridden society with their progressive approach. They tried to enlighten the lower castes. There were progressive movements among the upper castes as well. Modern education appears to have played a major role in this process.

In this chapter it is examined how the common people got modern education negating the traditional ethics, and how the conservative elements of the society reacted against these attempts. The struggle of the lower castes for the achievement of modern education is also examined. The modernization attempt within the upper castes is also considered in this study.

The growth of community organizations and struggle for social justice.

The agonies of the downtrodden necessitated the growth of movements against social evils like untouchability, unapproachability, prohibiting people from entering temples and public roads and denying access to Government jobs and educational institutions.

M.S.A.Rao thinks thus:
“All over the world the under privileged section, whether they are racial and ethnic minorities or low castes and classes, are organizing themselves to fight against inequalities, the discrimination and deprivation. They often violently agitated for the legitimate share in the economic opportunities, educational privileges and political power.”

The Missionaries were the first to raise voice to support social movement like the Breast Cloth Agitation. But the early reforms mooted by the Christian Missionaries, Aryasamaj and others did not satisfy the Backward Classes and felt disappointed with the benefits trickled down from the reform movements led by the Western educated, urbanized Brahmins and other high castes. Furthermore the Backward Class leaders agitated against the upper castes, which had monopolized the use of scarce resources and benefits.

It is widely believed that behind every revolution there is an ideological influence. If the Avarnas had fought for the right to education and freedom of movement, they must have the belief that they deserved the same rights that their Savarna counterparts enjoyed for centuries.

Robin Jeffrey comments:

“Both the Syrians and the Iravas were increasingly resentful of the Savarna Hindus, especially Nairs, in the Government service, and of the civil disabilities which applied in varying degrees to all who were not Savarna Hindus.”

In Kerala the people had begun to organize themselves against the dominance of the Nambudiris and the Janmis. The reverberations of the same could also be felt among the Nambudiris as well. It is obvious that change of

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1 M.S.A.Rao, Social Movements and Social Transformation..., p.31
2 Ibid, pp.9-10
3 N.K.Jose, Vaikam Satyagraha, p.175
4 Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nair Dominance in Kerala, p.116
5 E.M.S.Nambudiripad, Atmakatha, Chintha, Trivandrum, 1998, p.34
any sort is very painful to many people who have established their own norms, standards and concepts of stability.6

So the upper castes were not ready to give up their privileges that they had been enjoying for centuries. Under these circumstances the leaders of various lower communities decided to found organizations to gain what their community had been denied for a long period by the traditional society.

1. The Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P)

Sree Narayana Guru fired the first gunshot against the caste proscription and other discriminations with his founding of the Ezhava temple at Aruvippuram. The upper castes were rather infuriated by this provocative act. But when he told them that he had founded an Ezhava temple, they had to be silent.7

It was written on the walls of the Aruvippuram temple:

"Jathibhetham mathadwesham- ethumillathe sarvarum

Sodarena vazhunna- mathrukasthanamanithu."

(This is the place where there is no caste feeling, or religious intolerance; and it is the model where all behave like brothers.)

There was no caste intolerance in his Ashramam (hermitage)

Guru had allowed the Pulaya children to join his Ashramam. He also had conducted inter-dining (Misrabhojanam).8 He preached that the Ezhavas

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7 M.K.Sanu,Narayananuruswami, N.B.S.,Kottayam,1986,p.120
8 M.Achuthan,Swathantrya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum, Sahitya Academy,Trichur,2003,p.79
should organize themselves and become strong. He also advised them to educate and get cultured. He was also of the opinion that the community should not involve in the production and sale of toddy, which he thought, had lowered the status of the community. His most remarkable advice was to construct schools instead of building temples. For spreading all these ideologies he founded the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam in 1903.⁹

The S.N.D.P Yogam was keen in building schools and other educational institutions throughout Kerala realizing the relevance of education in a society like ours.

The educational activities mooted by the organization were one of the reasons for higher literacy among the people of Travancore and Cochin. A group among the Ezhava people was financially middle class and they attained good education. This made them aware of their social and political rights and made them fight against the social disabilities and raise their voice to gain a deserved position in the society.¹⁰

2. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam

The S.N.D.P Yogam inspired many eminent personalities in forming organizations in their respective communities. Ayyankali was one among them. He founded another organization- Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam in 1907 for the well being of the Pulayas.¹¹

It was quite easy for the Missionaries to convert them into Christianity highlighting the caste evils existing in the Hindu religion. Ayyankali was of

⁹ P.K.V. Kaimal, Revolt of the Oppressed, p.20
¹⁰ N.K. Jose, Vaikam Sathyagraha, p.174
¹¹ P.K.V. Kaimal, Revolt of the Oppressed, p.21
the opinion that the Pulayas and other lower caste people should not change
religion instead they should fight and gain the rights that were denied to
them. As he was a person with high calibre, he was elected to the
Sreemoolam Assembly. There he strongly argued in favour of freedom of
movement, educational rights and Government jobs for the community.12

As a result of the activities of the organizations such as the S.N.D.P Yogam
and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam made their communities aware of their
rights. They began to go to schools started by the Governments and the
Missionaries. As the Governments became less rigid in the caste matters in
providing Government jobs, the lower castes too began to accept jobs that
had not been given to them for centuries.

3. Atmavidya Sangham

The renaissance movement among the Ezhava, Nair communities was very
slow in Malabar.13 This was sometimes because of the fact that the caste
discrimination on the part of the Government was not present in Malabar.
As the British had no interest in maintaining the caste hierarchy, the
Government machinery was not at all supportive of the rigid caste system.
There were lessons in the textbooks against untouchability and other caste
discrimination.

In Travancore and Cochin the rulers had supported caste discrimination in
an open manner. Hence, caste evils were more openly visible and therefore
movements against them had a more aggressive character.

13 E.M.S.Nambudiripad, Atmakatha, p.34
The situation was different in the case of Malabar. The S.N.D.P Yogam and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam were less active in Malabar. Here the social reform movement was carried out, to some extent, by the Atma Vidya Sangham founded by Vaghbhatananda in 1917. This organization was more active in north Malabar. It favoured mixed marriage and mixed eating. To spread the message of the Sangham, he started a magazine called Abhinava Keralam in 1920. He opposed the monopoly of education by a minority group and started a Sanskrit school in 1906 at Calicut, which was open to all communities. The poor were given free education there.

He also supported the National Movement. It is believed that Vaghbhatananda had a role in making the cultural background for the growth of Marxist-Leninist ideology in Malabar.

There were movements within the upper castes as in the lower communities. The main aim of these organizations was the renovation of their respective communities on line with the modern times. The two predominant communities that organized themselves were the Nambudiris and the Nairs.

4. Nambudiri Yoga kshema Sabha

The Nambudiris were indeed the upper caste. But they had suffered many problems within the community. They were not properly educated. The English education was denied to them. The women members of the community were illiterate.

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15 Ibid, p.22
The *Malayala Manorama* wrote in 1905:

“Many (The Brahmins) are following the blind belief they once had. The Mangalore tiles, which had the English letters on it, are untouchable. They should not be used for the temples and the houses of Brahmins, thus say some of the poor Brahmins.”  

Only the elder member of the family was allowed to marry from within the community. All the other men followed *Sambantham*. Some of the members of the community believed that there should be changes in the community according to the change of time.

The *Malayala Manorama* continued:

“They should educate their children according to the need of the time, then this community would develop in many fields. They would be able to protect their property from being taken away from them. It is desirable that the ancient traditions followed by them are modernized and used for the well being of the community.”

To find a way to treat the ailing community, some of the dynamic men of the community decided to found an organization.

This organization (*The Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha*) was founded on the banks of the river Periyar in 1908 during the *Sivarathri*. Kurur Unni Nambudiripad, Chittoor Narayanan Nambudiri and some others were the founders of the organization.

The organization stressed marriage from the same community, widow remarriage, and English education to the men and women of the community and ending the evil of untouchability and unapproachability.

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16 The *Malayala Monorama*, July, 19, 1905.
17 Ibid
It is interesting to see what The Malayala Manorama wrote after a gap of 14 years:

“It is happy to see that this community has adopted the timely change. They (the Nambudiris) have accepted the learning of English language a favourable thing instead of considering it a Mlecha language. They also had believed that learning of English would make them Bhrashtans and the school life with the untouchables would make them stained. But all these have changed a lot.” 18

The organization did not confine itself to the reform activities within the community only. It was a revolutionary organization in the social context of the early years of the 20th century.

On 8th June 1929, the Mathrubhumi wrote about the progress of the Nambudiri women thus:

“The Nambudiri women, who had worn clothes up to their knees, used Marakkuda and worn bangles made of bronze, are escaping from these evils. They begin to read the newsletters such as Yogakshemam and learn about the outer world. They also think that the unmarried women increase and there should be marriage for all male members from the same community. They conduct Samajams. They should be appreciated for the same.” 19

The most important thing to make the community progressive was in achieving good education. V.T.Bhattathirippad had grasped it. This was the reason why he conducted a Yachana yathra to collect money for the school. 20

The progressive faction also wanted the younger members of their community to go after the modern education so that they could get good jobs other than the traditional ones. The Community went beyond that. It had the first widow remarriage in 1934 negating all the customs prevailing

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18 The Malayala Manorama, 8th March 1919.
19 The Mathrubhumi, June 8, 1929.
20 Palakeezh Narayanan (Editor), V.T. Oru Ithihasam, p. 83
in the community for centuries. Umadevi Antarjanam was the bride and M.R.B was the bridegroom.\textsuperscript{21}

The aftershocks of this incident were rather strong. The \textit{Raja} of Nilambur was prevented from entering the Guruvayur temple in 1935 and they demanded a letter of consent from the Trustee of the temple-the Samudiri of Calicut. This was a retaliatory move as he had participated in the widow marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{22}

It is to be noted that during the \textit{Guruvayur Satyagraha}, the progressive faction among the \textit{Nambudiris} had supported the entry of all Hindus to the temple.

\textbf{5. The Nair Service Society (NSS)}

By the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the \textit{Nair} had lost the prominence based on the ascribed right of feudalism and caste.\textsuperscript{23} The community felt that it lost the powers, as it was not united. The other communities had organized themselves. So there was a great attempt to found an organization for the well being of the \textit{Nair} community. The earlier attempts to found a strong organization were not fully successful. To make the \textit{Nairs} a strong community to regain the importance once it had enjoyed, an organization was founded in 1914 under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan. The activities of the Nair Service Society brought about the joining of different

\textsuperscript{22} C.Uthamakurup (Editor), \textit{Mathubhooniyute Charithram}, Vol.II, P.67
The other aims of the organization were:

to bring unity to the Nair community, uniformity in the customs and traditions, reform the customs, enhance the educational activities, renovate the Harijans, and cement communal harmony.25

The Nair Service Society had struggled its best to end the caste problems within the community and other evils relating to marriage. The most remarkable role played by the N.S.S was the attempt to end caste discrimination.

Mannath Padmanabhan toured all over Kerala at the time of the Vaikom Satyagraha to declare that the Nair community was in favour of the temple entry of the lower castes. The Government had spread that the upper castes were opposed to the same.

The organizations that came in to being in Travancore were rather communitarian. But at the same time the British regime in Malabar was opposed on the basis of political issues. More over the Indian National Congress had not supported the National Movement in the princely states in early days.

In Malabar the real enemy was not casteism, but the oppressive rule by the British regime. So the national mood and anti British mentality were less in Travancore and Kochi than in Malabar.

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25 M.Achuthan, Swathantrya Samaravum Malayala Sahityavum, p.81
In Travancore, the *Nairs* were rather community oriented, but at the same time, they were more political in Malabar.26

**Struggle for Modern Education.**

Many factors were responsible for halting the progress of education in Kerala. Casteism was the most important among them. If the different castes were not allowed to sit or talk together how could it be possible to have education in general schools?

The lower castes were almost sidelined by the upper castes. But with the formation of a number of caste organizations, the social upliftment of the downtrodden was materialized. In Kerala, as we have already seen, there were social movements led by many eminent figures such as Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Chattampi Swamikal, Vaghbhatananda etc. They were eager to bring about progressive changes in the society.

The caste structure had successfully blocked any progressive outlook. Education being an important ingredient in bringing about major changes in the society, the lower stratum of the society was deliberately denied this right. The upper castes with astounding powers suppressed them with the iron hand and the traditional code of social behaviour.

All other religions except the Hindus had educational establishments attached to their religious institutions. The non-Hindu communities had their church schools or *Madrassas*.27

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27 P.R.Gopinathan Nair, Universalisation of Primary Education in Kerala, p.5
The Muslims got their initial education from the Madrassas, and the Christians from their Churches and the Missionary schools. At the same time the Hindu community was stratified and a greater section of the community did not have access to the majority of the common schools except those run by the Missionaries. Until the formation of the social organizations such as the S.N.D.P Yogam, the lower castes had been suffering much from the upper castes in their move for the attainment of education. They had only access to the Missionary schools.

Kumaran Asan laments thus:

"We were prisoners here, the prisoners without committing any crime. The employees now are the children of the then officials or their grandsons. During those days the Government provided education free. At the same time we were driven out of the school."

Many of the social reformers were of the opinion that education should be open to all. Chattampi Swamikal was bitterly opposed to the Brahmanical domination over education and rituals. He argued for Vedic education to be open to all.

The higher castes were aware of the fact that if the lower castes were educated, they would not come under their control.

K.K.Kusuman writes:

"The higher caste people gradually changed their tactics and began to concentrate their attention on several other aspects of social life. They were opposed to imparting education to the depressed classes. Educational institutions continued to be the monopoly for the higher classes. The children of the backward classes were kept off from these institutions. There were several complaints which caused much

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29 K.K.N.Kurup, Nationalism And Social Change the Role Of Malayalam Literature, Sahitya Academy, Trichur, 1998, p.39
head ache to the authorities and the higher castes this opposition movement
gathered momentum under the Ezhavas.\textsuperscript{30}

The Ezhavas were a predominant caste in Travancore. But they had to suffer
much on their way to achieve modern education. There is an interesting
description by P.K.Madhavan in the biography of T.K.Madhavan about caste
discrimination that existed then:

"In my class there were a number of children. The teacher was called Asan. He used
to teach us properly. We were not allowed to mingle with the other children, as
they would get polluted. The Asan himself observed strict caste rigidity. The
punishment was rather cruel. He used to punish the children with a cane. He would
beat them until he was tired. No one was allowed to cry loudly. The lower castes in
the class were not touched by the Asan for the fear of being polluted. So there was a
method to punish the lower caste children. The Asan would take the cane and throw
it towards the lower caste child. This technique was called as Trinahadi (beating
by throwing the stick). He was an expert in this technique. If he had touched the child,
he should have to bathe to cast away his impurity."\textsuperscript{31}

Even the school classrooms were caste ridden. There were different pots for
the Brahmins and non-Brahmins to drink water.\textsuperscript{32}

Even after the beginning of the activities of Sree Narayana Guru, and the
founding of Ezhava temple at Aruvippuram, the status of the Ezhavas
continued to be disturbing.\textsuperscript{33}

Guru advised his men thus:

"The important temple should be the schools. If you collect money for any purpose,
the prime thing must be the construction of schools."\textsuperscript{34}

The decision by the Government to allow the lower castes to the schools was
taken only in the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The teachings of Sree

\textsuperscript{30} K.K. Kusuman, Slavery in Travancore, p.68
\textsuperscript{32} P.Narayanan Nair, \textit{Ara Noottantilude}, Sahitya Academy, Trichur, 1999, p.37
\textsuperscript{33} C.K.Moosad, \textit{Kelappan Enna Maha Manushyan}, N.B.S., Kottayam, 1982, p.52
\textsuperscript{34} M.K.Sanu, \textit{Narayanaguru Swami}, p.253
Narayana Guru were important in this context. He taught the Ezhavas to educate themselves and get enlightened.

Divan Sankara Subbhayyan of Travancore ordered that if the Ezhavas really wanted to enter the schools they could begin their own schools. This was a brilliant attempt by him to not to pollute the Government schools. Only two schools were founded following this plan. One was at Paravur and the other at Mayyanad. It evidently conveys the message that the Government too had supported caste discriminations. However, in 1907 it was decided to permit the low castes to be admitted in the schools in Travancore.

In Trivandrum College also the students did not sit together for the fear of being polluted. The Nairs sat in one corner, the Brahmins in another.

While studying in Kayamkulam, T.K.Madhavan and others had to walk through the streets. They were about eight students, all his relatives.

They were neatly dressed. The Christians, the Hindus and the Muslims did not like them. They called them Kottis, Chilantis etc. The experience at school was the same. The students of the other communities were not at all friendly to them. That was the atmosphere at the markets and the English school. This was because of the fact that the school had only recently been opened to the Ezhavas.

Ayyakutty was an Ezhava Munsiff. He too had suffered from caste discrimination even when he was a student. Once he had been thrown out of a cart while on his journey to Trichur. A Nair police constable pushed out

35 C. Kesavan, Jeevitha Samaram, Prabhat, Trivandrum, 1999, p.35
36 T.H.P. Chentharassery, Ayyankali, p.65
37 C. Kesavan, Jeevitha Samaram, p.217
38 P.K. Madhavan, T.K. Madhavante Jeevacharithram, pp.35-36
Ayyakutty and two others from the cart. One of them was beaten up.39 After getting an appointment in the judicial department, even the subordinate staff behaved according to caste hierarchy.

In Kochi the Thiyyas were admitted to the schools and were given fee exemption. In Travancore the Thiyyas were given no job in the revenue department. In Kochi it was decided that in future only the Ezhavas and the Valas would be given the job of Parvathyas. This was released through a circular.40

The Girls’ education was also a problem. The Ezhava girls had not been permitted to enter the girls’ schools.41

In Malabar the situation was a little different. The Thiyyas in Malabar were more in number than any other community.42 Even though there was no restriction to the admission of children in Government school, many schools did not follow the guideline.

The Zamorin College, Calicut had not given entry to the Ezhavas and other low castes. The only college where the Thiyyas had no permission to enter was the Zamorin’s College.43

There were reform movements in the Muslim community in Malabar as well. The socio - educational movement in Malabar was begun under the leadership of Sanaulla Makti Thangal, Hamadani Saikh, Chalilakath Kunhahammed Haji (1855-1918).

39 C.Kesavan, Jeevitha Samaram, p.176
40 Kumaran Asan, Gadyalekhanangal Vol.II, p.261
41 Ibid, p.11
42 Ibid, p.413
43 Ibid, p.415
The method of learning the Arabic books by heart was strongly opposed by Kunhahammed Haji. He called up on the people to learn Arabic as a language and learn it like Malayalam. He tried to rearrange the Arabic alphabet so that one can pronounce it properly. In the schools the habit of using crayons, bench, board, table etc. was begun by him.

He had to leave the Vazhakkad Madrassa since he taught Malayalam there as a subject. Chalilakath Kunhahammed Haji, his disciples and children were responsible for introducing modern thought among the Muslims of Malabar. He sent his girl children to the schools and there by played a role which V.T.Bhattatirippad and others played in their respective communities. They had tried to bring their women from the kitchen to the stage.

Sanaulla Makthi Thangal resigned his job and participated in the educational activities. He advised his community to become familiar with the education system of the British and tried to rearrange the education system according to this view. It was due to his propaganda that the Government took initiative to consider Arabic as a subject in the Government Schools.

In Travancore, it was his activity that made the government to post Muslim educational inspectors and Qur-an teachers.

In those days the Harijans were not all admitted in the schools in Malabar. E.K.Nayanar gives the following incident on admission in a school. A few Harijan students came to the school with some Congressmen. Nayanar’s
father and uncle strongly criticized those who wanted the Harijan students to be admitted. The Savarnas lost their temper.

They beat the children and warned that if they reached the school they would be killed. Next day, there was a mob in front of the school. M.P.Krishnan Nambiar and K.P.R.Gopalan were among them. They challenged the Savarnas to attack the children once more.

E.K.Nayanar’s father said:

“Look, what unfortunate things are happening! The Pulayas and the Parayas are going to learn in schools with our children.”

His father lamented:

“It is intolerable. What a hue and cry if the Pulayas are driven out of the school! These rascals would ruin the country.”

On the third day K.Kelappan brought the children to the school.

The ‘father’ in this part represents the upper caste belief about the caste rigidity.

Sree Narayana Guru preached that there should be only one religion, one caste and one god but the disciples were against this slogan in practice. Whenever Guru wanted to admit the Pulayas to the Ezhava schools, the leaders of the community opposed it.

The condition of the Pulayas and other slave castes was also appalling.

Though they were supposed to be terminally free, injustice and inequality continued. The low classes were denied access to public offices and

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46 E.K.Nayanar, Pinnitta Vazhikal, p.3.
47 Ibid,p.4
48 M.K.Sanu,Narayanaguru Swami, p.242
educational institutions. The Pulayas were unapproachables even in the bazaars and the markets.49

In 1915-16 there was a violent incident in Neyyattinkara.50 At Neyyattinkara Ooroottambalam, some Pulayas went to the girls' high school to admit some girls there with the permission of the department. The Nairs physically prevented them. This became violent and the same resulted in rebellion in the taluk and in near by taluks.51

If one untouchable was admitted to the school, the school would become polluted and thus the Nairs would also be polluted. The same day at Oorroottambalam junction, there was a confrontation among the Pulayas, Nairs and the Chakkala Nairs. There was much loss in the strife.52

The struggle for education by Ayyankali reflected the realities of the times. He had to meet the challenges of the upper castes physically. He took a brave decision: If their children were not admitted to the schools, they would not go to the fields.53

Thus for the first time the struggle for the right to education was linked with economic issues as well. When they were not given permission to enter the Government schools, they started schools of their own. The first school for the untouchables began in Venganur, but had only a short period of life.54 They could not withstand the pressure from the upper castes. Nevertheless this was a radical event. Till then the schools were started either by the

49 K.K. Kusuman, Slavery in Travancore, p.60  
50 M.K Sanu, Narayanaguru Swami, p.235  
51 Kumaran Asan, Gadyalekhanangal Vol.II, p.362  
52 T.H.P. Chentharasseri, Ayyankali, p.75  
53 Ibid, p.66-67  
54 Ibid, p.52
Government, Janmis or by the Missionaries. This traditional code was broken for the first time.

In this context, the Christian Missionaries opened the doors of their educational institutions even to the lower castes. They were aware of the problems of the downtrodden. So they put before these groups the opportunity for education and social equality.

The Missionaries, who had actively taken part in the social and educational activities, changed the society much. The lower castes who took refuge in Christianity and those who refused to embrace Christianity felt great changes in their thought and belief.55

The entry of the Avarnas was not forbidden in places where the Government restrictions were not applicable like the Missionary Schools, the press etc.

This freedom was an indication of the downfall of the feudalism in Kerala and it was a major factor that facilitated the emergence of Sree Narayana Guru, Dr.Palpu and also responsible for the bringing up of Pandit Karuppan and Ayyankali.56

Gradually the Schools were opened for the Thiyyas and other communities. They began to learn with increased enthusiasm. The jobs were also open for them.

It is believed that the spread of modern education gave impetus to social revolution.57 With the spread of education, the educated middle class

55 M.K.Kumaran, R.Sankar, p.49
56 K.N Ganesh, Kerala Samoohapadanangal, p.39
57 Mannath Padmanabhan, Jeevitha Smaranakal, p.106
dominated the social arena. This was particularly visible in Travancore. The growth of education of each caste and their ability to acquire Government jobs were complimentary. The English education and the Government jobs created a middle class also among the Thiyas as socio-political control of the English made the people adopt the new system of education. The people all over Kerala were attracted towards this new system of education.

In Malabar, majority of the Nairs and the Brahmans did not go after the English education. They feared that the destruction of the Hindu society was imminent and with that the destruction of the social, cultural, moral and spiritual values of the society too.

The activities of the Basel Mission gave the opportunity of all people irrespective of castes to get in to the schools. They brilliantly utilized the caste proscriptions and tried to convert the people in large scale. The majority of the converts came from the suppressed class. The workers of the Basel Mission factories belonged to lower castes. Due to untouchability, they were not allowed to walk along the main road, use the public well, or involve in other things. Education was denied to them. This advantage was utilized by the Missionaries to convert them to the Christianity.

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58 A.Sreekara Menon, Kerala Samskaram, p.231
60 K.K.N. Kurup, Athunka Keralam Charithra Gaveshana prabanthangal, p.21
61 M.P. Sarojini Amma, p.83
62 K.K.N. Kurup, Athunka Keralam Charithra Gaveshana prabanthangal, p.21
63 Universalisation of Primary Education in Kerala, p.14
64 K.K.N. Kurup, Athunka Keralam Charithra Gaveshana Prabanthangal, p.22
65 R. Prakasam, Keralaithile Trade Union Prasthanam, Prabhat, Trivandrum, 1979, p.9
The most important thing regarding the untouchability was proselytization. Nowhere like the Travancore-Kochi had witnessed the large scale proselytization.\textsuperscript{66}

M.Sahadevan writes:

"The work of the Missionaries was instrumental in bringing into affect the principle of equality before law at best in respect of dress, in the case of the untouchable and in arousing the consciousness of rights among the low castes."\textsuperscript{67}

To reduce the high castes to the level of the low by bringing the social system crashing down was by no means the Missionary aims.\textsuperscript{68}

To protest the clandestine aim of the Missionaries, the upper castes sent their children to some other schools in some places, for they had aversion to the Missionary schools.\textsuperscript{69} Even though the children of the lower castes were admitted to the schools in Malabar, their number was limited. There were very few low caste pupils in the D.M.R.T School at Tanur in the 1930s, even though they had not been denied admission.\textsuperscript{70} They feared the caste Hindus very much. A.C.Kannan Nair writes in 1932 that he went to the Board school for admitting the lower castes. Not even a single child turned up. As the Harijan students were admitted many upper castes left the school.\textsuperscript{71} This was the response of the upper castes. But it was a temporary phenomenon. Most people began to accept the new atmosphere as desirable.

When the Thiyyas took part in the Government jobs, their position of being the untouchables began to subside in Malabar. In the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{66} Mannath Padmanabhan, Jeevitha Smaranakal, p.106
\textsuperscript{67} M.Sahadevan, Towards Social Justice and Nation Making, p.18
\textsuperscript{68} Robin Jeffrey, The Decline of Nair Dominance in Kerala, p.50
\textsuperscript{69} K.K.N.Kurup, Peasantry, Nationalism And Social Change In India, p.106
\textsuperscript{70} Interview with Sri. Assainarkutty, Tanur.
\textsuperscript{71} K.K.N. Kurup, A.C.Kannan Nair Oru Padanam, Bhasha Institute, Trivandrum, 1985, p.63
The National Movement and the Struggle against Caste evils.

Fight against social discrimination became an agenda of the Indian National Congress only in the 1920s. The activists from the lower castes themselves sowed the seeds of the struggle. If T.K.Madhavan had not raised the issue of untouchability in the Kakinada meeting of the Indian National Congress, there would not be a programme for the congress against untouchability.

Gandhiji was not in a position to approve mixed eating or mixed marriage. But he was supportive to begin a movement against many caste evils. The Congress grasped the gravity of the situation soon and thus a decision was taken to fight against it. There were organized movements and isolated attempts against caste cruelties.

A. Organized Movements

To end caste discrimination, the Indian National Congress planned a strong movement. The three Satyagrahas spearheaded by the Indian National Congress in this connection received greater attention not only in Kerala but also other parts of the India.

When the Non-Co-operation movement of the 1920s was withdrawn, the Indian National Congress gave importance to the struggle against the caste

72 K.K.N. Kurup, Athunika Keralam Charithra Gaveshana Prabanthangal, p.23
73 Ibid, p.24
74 N.K. Jose, Vaikom Satyagraha, p.24
75 Ibid (preface), Nitya Chaithanya Yati, p.20
76 A.K. Gopalan, Ente Jeevithakatha, Chintha, Trivandrum, 1987, p.35
evils. So Vaikom Satyagraha, Guruvayur Satyagraha and Paliyam Satyagraha were conducted in Kerala. These movements gained maximum attention from the masses. People from all walks of life jubilantly participated in these movements since it was widely believed that social emancipation was the first step towards political emancipation.

1. The Vaikom Satyagraha

In February 1924, there was a meeting of the Indian National Congress in Kollam. The meeting adopted the resolution that efforts should be made to open all the temples to all Hindus; all schools to be opened to the backward castes. It was also decided to fight against any restriction on the lower castes in traveling along the public roads.77

The lower castes had not been allowed to walk along the roads of the Vaikom Siva temple. The Vaikom Satyagraha was intended to grab this right. To prevent the right to movement for the lower castes, the Government argued that the upper castes were against this.78 The endal was considered to be a ritual that the community, the Government and the court had accepted.79 This was the conservative ‘justification’ for the continuance of the system.

Leaders like K.Kelappan, A.K.Gopalan, Krishnapillai etc. led the struggle, which was totally Gandhian in practice. This struggle brought the common

78 Mannath Padmanabhan,Ente Jeevitha Smaranakal, p.113
79 N.K.Jose, Vaikom Satyagraha, p.83
people together with the Indian National Congress. The movement was so attention grabbing for the people with the spirit of nationalism.

When Gandhiji visited Vaikom, the struggle got a new dimension. When he asked the Savarnas that if there was any document to prove that the Avarnas could not be allowed in the temples, the Indian Thuruthi Nambudiri and other Savarnas quoted the Sankarasmruthi by Sankaracharya.

But it was well known that Sankaracharya had not written the Grandha. There were no documents to prove that the temple entry should be denied to the lower castes. At the end of the Satyagraha, the Government agreed to open some of the roads around the temple for the Avarnas. But in the case of other temples the Government was unwilling. In 1924 the political leadership was not in a position to do anything remarkable in this respect.

2. The Guruvayur Satyagraha.

The Badagara meeting of the Indian National Congress passed a plea to all the Devaswams and the Hindus to allow all members of the community to enter the temples. The Bombay session of the Indian National Congress, which was attended by K.Kelappan, gave permission to begin the struggle for the entry of the lower castes to the temples all over Kerala.

The K.P.C.C in 1931 decided to hold Satyagraha at the Guruvayur temple where the lower castes were denied access.
The Satyagraha was begun on November 1 of 1931. The leaders of the movement were K. Kelappan, Moyarath Sankaran Nambrar, A.K. Gopalan, P. Krishnapillai etc. There was a strong propaganda throughout Malabar.\textsuperscript{87}

The significance of the Guruvayur Satyagraha is that it was an important agitation by the Indian National Congress after it had suffered setback in the Non Co-operation Movement. There was a referendum in Ponani Taluk to know whether the people supported the movement. The astonishing result was that majority of the people had supported the entry of the lower castes to the temple. The Trustee of the temple, Samudiri, closed the temple to cool the spirit of the Satyagrahis. The Indian National Congress had to withdraw the movement without winning the goal, but it brought about tremendous change in the minds of the common people.

The temple entry proclamation by the Maharaja of Travancore in 1936 was a milestone in the history of the movement against caste evils. It was a shock treatment to the ‘mad house’ of Swami Vivekananda.\textsuperscript{88} The temple entry was not an unexpected event. It happened when no other options were available.\textsuperscript{89}

According to him the reasons for the temple entry proclamation were:

1. The activities if the S.N.D.P Yogam and the Ezhava community and their protest, agitation and threat.

2. The generosity of the Maharaja

\textsuperscript{87} Perunna, K.N Nair, Keralathile Congress Prasthanam, P.73
\textsuperscript{88} N.K. Jose, Kshetrapravesana Vilambaram Oru Padanam, p.2
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, p.3
3. The attempt to alienate the Ezhavas from the Christian-Muslim nexus.

4. The inclination of the Ezhavas toward other religions.  

The factors mentioned above might have contributed to the temple entry proclamation in a big way. At the same time the political inevitability can’t be ignored. The Government felt that the united movement by the people belonging to every caste and religion would become a threat to the stability of the Government. So the Government put forth the decision to allow entry of all castes in the temples.

Even though the temple entry proclamation was made in 1936, the situation in Kerala remained by and large the same. It was only in 1946 (October 16) that the Lokanarkavu temple was opened for the Harijans. On 2nd June 1947 Gandhiji and some Harijans entered the Guruvayur temple ending proscription on the lower castes that existed for many centuries.

3. The Paliyam Satyagraha

Even after the temple entry proclamation by the Maharaja of Travancore, the situation in some places of Kerala was not much different in maintaining caste evils. So Paliyam Satyagraha can’t be considered less important in the history of the many struggles against caste discrimination.

Even in the middle of the 1940s the roads in front of the Paliyam temple were not open for the lower castes and non-Hindus. A memorandum was submitted to Paliyath Achan. But the response was not at all positive.

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90 Ibid, p.11  
91 K.K.N.Kurup,A.C.Kannan Nair Oru padana.m,p.143  
92 C.K.Moosad,Kelappan Enna Maha Manushyam,p.133
There was no alternative other than holding a mass movement. C. Kesavan inaugurated the *Satyagraha* on 4th December, 1947. The Paliyath family approached the court. The *Satyagraha* was banned. But ignoring the court order the struggle continued. In the struggle M.G.Velayudhan became a martyr in the police atrocity. The press note issued on March 5, 1948 said that the people of Cochin were not at all interested in the movement and alleged that some people from Malabar were responsible for the trouble.

The Paliyam *Satyagraha* was conspicuous in such a way that it attracted many people in large scale.

The members of the Kodungallur *Kovilakam* also took part in the struggle. In the freedom movement in Kerala *Paliyam Satyagraha* has an important role as the *Vaikom Satyagraha* and the *Guruvayur Satyagraha*. But many eminent historians have ignored the relevance of this movement.

They have given greater importance to the *Vaikom Satyagraha* and *Guruvayur Satyagraha* eventhough both were not successful in a broader sense. But the *Paliyam Satyagraha* was led by the lower castes themselves and was a complete success.

### B. Isolated Attempts

Apart from conducting organized mass movements there were also isolated attempts at certain areas against caste pollution. Persons and organizations

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94 Ibid, p. 86
95 Payyappilli Balan, *Paliyam Samarakatha*, pp. 110-11
96 Ibid, p. 114
97 N.V.P.Unithiri, Prologue to *Paliyam Samarakatha*, p. 3.
98 Payyappilli Balan, *Paliyam Samarakatha*, p. 167
took up these struggles. Even though they never appear as important events, they paved the way for many localized struggles.

In those days mixed eating by different castes was not allowed.

But the feast at the time of the marriage of T.K.Madhavan was a mixed one. Many of his Nair friends wanted that the feast had to be in that way. They were nationalists.99

Palakkad in Malabar was an area where existed strong caste disparities. There were a group of people namely Nayadis in Palakkad. They lived in the slopes of the hills. They used to come down for alms. They were the most downtrodden of all the castes. Even sight of Nayadis might cause pollution. It was a great sin to see them on certain days. So they cared themselves to keep away from the sight of the Savarnas.100

The Kalpathi Agraharam in Palakkad was a strong castle of casteism. Only the Savarnas were allowed to enter the Agraharam or in the vicinity of it. Activists from the Aryasamajam had held a movement against this discrimination without success.101 As a result of the caste evils, many of the Hindus mostly belonging to the backward castes embraced other religions. Many Ezhavas were converted to Christianity and Islam.102

In north Malabar, the situation was similar to that of Palakkad. In 1928 the lower castes were not allowed to walk along the Madiyankulam with an

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99 C.Kesavan, Jeevitha Samaram, Prabhat, Trivandrum, 1999, p.222
100 Kesavadev, Ethirpu, p.184
101 Ibid, pp.179-80
102 C.Kesavan, Jeevitha Samaram, pp.190-91
umbrella. One man was beaten up for doing so. His Olakkuda was destroyed. There were sparks of fury against this atrocity.

In Malabar also the lower castes raised their voice for the right to freedom of movement. In 1927 there was a meeting in Calicut in the chairmanship of Gandhiji. It was held at the Paran Square. An organization namely *Kerala Anthyajodharana Sangham* was founded. C.Krishnan was the president and Kelappan the secretary. There were brutal attacks on them by some anti social elements. As a protest, a meeting was held under the leadership of K. Madhavan Nair. It was decided that the lower caste was to be called as the *Adi Keraleeyar*.

A decision was also taken to form an organization called *Adi Keraleeyar Sangham*. By 1933 the situation was that the Savarnas were unable to prevent the entry of the lower caste in some of the temples.

Cherukad describes a remarkable incident against casteism. Even though there were temptations, the Cherumas were not ready to enter the temple. They believed that the ghosts would kill them all if they polluted the temple. At last Kulavan was ready for that. But when he reached near the temple he lost his courage and sat on the ground. They had to compel him further. He was bathed in the temple pond, sandal paste was smeared all over his body and a new dhoti was supplied. At last he entered the temple; and later a meeting was held in the vicinity. All these activities were conducted by

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103 K.K.N.Kurup, *A.C.Kannan Nair, Oru Padanam*, p.25
104 T.H.P.Chentharassery, *Ayyankali*, p.188
105 C.Kesavan, *Jeevitha Samaram*, p.189
106 Cherukad, *Jeevithappatha*, p.165
Palolli, Pulamanthol Pisharath Kunhukuttettan and one or two Nairs. The caste Hindus got infuriated. \textsuperscript{107}

In Malabar a poor man, Chami said these words, which he would never have uttered about twenty or thirty years before:

"The untouchability will soon disappear, Thampuran. Have n't you heard what the Swami has said?"

In addition to this Chami also talked about Kumaran Asan. \textsuperscript{108} Even though the Indian National Congress held Satyagrahas and other isolated attempts for the entry of the all Hindus to the temples, the status of education of the lower castes, as we have seen, remained dismal. The efforts by the Congress to amass support to fight the caste evils were remarkable. But at the same time there were no organized attempts by the organization to ensure the entry of the downtrodden to the schools all over Kerala. As the Congress did not lead a movement for mass education in Kerala, it was definitely a setback in the attempt to achieve mass education.

We have seen that the situation in Kerala improved much in the approach towards caste discriminations, addressing social grievances and mass education. Among these factors, the influence of mass education was remarkable, since it shaped the soul of Kerala society in the later years. As the study is about Malabar, it is necessary to go deep into the development of education in Malabar.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, p.76