CHAPTER I

STRUCTURE AND CHANGE IN KERALA

In our country, we have often had several movements occurring simultaneously in different regions affecting different segments of society. The movements were collective attempts to bring about social change to create / preserve new social orders. When the structure of a social entity is transformed for any reason, the ideology also is affected.

All human thinking and action is determined by social forces. Social institutions are created historically and developed historically, but they are constantly tested by socialisation when they will be taken over and legitimated by new generations¹. Consecutively institutions are created. But institutions disappear when there is no repetition of everyday life and maintenance of already set patterns. Society could be conceived as a social system made up of a number of mutually dependent components that exist in a relative equilibrium. Changes in one part may necessarily lead to changes in other parts. The totality of change, more often than not, tends to be gradual or incremental.

Generally, societies change by evolutionary or revolutionary force or at times by means of both. This social revolution denotes the sudden or abrupt change in the customs, behavioral patterns, values etc. of a society. In this process the beliefs, attitudes and habits of the general public are completely changed. The entire social structure or organization undergoes considerable change and modification as a result of which the pattern of social institutions, classes, states and creations etc. are greatly changed. Change is real and inevitable.

¹ Heine Anderson and Lars Bo Kaperson, eds. Classical and Modern Social Theory (Malden, USA, 2000), p. 185.
The nineteenth and early twentieth century was a great turning period which changed the face of Kerala far more than did the preceding thousand years. A new era set in Kerala which witnessed the emergence of the society quite different. Kerala experienced an intellectual revolution or renaissance during this period which totally changed the outlook of the people. Religious, cultural and ideological as well as economic issues lead to important dimensions and conflict in the social order. This period witnessed the formation of a consciousness about the identity of Kerala in all areas of social endeavor. The nature, direction and momentum of these changes constitute the basis for the introduction of an alternative system of beliefs and re-structure of social institutions.

This great transformation first took place in Bengal and the process of development followed more or less the same way everywhere in India. During this period of less than a century, Indian history was evolving from the medieval to the modern age\(^2\). The spirit of rationality generated a deliberate revolt against beliefs and practices, which existed solely upon the sanction of the ages, unsupported by reason and argument. Rationalism involves the replacement of traditional beliefs and ideas by modern knowledge\(^3\). S. Radhakrishnan remarks:

"When traditionally accepted beliefs became inadequate, nay false, on account of changed times, and the age grows out of patience with them, the insight of a new teacher, a Buddha or a Mahavira, Vyasa or Sankara supervenes, starring the depth of spiritual life".\(^4\)

A new ideology certainly burst forth upon the Kerala society. It gave birth to a critical attitude towards religion. The striking character of this period was the replacement of blind faith in current traditions, beliefs and


conventions by a spirit of rationalism. The spirit of rationalism proclaimed supremacy of reason over outside authority. It brought new conception of social justice and political rights.

During this era, Kerala experienced a structural transformation. This can be attributed to the culmination of social factors in social movements. These movements were basically reformative in nature and proved to be an onward rationalist movement. They were in fact a gradual evolution culminating, in the national movement for independence.

The period concerned witnessed the emergence of reaction and interaction of numerous subjective and objective forces, which developed within the Kerala society under the condition of colonial rule. This process from nineteenth century to the early twentieth century has been a period of social process of renaissance, social reform and national struggle.

The revolt of mind against the tyranny of dogmas and traditional authorities, beliefs and customs is the first requisite for freedom of thought and conscience. This lies in the root progress in social, religious and political spheres of life. So the progress in all these different areas of activity is independent to a certain extent. In Kerala this spirit first manifested itself more in religion and social ideas. This appeared to be an unprecedented awakening in the socio-religious life of the country.

During the colonial rule, Kerala society experienced a social transformation. Western education, Capitalism, change in land ownership patterns, creation of legal institutions introduced a change in the outlook of people. Many intellectuals too emerged on the scene. Several factors were at work for this social transformation and the emergence of a new social order. The renaissance in Kerala was not an accidental phenomenon. It developed gradually through different movements of reforms and changes. Any transitional stage is something different from a stage that precedes as well as the stage that succeeds. New relationships were evolved by the
interaction of the old with the new. It is from the colonial stage that Kerala had to begin its process of transformation to a new social system.

Even in the nineteenth century, Kerala was subjected to Colonial hegemony. On the eve of the British subjugation she was politically scattered, socially decadent and economically stagnant. The British subjugated Kerala for economic exploitation and for other imperialistic purposes. The colonial regime produced degenerative and regenerative social forces. Here emphasis is given to the social process of regeneration. The generative force behind the series of social and religious changes in Kerala was colonial modernity: In Heera Sing's perception, the interaction between non-European, pre-Colonial, pre-Capitalist structures and European colonial Capitalism has been a two-way engagement, a process of negotiation between the two, marked by accommodation and compromise.\(^5\)

Undoubtedly, Kerala did undergo a fundamental transformation during the colonial period. The evolution of the internal structure and institutions of the economy and society of Kerala as well as social and political movements occurred as an integral part of this development.

The economic, political and social interventions of the colonial power radically altered the caste based social structure of Kerala. Social structure here refers to the ways people were related and interdependent. The pre-colonial society of Kerala is taken as the point of reference for discerning transformation.

Though the Malabar district of Madras Presidency, Cochin and Travancore remained administratively separate from one another in the colonial phase; the general structure of society and religion did not seem to have any sharp distinctions. The social practices and religious beliefs of nineteenth century Kerala were ridden with the inequalities of power, status and material privileges. The Hindu religion seemed to have degenerated in

to a compound of magic, animism and superstition. Polytheism and idolatry turned religion in to ceremonious ritualism.

The religion and society of Kerala has also changed greatly over the centuries. Here, over two thousand years ago, the Tamil speaking people developed a fairly advanced civilization independently of the Aryan north. During this period, Kerala remained a part of an area sharing the same language and cultural activities. The entire South India was referred as to 'Tamilakam' by the Sangham works as well as contemporary foreign accounts. Gradually Keralites broke away from the Tamilians, a process undoubtedly encouraged by their geographical situation. In the course of centuries we developed our own culture, in the process extensively absorbing Aryan elements from the north, as well as Arab and European elements from the west. These influences affected the language and religion of the Keralites.

A silent revolution was taking place in the socio-religious system of Kerala during the last phase of the Sangham Age. It was a landmark in the formation of the agrarian society of Kerala. The simple tradition of the tribes became extremely complex as the people migrated to the other parts and turned in to settled agriculturists. The rapid increase of the new ideologies with the emergence of Buddhism, Jainism, Brahmanism, Christianity and Islam shook their tradition and became extremely complex. In the wake of socio-economic transformation, the heterodox religious ideologies themselves underwent major changes and got reconstructed more or less in idioms of pre-existing tradition.

The post Sangham socio-religious formation is the one, which became dominant in Kerala, in the ninth century and continued practically

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7 Ibid. p.46.

unaltered until the beginning of British colonisation. The earliest impulse for the transformation of tribal polity and society into a civilised one came from the Mauryan contact, by Asoka’s scheme of sending Buddhist missionaries to propagate Dharma. Overseas Roman trade in the early centuries of the Christian era paved the way to the next stage of development. Large herds of Roman coins discovered from Kottayam and Eyyal in Kerala and a place like Coimbatore outside Kerala testify to it. This contact eventually caused the growth of small Jewish and Syrian Christian pockets in the harbor towns of Kerala. Arab contacts were very ancient and Muslims were noticed in Kerala in the ninth century. Some of the witnesses in the Syrian Christian Charter had signed in Kufic an old Arabic script and their names would suggest that they were Arabs and probably Muslims also. These connections created a continuous flow of commodities and cultures.

The formation of organised Brahmin settlements in Kerala in the ninth century must have been the result of a slow process of migration from time to time. Usually the whole of Kerala was covered by a network of temple-centered Brahmin settlements. A combined administration of knowledge, institutional support, division of labour and ideology was essential for the formation of such settlements. The Brahmins had great knowledge and this enabled them to be a dominant community in Kerala. People govern themselves and others through the production of knowledge. The Nambootiris (Kerala Brahmins) gradually got dominance as the advisory committees of the Kings. The final stage of Brahmin domination coincides with the rise of Kulasekharas. They were the patrons of Brahmanism in Kerala. Large numbers of temples were constructed and Namboodiris became powerful and influential. The Brahmins attained a position of primacy in social and religious matters. Manipravalam works testify to the dominant position of the Brahmins in contemporary Kerala society.

10 Ibid.
The Nambootiris stood out distinct from the rest of the society, confident of their elite position and prestige as religious leaders. They appropriated economic power almost in the same period. In fact the dissolution of the older system in Kerala, took place under the impact of a new type of economy based on the agricultural expansion and the development of Nadus. Only surplus produce could support full time administrators, professional soldiers, priests, craftsmen and other similar specialists who do not produce their foods themselves. Surplus plays a key role in the formation of class and a new type of power structure called the state. Class is taken to mean such groups of people as either owners of the means of production or those dispossessed of these. In the initial stages of social development, dispossession of the fruits of production becomes a prelude to class formation.\footnote{Sharma R.S, Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India (New Delhi, 1983), p. XVI.} Intensification of inequalities in the distribution of the surplus accelerates class formation, and unequal ownership of the primary sources of livelihood finalises it.

In a food producing set up producers and users of the produce establish various forms of relations with one another and keep the productive system going. The production forces cannot be easily detached from production relations. The process of the unequal distribution of the fruits of booty and those of production became pronounced and marked the beginning of social stratification.

The final stage in the development of society is marked by the emergence of class and state. Initially, the state emerged out of gross inequality in the distribution of produce. Later it was dominated by those who managed to obtain the greater portion of land, labour and other basic sources of subsistence. Unequal distribution culminated in unequal access to the sources of livelihood.
At the beginning of the twelfth century, the land of Kerala was governed by dozens of Naduvazhies under a feudal system which went by brahmanical codes of morality. A self-regulating social system organised in terms of communities prevailed and managed the affairs. The higher-ups in the hierarchy monopolised the juridico-political matters by tradition. The juridical conventions and the administration of justice were primarily based on Sastraic jurisprudence institutionalised as ‘Desamaryada’ or local conventions. Since the Brahmins were the hegemonic group with enormous economic and cultural control, their Vedic Sastraic-Puranic adaptation constituted the chief tradition of wisdom for representing the socio-political processes. Knowledge generated power by constituting people as subjects and then governing the subjects with the knowledge. The technologies that are derived from knowledge are used by various institutions to exert power over people. There is a link between knowledge and power.

An important characteristic of the Hindu society of Kerala was the observance of the caste system which made the social life of the vast majority of the people miserable. This social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. The caste system that had stratified communities on the basis of inequality was part and parcel of the economic pattern of Hindu society in the pre-colonial period. The primitive communist society of Kerala was replaced by a system which divided the society into castes. First in to three or four then it became dozens and scores. Religion had been a central factor in the culture of Kerala since the beginning of its formation. As an ideology, religion played an important part where the caste system progressively established here.

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Caste based social order was the creation of the age-old Hindu religion.\textsuperscript{15} Caste is not the growth of a single age or even a few centuries. It assumes different characteristics at different times. Caste structure goes out of inter-relationships between groups. The institution of caste based social stratification was a major effect of the sastraic-puranic mode of representation of the hereditary social division of labour.

In the division of labour, superior castes were specialising in honorable, lucrative jobs and inferior castes in humble, menial jobs. Division of means was done according to the status and need of each caste. In this dispensation all caste groups received their portion of the material benefits. Thus carpenters, smiths, barbers, washer men, ploughmen all got their share of the produce to help them stay alive, at a reduced rate. Interdependence was the essence of separateness in the caste system. Here caste and occupation went together and a man was born not only into his caste based profession but also into his employer's hands as well.\textsuperscript{16}

Caste was the central institution of Kerala society in the pre-British period and it governed the behavioral patterns and values. The earliest direct observers of caste system in Modern times were Portuguese adventurers, administrators, merchants and priests who visited the Malabar Coast and had direct experience with our society. In many respects, European accounts for the next three hundred years do not progress than their reporting.

The institution of caste evolved gradually during the post-Sangham period. Though the caste system in Kerala had some peculiarities of its own it was the version of Brahmin-centered Varna-caste system that prevailed elsewhere in India. The main concern of the dominant section was to avoid the danger of admixture of blood, and to keep the division of labour based

\textsuperscript{15} Francis, Day, \textit{The land of the Perumals of Cochi 'its Past and its Present'} (Madras, 1863), p.298.

on the dividing practices of the caste system intact. The life activities of the
individuals were externally determined by the customs and codes which
prescribed each and every act of the individual from birth to death, without
leaving any space for free will. With this, the freedom and equality of the
entire society which is the characteristic feature of primitive communism
disappeared. Every individual belonging to a particular caste was equal to all
members of the caste while every caste was superior or inferior to another
caste. Every advance in the ever-changing chain of division of labour led to
the emergence of a new caste, or sub caste within a caste.

Kerala has its own peculiarities in the evolution of class-caste society.
Only one of the four Varna - the Brahmins-had become part of Kerala Hindu
society. Many of the ruling families belong to the next one the Kshatriya
caste. But the bulk of the people who carried on the warfare, the professions
of Kshatriya were drawn from outside this caste. The traditional warriors of
Kerala, in historical times, are non-Kshatriyas.

The third caste Vaisya is totally absent from the caste hierarchy of
Kerala. Sandesakavyas, depict the social history of the medieval period.
There is no direct, mention of Vaisyas except in Chathaka Sandesa in which
the streets of the Vaisyas at Padmanabhapuram are described.\textsuperscript{17} The non-
existence of any caste whose traditional occupation is trade in the Hindu
society of Kerala is significant. The people who perform the function of
Vaisya caste-the Jews, the Muslims and the Christians-were outside the
Kerala Hindu society even in historical times. At the same time there were
minute divisions of caste and sub-caste for each minor occupation.

The purity pollution dichotomy, which distinguished between the
Brahmins and the untouchables non existent in the earlier period, got well
established later in history. During the early medieval period, Kerala society

\textsuperscript{17} Muraleedharan M.T, “Kerala Society as Reflected in Sanskrit Sandesa Kavyas”,
\textit{Abstracts of International Congress on Kerala Studies} Vol. 3 (Thiruvananthapuram,
had three main divisions: Brahmin, non-Brahmin and Paniyalar. With the expansion of agriculture, the scattered villages were formed under the leadership of Namboodiris including various professional groups. It was necessary for the villages to have groups of separate profession. In course of time, these separate professional groups accepted the established tradition and became separate castes and sub-castes. The composition of the Sudra caste varied from region to region and their role was also different. Later, the amalgamation of the existing local cultures also took place and the picture became far more complex.

The main stress on the ordering of caste appears to have been the division of society in to Savarnas and Avarnas in Kerala. The Savarnas were in control of powerful positions and the Avarnas were more or less working for them. Those castes at the bottom of the ritual scale were generally at the bottom of the local economic scale as well. Thus the ritual degradation and material deprivation and dependence reinforced each other. It had been this combination of religiously based social discrimination and isolation with economic disadvantages which had given the institution of untouchability its sting and its staying power.\(^\text{18}\)

From the point of view of precedence, the Namboottiris were at the apex. They stood at the top of the traditional social hierarchy emphasised caste loyalties, and caste assemblies. The Namboodiris being the land owners were freed from the need of working for a living and their main pursuits were religion and literature. They even moved unmolested between enemy kingdoms.

The Kshatriyas were placed next to them. Kshatriyas of Kerala differ vastly from those in the other parts of India. The Aryan Brahmins accepted the rulers and the martial sections as Kshatriyas. There are different sections and sub-sections among the Kshatriyas of Kerala. Several sub-castes

\(^{18}\) Robin Jeffrey, et.al. eds. *Indian Rebellion to Republic: Selected Writings 1857-1990* (New Delhi, 1990), p.266.
emerged among those who were directly or indirectly related with the temple below the Kshatriyas. The daily routine of rituals in the temples ensured employment to a large number of people - priests (Brahmins), musicians, dancing girls, teachers, clerks and accountants and functionaries of various kinds. The castes that stand in between the Nambootiris and the Nairs were all together called Antarala jatis. Though they did not enjoy equal status with the Brahmins, they belonged to the Savarna section of the Hindus, performing a particular job which is connected with the Temples or was of service of Brahmanism.

The Nairs were at the bottom of the caste-Hindu scale (‘Savarna’). They acquired economic and social status after the ninth century. They are noted for their martial tradition. The Nairs were designated as sudras, but in reality they enjoyed the status of Kshatriyas. Barbosa points out:

“...the Nairs have no other duty than to carry on war ,and they continually carry their arms with them ,swords, bows, arrows, bucklers and lances”.

They all lived with the Kings and some of them with other lords, relations of the kings and lords of the country and with the salaried governors. These people accompany their lords day and night. Throughout the history of Kerala they had formed the bulk of the fighting community and many of them controlled the local administration and cultivation process. There were many sub-castes among them. Their number is large and religion is more purely animistic than that the castes above them. They did not read the Vedas as part of their traditional caste-duties.

Ezhavas or Thiyyas were another important caste that emerged in Kerala society in the medieval period. The Ezhavas are mentioned in

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20 Ibid.
Tharisappalli Copper Plate as labourers.\textsuperscript{21} The Syrian Christian Copper Plates of the thirteenth century, records that the traditional occupation of Ezhavas was toddy tapping. Barbosa also observes that, the traditional occupation of Ezhavas was planting and tapping coconut trees. Some of them learned the use of arms and fought in the wars when it was necessary.\textsuperscript{22} In course of time a group of Ezhavas of Northern Kerala took to armed training and they came to be known as ‘Chekavar’. They were given due respect by the society as is evidenced from Vadakkan Pattukal. Thiyyas or Ezhavas form the most numerous Hindu communities. They were below the Nair caste in terms of ritual status. The Ezhavas and other equivalent castes were considered out castes by Savarnas who practiced untouchability against them. The Ezhavas or Thiyyas considered the slave castes and the aboriginal tribes of Kerala to be polluting castes. A striking feature of the Ezhava caste is that there were within it, men of learning in Sanskrit as well as Ayurvedists and Astrologers.

We get inscriptive references about various sub-castes. The Kottayam Syrian Copper Plates of Sthanu Ravi Varma, the Veera Raghava Copper Plates of the thirteenth century mention about the professional groups.\textsuperscript{23} The artisan castes were called Kammalas -Kallassary, Asari, Musari, Kollan and Thattan. Vaniyas and Chaliyas became other professional groups. Another polluting caste was Kanisan (Kaniyan) was consulted to foretell lucky days and lucky hours, casting horoscope and explaining the causes of calamity. Mannans and Vannans (washer man class) were indispensable to the higher castes in certain purifactory ceremonies like ‘mattu’.

The next to be noticed is the caste formation of agrarian slaves. They were at the lowest level of the society. They were, in all probability the

\textsuperscript{21} Narayanan M.G.S, \textit{op.cit.}, p.34.
\textsuperscript{22} Barbosa Duarte, \textit{op.cit.}, p.137.
\textsuperscript{23} Narayanan. M.G.S, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 91.
aborigines. The main representatives of the agrarian serfs were the Cherumans and Pelayas. The Pelayas were not slaves at the time of Kulasekharas. The Parayas, Vettuvas or the Panas who were the poets and minstrels of the Sangham period belonged to this caste. They constituted the labour force. Nearly all the rice land cultivation was carried out by them. These people ate carrion and beef. So they were looked upon as equally impure like Muslims or Christians.

The growth of agrarian society led to the growth of caste structure that broadly corresponded to the growing division of labour. This system of many occupationally specialised caste is possible only in a relatively simple and stable economy where the occupations necessary to. The society's continuance are limited in number and do not require a high degree of technical skill. This brief reference of the social order which stratified communities on the basis of inequality was part and parcel of the economic pattern of Hindu society even in the colonial period.

Relation between castes is expressed in terms of pollution and purity. There was a recognised scale of distance at which members of each of the polluting castes must stand from a man of higher caste. In Kerala all the castes including the ruling caste were untouchable to the Brahmins. Bodies of all the other castes except those of Brahmins were considered as having an inherent polluting effect. The lower the castes, greater was the pollution. Because of this, all the caste, including the lowest ones observed the custom of untouchability. The concept of untouchability was based not on the direct physical touch of the bodies, but on the polluting effect of the body and the relative purity of the body polluted. The laws of pollution lay down that the outcaste should not come anywhere near the Namboottiri at all. The distance that the bodies of the lower castes had to keep from the upper castes to avoid pollution was stipulated as follows:

From the Brahmins

Kshatriya -- 12 feet
Nair -- 24 feet
Kammala -- 36 feet
Ezhava -- 48 feet
Paraya -- 60 feet

When walking along the road, the man of higher caste utters a warning grunt or hoot to persons of any lower caste, who thereupon retire to the necessary distance. The concept of pollution assumed serious dimensions and came to be applied not only in the relation between different castes in Hindu society but also in the relations between Hindus and non Hindus. Ibn Batuta observes about the conduct of the Hindus as follows:

“..... they do not allow the Muslims to touch their vessels or to enter in to their apartments, but if any should happen to eat out of one of these vessels, they break it to pieces”

The caste rules operated in the most irrational manner. The triple defilement practices of untouchability, unapproachability, unseeability were observed by people at all levels of Hindu society. Though the Savarnas did not permit the low caste Hindus to approach them without feeling themselves polluted, no such distance pollution was associated with the Christians and Muslims; but their touch was considered polluting.

There were externally identifiable castes significant too. The style (mode) of clothing, the shape and position of the tuft of hair and the differing style and material of the ornaments functioned as the caste marks of the bodies. The clothing of Keralites even in the beginning of the twentieth

The 21st century was prescribed by customs with striking differences based on caste and sub-caste identity. Clothing functioned as a sign-system to signify caste of the individual. One would wear a cloth to one's waist strictly limiting the lower end above the knee-joint or up to the knee-joint or above the ankle or stretching down the ankle. Kanippayoor Sankaran Nambootiripad states that nobody could violate this custom as it was equal to the violation of one's caste identity which would cost one one's life.

There is also 'ceremonial pollution' / 'contact pollution' / 'distance pollution' at the intra-caste level. Women were regarded as polluted and as conveying 'atmospheric pollution' during their monthly periods and after delivery. A death or birth in a family entails pollution on all members of the 'tharavadu' and of those connected families. These types of pollution have to be removed by prescribed ceremonies ('Vannathimattu').

In the caste, sub-caste society of Kerala, the nature of relationships between the male and female bodies was controlled and channeled for the reproduction of the caste bodies without upsetting the system. The actual marriage ceremony among the Nair and the Ezhava castes was the tying of the token of the wedlock ('Thaklikettu Kalyanam') around the girl's neck which was performed at a very early age. But their actual customary sexual union with males was not considered as significant to be ceremonial, especially in the matrimonial joint family. Veli - the Brahmins sacred marriage - was the only form of marriage in which the female and male are united ceremonially. The Nambootiris developed a very specific custom of marriage relation within their caste. In their anxiety to preserve undivided the Brahmaswam lands, only the eldest son of the head of the family was permitted to contract a marriage. The permission was extended to the second son when this was necessary to secure succession. The practice of

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28 Kesavan C, Jeevithasamaram (Mal.), (Kottayam ,1968), pp.105-111.
30 Rajeevan B, op.cit., p. 50.
Sambandham (concubinage) of the junior members of the Brahmin family was observed with the lower caste women (not below the Nairs). The junior members could not bequeath property to their children or even maintain family.

The lower castes were expected to follow the code of behavior according to which they may not do anything which will raise them above their ascribed position in life. They should not dress in a style superior to that of their status nor could they have a residence better or bigger than the houses of the others. They were not permitted to take Sanskrit names, and there were rules that governed the words that could be used in conversation with persons of status-superior castes: for example, the use of the first person singular was not permitted (it had to be "this slave" or "this inferior"), a person of an oppressed caste could not refer to "my money" but to "copper". They should not own land or take to new and more remunerative services except those which are customary. The untouchables and other inferior castes that formed the lowest layers of the caste-ridden Kerala society were further debarred from the right of using the public wells and tanks. The use of approach roads to temples was denied to them.

The three political units, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar began to be influenced by the new systems of administration established by the British in India. Education was an area where a lot of changes came with the transfer of power to the British. It is essential to understand the dynamics of relationship between education and colonialism in order to understand the development of education under colonial rule. Education in Kerala is designed by the colonial powers to legitimise their domination and to serve their own economic needs. Economic and political control over Kerala was essential for the survival of colonial rule and education was used to achieve this goal. Attempts were made to develop, through education, a new set of values and justification of the colonial rule. Education loses its independent
identity and becomes subordinate to political power. Even though, Colonial education, no doubt, brings changes and social transformation here.

New ideas undoubtedly enrich the existing sphere of knowledge. The real beneficiaries of colonial education were a select few who had a specific role assigned by the colonial rulers in the continuation of the colonial hegemony. Colonial education meant for better control of the colonial country rather than its development. The ultimate outcome of this policy is the desired objective to 'control' not to 'change' the colonial country.

The indigenous pre-British education suffered from caste discrimination. As in the other parts of India, in Kerala also, education meant Sanskrit education - philosophical, technical and artistic. Brahmanism claimed the authority over Sanskrit. But it is interesting to note that in Kerala, in spite of the rigid caste system, the common people kept the light of Sanskrit learning lit by Jainism and Buddhism.  

Although the Hindu rulers and Namboottiris of Kerala denied the right to education to the lower castes and outcastes, they were unable to prevent people from learning Sanskrit since it was already prevalent among them. The non-Brahmin cult of Sanskrit among the common people remained intact even when they crossed over to other faiths. The Ayurvedic tradition of particular Ezhavas, the Christian and Muslim community is an untenable evidence to prove this historical fact. Some main types of traditional schools were the ‘Ezhuthupalli’, the ‘Kalari’ (school of martial arts) and the Vedic schools. There were also Madrasas for Muslim students. These were pre-modem non-secular schools. Vedapatasalas and Sabhamutts organised at the

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32 Ibid.
33 Ayyappan Prof. A, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village (Bombay, 1956), p.105. Hortus Malabaricus, 12 Volume Latin work was compiled with the help of natives. Itty Achuthan was the most important one who was an Ezhava.
household level meant for the education of Brahmins.\textsuperscript{34} The Vedic and Sastraic knowledge was the monopoly of the Namboottiris. “There were temple centred institutions called Salais for Vedic cum martial learning accessible only to the Namboottiris”\textsuperscript{35}

Ezhuthupalli and Kudippallikoodam meant for the education of non-Brahmins. ‘Kudippallikoodam’ or village schools were organised like formal schools. They were run in separate schools with a teacher paid by the community. Transmission of knowledge in hereditary trades was the responsibility of the ‘Jati’. They undertook to train their youngsters their respective traditional vocation.

The elementary school’s curriculum was secular in approach and responsive to practical needs to rural people. Indigenous education has been based on rot learning; and even in the second half of the nineteenth century, books and papers were not used in these schools.\textsuperscript{36} Children wrote on sand, rice grains or, when they were better at writing, on palm leaves.\textsuperscript{37} These traditional schools functioned as pre-primary schools even in the beginning of the twentieth century. Children were educated in these caste-based schools, before they went to non-traditional schools. The state had little or no role in school education though Kings would patronise people famous for their learning.

Traditional system of learning was disrupted and dislodged in the colonial period and supplanted by a new system of education. The Christian missionaries did the spade work in the field of modem education. In 1813 the British Parliament permitted European missionaries to enter the country

\textsuperscript{34} Parameswra Ayyar S. Ulloor, \textit{Kerala Sahitya Charithram} Vol. 1, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1970, pp. 40-41.

\textsuperscript{35} Narayanan M.G.S, \textit{Aspects of Aryanisation} (Trivandrum, 1976), pp.21-42.

\textsuperscript{36} Kesavan C, \textit{op.cit}, p.29.

\textsuperscript{37} Sankaran Namboothiripad Kanippayoor, \textit{op.cit .}, p.174.
under the new system of licensing. This eventually threw the entire subcontinent open to missionary activity. It was during the British hegemony that the Christian values directly opposed the caste-ridden society of Kerala. The principle of equality and a concern for others in the Christian gospel contradicted the Hindu idea of inequality of man implicit in caste. The objective of these organisations was of course to evangelise the people of Kerala. But in practice their activity took on the character of movements in educational and social reform.

One of the main social activities of the missionaries in Kerala was the founding of schools for the backward classes. The establishment of schools was mainly an outcome of the Protestant missionary activities. The mass base from the Protestant missionaries came from the oppressed castes, the Channars Pulayas and Ezhavas. Missionaries were fully aware of the fact that educational work was a necessary pre-requisite to their religious work. The motive of the missionaries was to get access to the indigenous society through education and to propagate new cultural values which would help them in conversion of people to Christianity.

The missionaries asserted the right of people of oppressed castes to modern education. Mission schools were the only schools to which the people of oppressed castes had access. Samuel Mateer, the nineteenth century missionary writes:

"Let (the educational class of Travancore) take a decided stand against the social evils of caste. Let them make an attempt in real earnest to raise the masses by primary education and by a few firm and resolute measures against the cruel oppression of the poor and helpless; and a solid

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and general advance in national prosperity, power, and happiness will speedily be evident to the world”.

The missionaries began the efforts at female education right from the start. Certainly the school courses were biased towards the teaching of Christian theology. At the same time the secular subjects like Geography, Arithmetic were part of primary school curriculum. Instruction in missionary schools was in the vernacular i.e., in Tamil and Malayalam. Missionary activities were also linked with the establishment of dispensaries and hospitals though their basic object was to attract people to Christianity. Modern schools in Kerala were first established by the Christian missionaries and later by the state. The introduction of modern education was needed to break the chains of caste-slavery during the colonial age.

The introduction of modern western education created an upward movement to different castes in Kerala. Missionary education was a fine opportunity particularly for the Avarnas. They preferred less wealthy classes than the predominant. As a result of this, slowly the hitherto neglected section came to emerge in socio-political spheres asserting themselves in social and liberal movements. Traditional society had known only hereditary specialisation of caste exclusiveness.

The modern western education affected a change in traditional informal learning in the context of caste to a formal methodical teaching of western models with prescribed syllabus, printed translation and writings. Subjects like Physics, Chemistry and History taught in missionary schools had tremendous influence on the Hindu thought and challenged the traditional view. These new things which were not known to the traditional society spread informally to the areas surrounding the schools. Education proved to be a dynamic agent of social change for low castes.

Before the arrival of missionaries in Kerala, the Government did not take any interest in the field of education for low caste people. In 1817 a Royal Rescript, addressed to the Diwan Peshkar at Quilon was issued in Travancore, which was written by James Munro. The Rescript was remarkable because it declared universal education, paid for by the state, to be an objective of state policy. Several schools were established in the nineteenth century by the CMS missionaries. In spite of upper-caste opposition, the missionary effort had the support of state power in Travancore and Cochin particularly during the time of Diwan Munro.

But the progress of education of the depressed classes in Malabar was not satisfactory. The chief hindrance in the way of their education is ignorance that did allow them to elevate themselves out of their position of serfs. However the credit for having laid foundation of western education in Malabar area goes to the Basel Evangelical Mission. The Government of Madras introduced a plan for improving education among the Muslims and started separate schools for them. It was too difficult to induce the orthodox Muslims to take to secular education. The orthodox Muslims and the Namboottiris were themselves responsible for their educational backwardness. In short, in the field of education Kerala went ahead of other provinces in the country.

However the educational facilities were mainly restricted to the upper caste Hindus and Christians. Caste prejudices kept backward communities away from Government schools. They were tied to their hereditary occupations under the caste obligations. Thus, literacy was limited to the upper caste. The English education that developed under colonial sponsorship totally ignored the importance of mass education. In the new education the emphasis was to educate a select few. Subordination of education to political power made the basic object of their educational policy to strengthen colonial rule. The colonial administration was keen to promote

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an educational policy which served its own interests. New schools and colleges were established to promote learning. New social, political and economic ideas came through the channel of western education. The Nambootiris who possessed a higher social status began to send their children to English schools only after the formation of Yogakshema Sabha in 1909.\(^{41}\) But the Christian Missionary schools admitted all irrespective of caste or religion.

The backward and depressed castes realised the importance of education. Christians with the benefits of education emerged as the middle class and established their hold over the monetised economy, and the Ezhavas also improved their position gradually. The Thiyyas were among the first to join the Basel Evangelical Mission’s institutions in Malabar and a significant minority had subsequently worked their way in to the colonial administration as Tehsildars, Lawyers, Pleaders and Sub-Judges and up to the ranks of Deputy Collectors.\(^{42}\) Though there were colleges in Kerala the non-caste Hindus (Avarnas) were denied admission till as late as 1918. They went to Madras for a University education.

But these healthy developments produced certain counter forces -the awakening of communal feelings among all sections. The Backward castes realised that their emancipation was possible through consolidated and collective action along caste /religious lines. Western education and learning carried with it free expression of opinion and critical evaluation of policies and personalities. The empowerment of these groups made the elites realised clearly that caste mobility was essential for individual or familial mobility. The result was the rise of socio-religious movements like Malayali Memorial and Ezhava Memorial at the end of the nineteenth century and the


formation of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and Nair Service Society at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The newly emerged educated middle class among the lower castes realised that the backwardness of the society of Kerala was due to the ignorance of the people. They pointed out that education was a must to enlighten and awaken the masses against oppression and exploitation. The spread of education became essential for overcoming their economic and social backwardness. To them, education became the means to secure a just share of political power and representation in the civil service. It became an instrument of emancipation from the social and economic subjection which the caste system had imposed on them.⁴³

There was no doubt that the new education broadened the horizon of knowledge. The revival of socio-political consciousness and the crusade against traditional evil social practices were simply the outcome and the impact of educational growth. The establishment of printing press and easy availability of books removed the traditional barriers and made education accessible to more people. Along with education, the Missionaries bestowed special attention on evangelical work among the backward classes in Hindu Society. “British western attack resulted in a reinterpretation of Hinduism at both ideological and institutional levels, and the conversion of the lower castes (especially Harijans) to Islam and Christianity was an important factor in producing a changed attitude among the Hindu elites towards caste and untouchability.”⁴⁴

The colonial period in Kerala witnessed an awakening among the non Brahmin castes and it led to social mobility among them. The spread of education made the lower castes conscious of the importance of overcoming their economic and social backwardness. They began to criticise the age old

⁴⁴ Sreenivas M.N, *op. cit.*, p.50.
traditional and cultural practices. Traditional customs, practices and beliefs were subjected to the scrutiny and those which could not stand the test of the new philosophy and science were condemned and discarded.

The impact of modern education and intellectual interface was a critical long term force in the making of the new mentality and it emerged in the nineteenth century. This renaissance mentality was conspicuously different from the pre-colonial period. This mentality aimed at a synthesis of tradition and modernity. The result was a new point of view, a new set of values that emphasised religious experiences and reform as well as secular literary expression.

Critical awakening was not only a secular cultural phenomenon but a religious reformation also. Socio-religious forms and literary-artistic movements formed one organic whole. The culture of the renaissance was deeply indigenous and modernity in Kerala was not a weak and distorted caricature of models from the west. It was a synthesis in which the ever changing Kerala civilisation successfully absorbed new elements. In the light of modern knowledge, Kerala looked back critically on her past and recreated herself by synthesizing the elements selected from the past and her selective borrowing from the outside. The Renaissance movement accommodated the elements that were novel and identifiable as western. Western impact was primarily an element that accelerated changes which were affecting the Keralites.

The impact of western education on regional language – Malayalam - is significant. A striking feature of this period was that the Christian Missionaries introduced Malayalam as medium in their primary schools. Malayalam had become a powerful vehicle for social reform and patriotism. No doubt, what people write and the way they write can partly be explained in terms of the shape of the polity and economy they are situated in. A major formative influence for the development of ideas and ways of thinking in the
nineteenth century was the dialogue between the Western and Kerala culture that began with the development of modern education.

Writers in Malayalam turned their attention from religious writings to secular writings. New models for creative literary activities were accepted from the West. The colonial agents encouraged the growth of regional literature by setting up printing press, cutting types for various Indian scripts, compiling dictionaries and producing grammar texts and translating classics in the regional languages into English. It should be noted, that even before this there had been a record of Catholic missionary activity in connection with printing. The Jesuit missionaries who came in the wake of Portuguese navigators and traders set up the first Printing press in Goa in 1556. The first Printing press was setup at Kollam in Kerala in 1578. Catholic missionaries issued printed works in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They translated the Bible, wrote Christian Puranas, and compiled grammar and dictionary in Malayalam. But it was only in 1821 the first printing press in Malayalam language was setup in Kerala - C.M.S Press, under the initiative of Rev. Benjamin Bailey.

The introduction of printing brought about many sided changes in the life and thought. The books and journals along with schools made possible the transmission of modern as well as traditional knowledge to large number of Keralites. Knowledge was now thrown open to all disregarding caste differences which has been the privilege of a few hereditary groups.

The written word as a cultural factor became increasingly important and influential during the course of the nineteenth century. Press was introduced as a part of their moral obligation to bring enlightenment to the

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backward subject people of India. They realised that Indian languages were the most efficient way to spread their ideologies in colonial India. Newspapers were started both in English and in Indian languages. Some form of moral education remained the central concern of this colonialist venture. Early newspapers in Malayalam, *Rajya Samacharam* (1844) and *Paschimodayam* (1847) are started by Basal Mission with this motive from Nettur near Thalasseri. *Rajya Samacharam* was for the Christian religious propaganda and *Paschimodayam* for spreading general awareness and scientific knowledge or colonial education to Malayalees.48

*Western Star* (1860) and its Malayalam version *Paschima Taraka* (1864) were the pioneers in newspapers. The other prominent newspaper of this period included *Keralapataka, Sandishtavadi, Keralam, Sathyandakahalam, Nasrani deepika, Kerala deepakam, Thiruvithamkoor Abhimani, Keralachandrika and Keralamitram.*

The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was aimed at curbing the freedom and expansion of Indian language press. Most of the journals stopped their publication. The earliest measure of repression on Malayalam press was on *‘Sandishtavadi’* by the Travancore Government for its severe criticism on state administration. In the beginning of the twentieth century the press was matured to perform its functions. It stood at the forefront of progressive social reform and political movements. Through their columns they made the people conscious of the importance of education as a step towards social reform and transformation.

The influence of English on Malayalam literature marked ferment in poetry. The English romantic poetry influenced the Malayalam poets. Their ideology was based on love and liberty. Sacredness of love is highlighted against casteism, inhuman evils and customs. Malayalam developed as a standard vernacular brought social leadership to the educated middle class.

48 Raghavan Puthuppalli, *op. cit.*, p.46.
By this means, the middle class could seize leadership of the social and cultural movements of colonial Kerala and later on of political movements as well. In the hands of educated middle class, the new vernacular prose became the medium of rational, scientific thought. Thus the stage brought a new dimension to Malayalam literary activity in the nineteenth century. Malayalam evolved from the old to the new.

The notion of justice which was allied with that of reason was a new characteristic of modern literature. The individual with his conscience emerged. Conscience extended from the religious sphere to social protest. Conscientious protest evolved eventually in to political nationalism. The love inspired protest expressed in Veena Poovu by Kumaran Asan. The romantic spirit of the period was also manifested in poems like Asan's Nalini (Oru Sneham) and Prema Sangeetham of Ulloor. The literature of this period popularised political freedom and social justice. The development of critical consciousness in Kerala was a process that absorbed new elements adapted itself to new needs and restated itself in new terms. It was as much a reformation as it was a renaissance.

The novel was a new branch modeled after English fiction in Malayalam literature. Outmoded social traditions that created human sufferings were graphically pictured in literature. The socio-economic changes of the colonial rule became favourite theme of the novelists. The period of novel began with Appu Nedungadi’s Kundalatha in Malayalam (1887) but the striking novel was Indulekha (1889) based on colonial ideology. The author Chandu Menon attacked the orthodoxy and admired the new colonial values of life. He sought to combine romantic love with realistic social details and brought a new social realism in Malayalam literature.

In the meantime, the colonial power mediated a series of structural changes in the economy of Kerala in the nineteenth century. Occupational structure of Kerala underwent significant changes. Unlike most other parts of
India, Kerala witnessed a pronounced shift both in its economy and the structure of the work force away from agriculture to processing industries. “During the nineteenth century the British agent first intervened in the economy of Kerala by extracting its economic surplus through taxes, land revenue and the monopoly purchase of primary products at low prices”.

The penetration of colonial capitalism diversified occupational structure. The pre-colonial economic system was based upon the social structure that had stratified community on the basis of inequality. It was feudalistic. The economic structure of the society of Kerala was never divorced from the social structure. The forces of production and social relationships of production form the economic base or infra-structure of society. The other aspects of society known as superstructure - political, legal and educational institutions, and belief and value systems - are largely shaped by infrastructure. A major change in the infrastructure will therefore produce a corresponding change in the superstructure.

In agrarian societies land is the most important means of wealth, sources of power and prestige. The rights in land are often hereditary with power and prestige tending to his ascriptive attributes. Consequently, changes in the institutional frame work of agriculture, the pattern of ownership, control and use of land or more briefly, the land system will have far reaching effects on the land-based social order in such society.

The caste system that had stratified communities on the basis of inequality was the economic pattern of the Hindu society in the past in Kerala. It refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other. They enjoy or suffer the unequal distribution of rewards in society as members of different social groups.


All castes in Kerala were inferior to the Namboottiris, both socially and economically, as caste ranks below them as cultivating tenants. Therefore their relationship to the Namboottiris was one of socio-economic subservience. Their social subservience was expressed through numerous dependent social practices based on the caste system and caste-based institution of Janmi System. In the traditional society of Kerala, power, wealth and opportunity had been the monopoly of a small but privileged community of caste Hindus led by Namboottiris. These Namboottiri landlords could not engage in cultivation because of their ritual status. Actual cultivation was done by the people of lower castes while Brahmin landlords retained full ownership rights.

The land grants made to the Brahmins or Brahmin controlled religious institutions strengthened a dominant minority of caste superiors. They became caste lords and in turn land lords. This strengthened the control of the Brahmins over the lower castes. In the Janmam lands of Kerala, the Janmi (hereditary land owner) enjoyed absolute right of ownerships and the state did not take a share of the revenue of these lands. The major portion of the paddy lands in Kerala were owned by Temples and Brahmins in the pre-modern period and was tax free, shows that these lands had no feudal obligation to perform towards the King. These land grants thus created a landed aristocracy between the King and the cultivators.

Feudalism is primarily a method of government in which the essential relationship is not between the ruler and the subject, nor the state and citizen, but between the Lord and Vassal. Feudalism is a form of social order in which the possessing class appropriated the surplus produce of the peasants by exercising superior rights over their land and persons. In social terms ‘feudal’ might seem appropriate to the local network of social relations. The low order of spatial mobility for individuals or families and the absence

of effective centres, which might link rural networks into larger patterns of organisation, existed in Kerala and it is referred to as Janmi System.

The system of land grant provided the administrative mechanism for maintaining land and order in the donated areas. All such powers were delegated to the donees. According to R.S Sarma, the essence of feudalism lay in the organisation of the whole of administrative structure on the basis of land. The system was based on a self-sufficient economy in which things were mainly produced for the local needs of the peasants and their lords and not for market. In Kerala, such feudal elements reached its maturity during the pre-colonial period. The work of cultivation was carried out by peasants and the outcastes (Pulayars, Parayars, cherumars) who were tied to the land. They were subjected to the worst forms of untouchability and class oppression. They handed over the produce to the land lord who acquired the land hereditarily. Share of the produce was collected in both cash and kind. These transactions were taking place with in the limits of customary law called ‘Kil mariyadai’, which ensured the sustenance of the ties of dependence and service obligations.

The growth of intermediaries - Uralar, Brahmins, temples and Karalar - led to the new forms of land control. The tenant settlers / Kudians came under the control of customary land lord and intermediaries. Mortgage and lease transactions became common. An outright sale of land was absent. Extension of ownership to non-Brahmins also contributed to the growth of Janmi system. Nair chieftains possessed proprietorship over vast areas of land from early times. Over their lands, the Namboothiris have never asserted their rights. The Nair chiefs or Madambies were the full proprietors of their holdings. In north Malabar there were more Nair Janmies than Namboothiri Jenmies. Janmom property is the absolute private property of the owner or

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proprietor. Generally they are tax free. There was however, a light assessment called ‘Rajabhogam’ on lands belonging to non-Brahmin Janmies.55

The relationship to the Janmies (exclusively belong to Savarna caste) was one of socio-economic subservience. Since the caste based social subservience was re-inforced by economic subservience, the farmer lingered on so long as the latter persisted. Although the Nambootiris traditionally enjoyed ritual superiority over the other social groups, it is important to note that it was because of their land ownership that they could remain a leisure class devoted to the pursuit of learning and religious practices, supported and sustained by the efforts of the other groups.56

The Nambootiris unlike Brahmins in other parts of the country did not enter into secular vocations like administration, account keeping, etc. They lived on the rent received from their tenants. With the economic dominance and spiritual superiority in the pre-colonial period the Nambootiris enjoyed economic power and authority over the entire village. The Janmies controlled the village affairs of their respective areas, especially in relation to the tenant households. The juridical convention and administration of justice were primarily based on Sastraic Jurisprudence institutionalised as ‘Desamaryada’.57

This pre-colonial set up underwent the gradual process of transformation during the 18th and 19th centuries. The system began to disintegrate under the impact of new forces and there was a shift of the economic balance established between community and community. The low caste Hindus in particular turned to eradicate the evil customary practices amongst themselves and to strive for getting those social and political rights which had been denied to them for ages.

55 Ibid., p. 144.
56 Radhakrishnan P, op.cit, p.249.
57 Rajan Gurukkal , op.cit., p.75.
The land ownership pattern and tenure rights which existed in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions of Kerala had many common characteristics. None of them tilled the land directly. They leased the land to Karalars. The land was cultivated by tenants and agrestic slaves attached to the soil belong to the low caste. In the pre-colonial period economic and social status of a caste / family / an individual was based on the nature of land rights they enjoyed. The land rights were the privilege of the upper castes. The product of the soil was shared between the Janmies and different tenure groups on the basis of customs and practices.

This form of landlordism dominated social and economic arrangements in villages throughout Kerala. The land system and caste system were closely connected and there were close links between agrarian relationships and the marriage and family systems. Hierarchies of land ownerships and hierarchies of land relationships worst hit the ritually inferior castes. The lowest tier of untouchable castes was subjected to severe oppression, slavery and different bondages and dependence. “There were certain customary rules and regulations between the Janmi and different classes of tenants. These regulations gave the Janmi extensive powers. He could interfere in the personal and family affairs of all his tenants”. But so long as the tenants paid his share of the produce to the Janmi, and in other ways obeyed him, the Janmi had no right to evict any of them. The relationship between Janmies and tenants was contractual and the tenants had to pay rent and render other services. The relationships between the members of various castes in Kerala were governed by this Janmi system.

The colonial interest of resource appropriation from the colonies led to the introduction of series of tenancy reform laws in Kerala. To ensure regular payment of land tax, ownership rights were granted to the tenant cultivators

58 Ramachandran Nair S, “Land reforms and Agriculture in Kerala.”, Agrarian India: Problems and Prospects (Calicut, 1999), ed. Dr.E.K.G. Nambiar, p.120.
through tenancy reforms. The land survey and settlement work of the nineteenth century, the introduction of tenure reforms, the application of British concept of ownership of land which made it saleable, had far reaching effects in the Kerala economic structure. Land could be sold to anyone who had money disregarding caste status. The Savarna land monopoly had been checked.

Colonialism greatly altered the material organisation of the society. The development of land as individual and independent property, which could be brought and sold introduced changes in the structure of production. The notion of property of land was not alien to pre-colonial Kerala. The novelty of colonial rule was not the institution of private property, but the institution of a new bourgeois form of property in land.\textsuperscript{60} In pre-colonial period, land was a 'possession'; it was not yet a 'commodity' to be transacted with the framework of laws.

The forces released by the colonial state lead to the introduction of capitalist forms of social organisation. Under capitalism an individual is free to use or dispose of his private property as he chooses. The British colonial rule in Kerala carried with it the ideas of economic, legal individualism and liberalism. The main aim of the colonial rule for agrarian liberalism here came from the former's search for a convenient and effective method of taxation. In this, the colonial authorities were acting under the influence of utilitarian ideas of James Mill and Recardian theory of rent which could be readily applied to the agrarian society of Kerala.

The colonial domination introduced a new economic order which was characterised by British bureaucracy, commercialisation of agrarian economy, development of transport and communication and western concept of private property in land. A new agrarian structure was born that was neither traditional nor feudal. The colonial rule accelerated the creation of the national market and made the biggest transformation in the mode of

\textsuperscript{60} Hira Sing, \textit{op.cit.}, p.45.
production. Europeans purchased lands at concessional rate and invested foreign capital in agriculture.

The re-structuring of Kerala economy by the colonial state introduced all the possibilities of transition to capitalism. Self-sufficient village economy was transformed into a single economic unit by the introduction of capitalist forms. The capitalist economic development was determined primarily by the needs and interests of British Capitalism. It is bound up with the decay and even disappearance of old land relations and artisan and handicrafts industries. The British under the market economy, land and labour were separated and made available for sale. Labour was separated from other activities of life. Modern peasant proprietors, owners of land and modern industry and transport appeared. New classes emerged such as class of capitalist, industrial and transport workers, agricultural labourers, tenants and merchants. This transformation was subjected to the economic requirements of British capitalism. The independent development of the society of Kerala was obstructed.

Introduction of the new land relations and revenue payment in the form of fixed money payment, forced the peasant to produce mainly for the market and this led to commercialisation of agriculture. It is directed towards the production of cash crops to be sold in the world market which led to the growth of capitalist farms. Colonial Government encouraged cultivation of coffee, tea and spices. The capital and management were brought from European countries where as land and labour was made available here.

The most developed form of these capitalist farms is the plantation of tea, coffee, rubber, cardamom, lemongrass, etc. British firms like Pierce Leslie & Company, Harrison & Cross Fields, Kannan Devan, Commonwealth Trust, etc; and the Swiss Volkart Brothers dominated the plantations. These European firms virtually monopolised the export of plantation products as
well as import for the plantation sector through their agencies.\textsuperscript{61}

Besides these developed form of plantations, capitalist relations have developed in rural areas. The most wide spread of these industries is coir making, cultivation of land under cash crops as tapioca, banana etc; also cultivated through wage-labour. The industrial development of Malabar was responsible of starting some of the earliest weaving mills and tile factories. The Basel Mission was responsible for setting up the first weaving and tile factories in Malabar, largely to provide employment for its converts. There seem to have been a direct link between the ability of the Mission to provide employment and the number of its converts.\textsuperscript{62} A few enterprising converts while working their way through the Mission factories became factory owners in their own right.\textsuperscript{63} Samuel Aaron, the proprietor of Aaron Mills estimated that between one hundred and one hundred and fifty weaving factories were founded during the war years, mainly by Thiyya entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{64}

Pre-colonial state stood at a distance from society, in some way above it, that it did not intervene too directly in the affairs of the community. It is assumed that it was the colonial state that sought to regulate the social life of the community and the domestic life of individuals in a determined fashion.

By about the beginning of the nineteenth century colonial hegemony governed the complex social relations, arising out of the new land system based on private property in land. A judicial organisation based on western principle was introduced. The colonial Government established certain uniformity in basic legislation. In 1861, the British Criminal Procedure came to force in Travancore, meeting out equal treatment to all subjects for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} Dileep M.Menon, \textit{op.cit.}, p.65.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Samuel Aron C, \textit{Jeevitha Samarangal} (Mal.), (Cannanore,1974). pp.18-28.
\item \textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid}, pp.45-48.
\end{itemize}
criminal offences irrespective of caste considerations. Such legislation made the Avarnas aware of their rights and privileges. Social grievances were separated from religious beliefs.

A capitalist system cannot function without the aid of a Government possessing sovereign powers. The evolution of a state that had to respond to popular demand is an important factor in this social transformation. The new form of power - colonial state - gave birth to various institutional structures. Its procedures through institutional devices led to the introduction of individualisation. Direct colonial rule was established in British Malabar and in Princely States where Residents wielded control over their administration. Specialists groups like teachers, clerks, soldiers, technicians, labourers and so on made part of the colonial administration against traditional power relations.

The introduction and growth of new and modem means of transport also brought a silent and profound procedure of transformation. All these changes were taking place to suit the needs of various phases of British capitalism and to sub serve the basic interests of British capitalism. The colonial government paid serious attention to link different rivers in Malabar by constructing artificial canals and persuaded the Travancore and Cochin rulers to follow the same. The beginning of plantations in Wayanad, Nelliampathy and the High Ranges accelerated the process of communication network. The construction of large number of roads to serve the colonial interest provided employment for thousands all over the country. These opportunities resulted in greater spatial mobility.

The colonial state through the functioning of the ideological apparatus played a decisive role in this transformation. Colonial administration brought the need for a social and cultural regeneration. As a result, the

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indigenous social institutions and cultural practices came under critical scrutiny, and in some cases even total disapproval and rejection.\textsuperscript{67}

A member of the joint family led the life that the family gave him and he had no right to decide what to do. The traditional system of joint family lacked spatial mobility and diversity of occupation. Conservatism in social institutions is a chief obstacle in social change. In an age of individualism, the members of the joint families had no scope for self-development as the tharavadu was more important than the individual.\textsuperscript{68} With the establishment of private property in land and the individual's right to its free disposal, there appeared centrifugal tendencies within the joint family. Joint families had been prevalent among the traditional land owning communities in colonial Kerala whether patrilineal or matrilineal.

There was increased demand for partition in the joint family in the last decade of the nineteenth century. A number of suits were filed in Travancore High Court and Madras Courts by the junior members of the tharavadu. Nairs opened themselves to British education and took up new occupational roles. The liberal and radical educated Nair youths voiced their protest against the matrilineal system of inheritance, joint family system and marriage practice. The Sambandham system of marriage and inheritance became a target of attack of the elites of the community. Radical young Nambootiris questioned the patrilineal system of inheritance and fought against several evil practices.

Under colonial hegemony political power has taken the place of the traditional religious authority. Hence the command of a political superior alone will be adequately obeyed and acted up to by the people.\textsuperscript{69} Changes have also been introduced in personal and family laws. With the establishment of private property in land and the individual's right to its free

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p.4 \\
\textsuperscript{68} Ramachandran Nair S, \textit{op.cit.} p.8. \\
\textsuperscript{69} Gopala Panikkar T.K, \textit{Malabar and Its Folk} (New Delhi, 1993), p.52.
disposal, there appeared centrifugal tendencies within the joint family. Joint families had been prevalent among the traditional land owning communities in colonial Kerala whether patrilineal or matrilineal.

Under Matrilineal system property cannot be divided unless all members of a tharavadu came to a unanimous agreement. A member of the joint family led the life that the family gave him and he had no right to decide what to do. In an age of individualism, the members of the joint families had no scope for self-development as the tharavadu was more important than the individual. This system obstructed the progress of industries. The members of the joint family had no individual interest in individual development, in which they could not claim their separate shares of their property which got invested as capital. The emergence of cash economy and socio-economic changes of the colonial period undermined the consistency of joint family system.

Changes have been introduced in Hindu personal and family laws in response to the demands of Nairs, Ezhavas and subsequently Vellalas, Kshatriyas and Brahmins. On the recommendations of the Government, appointed committees and commissions enacted laws on marriage, succession and, partition of tharavadu properties.

Disintegration of the joint family system led to the rise of low castes on the economic scale. It became easier for economically advanced low castes to acquire individual shares. The transfer of partitioned properties from high castes to others shifted the centre of gravity in the economic life from high caste Nambootiris and Nairs to middle and low caste in due course.

The notions of justice and reason received wider publicity. Intellectuals and ideologues advocated a more just, rational and critical

70 Ibid. p. 48.
reordering of the society. This awakening or renaissance was deeply indigenous. It was not merely a secular cultural phenomenon, but was also a religious reformation. It was a synthesis in which civilisation of Kerala successfully absorbed new elements, which aimed at a synthesis of tradition and modernity. The social movement is characterised by an ideology. The ideology is that of protest against the then conditions of relative deprivation. The ideology thus formulated helps the section concerned to gain self-respect, honour and worth.

The process itself was not without precedent. The Bhakti movement of medieval Kerala embodied a revolt against the idea of inequality inherent in castes as well as against the traditional paths of salvation. The Alwars and Nayanars attacked the idea of inequality and caste exclusiveness. They sought to remove religion from the ceremonies of Brahmanical ritual and throw open to men and women of every rank and caste. "It needed no priest, for the offering of love required no sacerdotal sanction, and the grace of God was in no man's keeping". 72

In any traditional society folklore forms the aspiration of that particular society. The critical spirit of self-enquiry was present in the traditions of the early period in Kerala. It was folk imagination that voiced the protest against caste most clearly. There is a folk-legend about the Brahmin scholar, Vararuchi, who married a Paraya woman. They had twelve children each of whom was brought up by a different family of different caste. As a result, this generation represented every caste from the Brahmin to the Paraya. All men have talent divinity in them and caste separation has no validity. This was really the imaginative reaction of the folk-mind to the shifting separatism of the caste system.

Kunjan Nambiar took the same line in this attack. Kunjan Nambiar's ‘Ottam Thullal' in Malayalam in the eighteenth century is an initial effort in this direction. He injected a new life into the poetic diction by employing the

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vocabulary of the common man. Humour was used for cleansing the political and social life. He used colloquial Malayalam in his Thullal songs which were noted for satire and irony. He attacked with sparkling wit, the irrational social institutions polyandry, and polygamy and caste system of the age. His songs were not for the elite but for the masses irrespective of barriers of caste and creed.

The socio-religious reform imposed by the Portuguese Jesuits through the Synod of Diamper for 'christianising' the local Christians set in the first wave of reform in Kerala. It was not easy for the Syrian Christians of Kerala (Nasranis) to shake off their caste and traditional practices and carry on with their new faith. The ceremonies associated with child birth, marriage and death bore several resemblances with the local customs among the upper Hindu castes. Also, the Kerala Christians, "in order to preserve their nobility, would not touch the inferior castes, and would whilst going along the roads, shout to the people from afar to make way for them and they had the right to kill any person of the lower caste who crossed their path." The proximity and touch of low castes were considered as polluting. They also followed the evil Hindu customs like trial by ordeal, early marriage, animal sacrifice and sorcery. Change in rituals, customs and tradition is necessary before any social change. The first organised attempt in Kerala against these evil practices was undertaken in the Synod of Diamper.

The reform as administrative action in the Malabar region began with Tippu Sultan's intervention. He prohibited the appearance of ladies in public without covering their upper parts and the practice of Sambandham system. The evolution of a state that had to respond to popular demand is an important factor in the socio-religious transformation of Kerala. Even in

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73 Rajan Gurukkal, op.cit. p.93.
74 George Mark Moraes, A History of Christianity in India - From Early Times to St.Francis Xavier AD.52 -1542 (Bombay, 1964), p.175.
the early decades of the nineteenth century a series of administrative and social reforms with a view to modernising administration and society were introduced here. The pre-colonial state stood at a distance from society, which did not intervene too directly in the affairs of the community. It was the colonial state that sought to regulate the social life of the community and the domestic life of individuals in a determined fashion. As a result the indigenous social institutions and cultural practices came under critical scrutiny. The colonial state played a decisive role in this transformation.

The new spirit of self-criticism, and growing social consciousness demanded changes in the caste based ascribed status system in Kerala. The first movements were the social reform and the protest movements of castes and communities that had suffered deprivations under the old system. The government introduced changes in the society through legislation and other means as a result of popular demands.

The demand for the right to wear upper garments by the Channar women of the Christian converts in Travancore in 1829 deserves special mention here. The cultural Renaissance in Kerala actually began with the Channar uprisings which gave for the first time-an ideology based on equality, social freedom and rationality to the untouchables to agitate for their rights. The content of the uprising was radical. It was viewed against the then existed socio-religious and political conditions. The caste-Hindus opposed the agitation and accused the Christians for fomenting troubles. Police had to be rushed to that area to deal with the situation arising from serious breaches of law and order.

After some disturbances between the Channars and Nairs, the Rani issued a proclamation permitting the women of the Channar converts to wear a jacket called ‘kuppayam’ like the women of the Syrian Christians and Muslims. But Hindu Channars and other low caste women such as Ezhavas and Pulayays were forbidden from wearing any clothing whatever above the
waist.\textsuperscript{77} The Channar women, particularly those who were converts to Christianity, not satisfied with the order began to wear a style of dress similar to that worn by Sudra and Brahmin females. This led to a disturbance largely between the Channars and Nairs in the late 1850's. During the disturbance, the Christian converts were molested and harassed, and a number of mission schools, chapels and houses of ordinary Christians were burnt.\textsuperscript{78} The agitation of Channars eventually led to the Royal Proclamation of July 26, 1859 abolishing all restrictions in the matter of the covering of all parts of the Channar women, though there was still the stipulation that they should not imitate the dress of the women of upper castes. Even this stipulation was subsequently removed at the instance of British Government.

The formation of rationalism, reformism and the movement related changes due to mass protest and state action prepared the background in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the socio-religious transformation of Kerala. The development of critical consciousness in Kerala was as much a reformation as it was a renaissance. It was a process that absorbed new elements adapted itself to new needs and restated itself in new terms. The old hierarchy of social groups lost its rigidity. But the need of the hour was to have a mass-based movement organised and led by leadership from the lowest level to restructure the existing system. The intellectuals of Kerala acted as agents in the whole process of transformation. In the initial stage they were unable to put up any fight against the colonial state. They wanted to revolutionise the society and welcomed British rule rather than Brahmin rule. Moreover the material base for the release of social forces was not ripe enough for the political fight. They diverted and utilised their power and energy to cultural and social reforms.

\textsuperscript{77} Mateer, \textit{op.cit.} p.61.
The socio-religious movements that originated in Kerala in the nineteenth century were cultural revolutions and were against the Brahmanical superiority in social, economic, political and cultural fields. The philosophers of this period introduced an intellectual milieu for social change and reforms in the Kerala society. They were concerned with the mobilisation of the opinion of the people to participate in the regenerative process. This mobilising process became the source of social transformation. They mobilised the people of Kerala and the process of socio-religious transformation continued to accelerate the national struggle for independence. Of these philosophers, there were similarities in their teachings and ideology.

Thus the change in Kerala society was brought about by the revolt of the thinking Indians. Conflicts have to be seen as inherent in social life everywhere. These actions initiated by the intellectuals brought the socio-cultural renaissance of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Kerala society. The basic feature of this period of change was the presence of a transformed people capable of upsurges against the traditional forms of submission. A host of towering personalities emerged on the intellectual horizon. The most notable among them were Thaikkat Ayya Swamikal, Chattambi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru, Sree Subhananda Guru Devan and Brahmananda Siva Yogi. The chief initiators of change are these social reformers in the pre-independence period. Keralites got themselves organised under their able leadership to win equality, freedom and self-respect. Among them, Brahmananda Sivayogi emerged on the socio-spiritual sphere as a revolutionary rational saint. The transformation was possible only through the mass mobilisation with the help of a native leadership and organised movements.