CHAPTER-II

SOCIO-POLITICAL PROFILE OF KERALA : A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

Kerala acquired independent statehood on November 1, 1956, following the reorganization of Indian States on the basis of language. It is composed of three distinct geopolitical areas: two erstwhile princely states, Travancore and Cochin, and the Malayalam-speaking areas of Madras state, British Malabar.

The three regions possess several common features viz. ecology, language and social structure, but there are glaring differences in terms of land tenures, agrarian legislations, availability of land etc., all of which vitally influenced the nature of agrarian movements in these areas. The history of these agrarian mobilizations bear a vital significance in the social development of the region.

A brief outline of Kerala’s geographical, demographical and cultural factors illustrate the distinct identity of the state.

Geographic Profile:

Kerala is basically a narrow strip of land located on the south-west coast of India, 360 miles long and nowhere more than 70 miles in width, bounded to the west by the Arabian sea and to the east by the evergreen Western Ghats, offering a fascinating natural setting.
The three natural divisions are coastal low lands, midlands, and highlands. The lowland or coastal plains are composed of a long and narrow coastal belt on the west with sand banks and back waters. It is extremely fertile and covered with coconut plantations and scattered paddy lands.

The midlands are mainly under paddy, tapioca, spices, cashew nut, etc; while the highlands are wet, relatively cool, and covered by dense tropical forests in the upper ranges and scattered plantations in the lower ranges.

**Forests and Mountains**

The high altitude mountains which form the eastern belt of the Western Ghats are the chief mountain range. This area was inaccessible and virtually uninhabited till the latter part of the 19th Century thanks to thick forests. Approximately 30% of the area is still under forests, taking the state to second-place in India for forest cover. A good majority of the small-scale industries depend on forest products such as sandalwood, rattan, honey, rubber, rosewood and tusk of dead elephants, which contribute to a high level of income.

The tropical climate offers very little change in temperature and humidity throughout the year. Despite heavy, incessant monsoons twice a year, there is also a dry summer spell in March-April.
Kerala is rich in minerals such as copper, tin, lead, mica, lignite, graphite, illmenite, high quality clay and limestone, zircon, rulite, etc., but no coal deposits. This lack of coal is balanced by hydroelectric power potential from innumerable waterfalls, so that industrial potential is not hampered by power shortage.

The rivers also offer excellent fishing grounds and transport facilities for goods and men, besides aiding the development of the coir industry.

**Demographic profile:**

Kerala encompasses an area of 14,789 sq. miles. Its population as per 1991 census is 29,032,828, out of which 21,356,457 reside in rural areas and 7,676,371 in urban areas. Population density is high in Kerala.

The 1991 census places Kerala's decennial growth rate of population at 14.06 per cent². The demographic increase has been the result of a high birth rate, low infant mortality and a falling death rate. This phenomenon has been prevalent since the 1970s; now however, with high levels of female literacy and education, the birth rate has started to fall.
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<th>TOTAL</th>
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<td>29,032,828</td>
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Source: Census of India 1991.

Unlike some other Indian states, Kerala is overwhelmingly rural in character, and it lacks the nucleated villages which are common in most parts of India.

In common with the rest of the country, Kerala also suffers from severe unemployment and under employment. In recent times, this situation has been aggravated by the influx of Gulf returnees. Labor market distortions, high literacy and sluggish economic growth have contributed to give Kerala 10 percent of India's job seekers, despite having only 3.6 percent of the total population.

The total number of registered job seekers has risen from 151,000 in 1960 to 294,000 in 1970 and 3,067,000 by the end of July 1989, of whom as many as 1,861,000 have completed their schooling.

**Cultural profile**

The unique geographical distinctiveness has facilitated the development of a distinct culture in the state. Several
elements have contributed to this individuality, regional disparity, communal diversity, education and literacy and media of communication.

**Regional Disparities**

In the midst of broad unity of Kerala's society and culture, there are significant socio-economic and political differences between the three regions, which were clubbed together on the basis of language during the reorganization of the states.

While 98.32 percent of the land holdings in Travancore-Cochin area were below 10 acres, with 73.35 percent of the cultivable land falling into this category, in Malabar, 83.79 percent land holdings were below 10 acres and these accounted for only 32.30 percent of the cultivable lands 4.

Jannis (landlords) and landless agricultural labor therefore dominated the Malabar scene more prominently than the Travancore-Cochin regions where fragmented holdings predominate.

The bane of landlessness in the Malabar, giving a lower status to a larger cross section of the community, was aggravated by significant disparities in urbanity and literacy too. Travancore and Cochin attained higher literacy rates than Malabar 5; although on an all India basis, Kerala as a whole stands way ahead in literacy, as evident from the table below:
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Source: Census of India 1991

### Table 2.03

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<th>Male</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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<td>0.71</td>
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<td>0.57</td>
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**TVM= Thiruvananthapuram and Alph= Alappuzha**

Source: Census of India 1991.
The Travancore-Cochin governments actively stimulated agriculture, commerce and industry, built roads and canals, founded schools, colleges, and hospitals. In Travancore, the Alleppey district attained the highest rate of urbanity, while in Malabar, the Malappuram district had the lowest urbanity rate. Cochin was the most industrialized region with high urbanity and literacy rates.

Disparities in terms of concentration of various communities in the three regions are also relevant.

The Malappuram district had the highest number of Muslims in Malabar which had the highest concentration at 32.96%.

Christians dominated the Cochin and Travancore regions. The highest concentrations were in the Ernakulam and Kottayam districts at 42.6% and 47.2% respectively. But the Christians, like the Hindus, were further divided and sub-divided. They belonged to two traditional groups: the Protestants and the Catholics who were further differentiated by the Syrian and Romo-Syrian (Neo-Christian) denominations.

Hindu society had lost its traditional structure with modernization. There were virtually three parallel communities: Nairs (12.5%), Ezhavas (26.4%) and the scheduled castes (9.6%).

Overall the Ezhavas (Other Backward Classes) and other "Untouchables" formed the bulk of the population at 62.65%, while Namboodiris and Nairs, who were the big Janmis, formed
A very small percentage in the Trichur, Alleppey, Guillon and Trivandrum districts. However, while Ezhavas were concentrated in Alleppey and Guillon districts, Trichur and Trivandrum were dominated by Nairs. In all four districts, small "pockets" of Muslims occurred in the urban areas.

The diversity was particularly noticeable in the occupations of the different communities in each region. In Malabar, both Muslims and Ezhavas were petty cultivators and agricultural laborers. But in the urban centers such as Trichur, Ernakulam, Alleppey, Guillon and Trivandrum, Ezhavas were either traders or factory workers.

Generally, the Brahmins, Nairs and Christians were economically well-placed. However, since the Brahmins were a very small community, the main social competition was between the Nairs and the Christians.

While the former were bent on regaining their past glories, the Christians who have never had had any privileged position in traditional society, gained the upper hand in the economy.

The Nair-Christian contest took on greater dimensions with the social emergence of the Ezhavas and later, the Muslims, following the merger of Malabar with Travancore-Cochin, giving the conflict a multi-polar tone.

**Communal Diversity**

Kerala is the only state in the country with only 60 percent Hindus against the All-India ratio of 80 percent. The
state also boasts of three major world religions living fairly amicably, with the minority communities concentrated in certain districts.

Throughout Kerala, Hindu society was very orthodox and bound by strict traditional caste hierarchies, which however, did not fit into the All India model of four varnas.

The Hindus

Swami Vivekananda has called Kerala "a mad-house of caste". According to V. Nagam Aiya, there were some 1050 sub divisions of castes present in Travancore alone, many condemning untouchability, unapproachability and unseemability.

In place of the four castes based on occupation, there were two major castes, Brahmins (priests) and Sudras (service), eliminating the Kshatriyas (warriors) and the Vaisyas (business-men)⁸.

At the top of the caste hierarchy were the Namboodiri Brahmins, a healthy, aristocratic, landed group of the highest ritual and secular rank.

Then came the intermediate castes which included Samantans and Kshatriyas, who were originally Nairs. While the Nairs performed Kshatriya functions, to a certain extent, the Christians and Muslims did Vaishya work.

At the bottom of the scale were the Tiyars (or Ezhavas), Kammalans (artisans), Pathitha Jathis (low polluting classes) and lastly the Nichha (lowest) Jatis. Harijans fell out of the
purview of the caste system proper.

The Christians

The Christian church is believed to have been established in Kerala in 52 A.D. by the Apostle St. Thomas, who landed at Malankara near Cranganore. He converted some Brahmins and others and founded seven churches, six in Travancore and Cochin and one at Palayur in Malabar.

After the arrival of the Portuguese, the community split into two, the Romo-Syrians, who continued to owe allegiance to the Church of Rome and the Jacobite Syrians who denounced the authority of the Pope.

The Syrian Christians (Jacobite Syrians) held themselves aloof from the Harijans and the Neo-Christian (Romo-Syrian) community, which were looked down upon as "untouchables", because they were the converts from the polluting classes of Hindu community. The Syrian Christians were generally small cultivators, fishermen and petty traders, while the Romo-Syrians were generally fishermen, living in the coastal areas.

The Muslims

Islam came to Kerala in the 8th and 9th centuries, in the wake of the Arab traders who spread all over Malabar and in certain areas of Travancore and Cochin.

The Muslims were thus a hybrid community, composed of the offspring of mixed unions of Arab traders and Hindu women, and
of converted Harijans. The largely trading community is very industrious and enterprising.

The Muslims belong to the Shafi school of the Sunni sect of Islam. Apart from Koran, they acknowledge the authority of the Sunni sect of Islam. Muslim power however declined by the end of the 16th Century, in the face of the Portuguese challenge in the trading arena.\textsuperscript{11}

**Education and Literacy**

In ancient times, only the upper castes were educated, with the "Auspicious Scholars", the Namboodiri Brahmins maintaining a strict social and traditional monopoly.

Salais or Matts (schools), located in temples, offered education in the Vedas and scriptures. Subjects included Sanskrit, Literature, Philosophy, Mathematics, Ayurveda (traditional medical science) etc.\textsuperscript{12} The Kalaris of Nairs taught physical culture and fencing. These salais and kalaris catered exclusively to the upper castes. The lower castes frequented a third kind of center called Ezhuthupalli.

Since the Salais or matts were Brahminical education centers, the medium of instruction was Sanskrit, which gave impetus to the development of Malayalam which had emerged from Tamil. The Kalaris also promoted the growth of Malayalam literature, as evident from the tenth century martial ballads and folk songs.
The early period of modernization in Kerala, witnessed the replacement of traditional education with modern secular education, propagated by missionaries.

The London Missionary society opened an English school at Nagerkovil in Travancore during the reign of Rani Parvathi Bhai (1814–29). Another school was established in Cochin at Mattancherry in the same period. Many more gradually sprang up in Travancore and Cochin regions, while Malabar remained comparatively neglected until the Zamorin's college opened at Calicut in 187913.

Under the leadership of Colonel H.M.Munro, who was the Dewan in Travancore and Cochin, a number of 'Ezhuthupallis' were converted along modern lines. While the old curriculum and mode of instruction remained untouched, the elementary educational system was reorganized. Government aided private schools sprang up.

As English education gained momentum, several schools were thrown open to Harijans. Similar achievements have been recorded in higher education too. However, it must be noted that all private institutions are state aided.

During this period, the Malayalam language also underwent tremendous changes. Missionaries did excellent work in this area, contributing dictionaries and grammar books.

The introduction of the printing press in 1821 by Rev. Benjamin Bailey amplified the progress of education in the state. In 1847, Rev. Gundert started the first Malayalam news-
paper.

The introduction of modern secular schools and the growth of journals and newspapers has altered the structure of the traditional agricultural economy of the society. Several reform measures were introduced in the agrarian field, which enabled landless laborers and tenants to acquire more rights and land.

Similar developments took place in trade and commerce that had promoted a "structural shift" in the social hierarchy, challenging the traditional mores, leading to remarkable progress in the field of education and literacy amongst all castes and communities so that today, Kerala is the most literate state in India.

The credit for an early start in the introduction of modern educational facilities and media of communication undoubtedly goes to European missionaries, who gave Kerala an educational structure largely run by private agencies.

**Media of Communication**

The state which has the highest literacy rate in India, has also developed a unique library movement. As a result nearly 3,700 libraries with a total collection of more than 6.7 million books offer membership to some 600,000 persons. Today, as a result of the aftermath of the voluntary movement known as Grandhasala Sangham, there is a library every two square miles. These libraries are also offer facilities for cultural
activities and open discussions of public matters.

Kerala stands first in the number of daily newspapers in India and fourth in terms of circulation. The print media is supplemented by the All India Radio, with its network of 66 principal stations and the production of Malayalam films and other Indian films.

**Historical Profile**

Although history offers no clues of Kerala society during the Paleolithic age, megalithic monuments found throughout the state indicate the first glimmerings of the development of Kerala society. The question arises: Who were the earliest inhabitants of Kerala?

Anthropologists' answer is that the majority of the tribals which existed at that time belonged to Negrito type, i.e. Kadar, Kanikkar, Pariyas and others. They were replaced by the proto-Australoids and later the Mediterraneans. Between them, they constitute the main elements of Dravidian population in the state.

Aryans came into the picture two to three centuries before the Christian era. The major chunk of the Namboodiri Brahmins migrated to the state during the 6th, 7th and 8th century A.D.

A number of foreign and indigenous accounts are available on the ancient society of Kerala. These make mention of the
state's trade relations with foreigners including the Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Israelites, Greeks, Romans and Chinese. Trade invigorated the economy as well promoted the introduction of other religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam in Kerala from very early times, all of which have contributed to mold the culture of Kerala into a cosmopolitan one.

**Beginning of the Christian Era**

The first five centuries A.D. are known in history as the Sangam period. During this period, the state was a part of Tamilakam, hence the polity and culture were mingled with Tamil culture.

The region is divided into five, viz., Venad, Kuttanad, Kudanad, Puzhinad, and Kakanad. These were controlled by three political powers, the Alps in the south, the Ezhimala in the north and the Cheras in the center. Of the three, the Cheras emerged most powerful and contributed a great deal to the welfare of the state.

During the Sangam age, society in Kerala progressed beyond occupation-based castes to give its people social freedom, equality and dignity of labor. Women were accorded high status, with freedom of choice in occupation and education. There was neither any purdah system nor child marriages. Even lower castes were afforded opportunity to high positions by the kings and nobles.

The Sangam era was marked by all round socio-economic
progress. Extensive foreign trade, agriculture, fishing, hunting, spinning, weaving, carpentry, etc. all contributed to the development of an impressive economy, culture and a civilized way of life.

After the decline of Sangam period at the end of 5th century, political turmoil prevailed for almost 3 centuries; this is known in Kerala history as the "Dark Age" or "Long Historical Night".

The state was attacked repeatedly by other South Indian rulers including the Chalukyas, the Pallavas, the Pandyas and the Rashtrakutas.

It was during this dark age that Aryanization climaxed with the arrival of a major body of Brahmins, who established their predominance through their intellectual caliber, defeating the Buddhists in argument to demonstrate the supremacy of Hinduism.

The Brahmins introduced the classic caste system into society, giving rise to two more castes, i.e. the martial caste (Kshatriyas) and the trading caste (vaishyas).

They also brought about changes in dietary habits. Earlier, Brahmins used to consume beef and liquor. This was looked upon with contempt and those who partook of them were considered low class people. Dignity of labor was degraded and education was banned to the low castes. Women lost their status as child marriage was introduced. It can therefore be concluded that the Dark Age introduced all manner of social evils earlier unknown.
to this land.

With the rise of the second Chera empire, the stagnation of Kerala society came to an end, but all social customs and practices introduced by Brahmanism continued to exist. This empire lasted for nearly three centuries, i.e. from 800 to 1102, during which a long line of illustrious kings ruled the state.

The first two centuries under the reign of Kulasekharas are known in history as "The Golden Age". All round progress was achieved in literature, religion, arts and trade etc.

Unfortunately, all these achievements were nullified during the "Hundred Years War" with the Cholas in the twelfth century. The last of the Chera Raja succeeded in regaining some glory by putting an end to the war. But, after his reign, the lack of able leadership sent Kerala back into chaos.

After the fall of Kulasekhara empire, far-reaching economic, political and social changes took place. The economic condition had deteriorated with the prolonged war with Cholas, during which, foreign trade and relations had not been maintained. The net decline in foreign exchange flows caused a set back to economic prosperity.

Similar political decline ensued with the loss of powerful leadership to hold down the rise of petty chiefdoms, creating chaos all over the state.

On the socio-religious front, Buddhism and Jainism began to waver before the onslaught of Brahmanism with all its attendant evils. The end of the "The Hundred Years War" saw the
Namboodiri Brahmins emerge as influential "Janmis" by misappropriating temple properties. Thus, the "Jammi" (landlord) system took root in Kerala also.

During the pre-Portuguese period, four prominent kingdoms emerged: Venad in the South, Cochin in the center, Calicut in the north and Kolathunad in the north-east. In the deep south, Venad continued its supremacy over other petty chiefdoms for a long period. In the north, Calicut under the Zamorin’s leadership kept the Cochin Raja and the Kolathuraja, along with several others under his suzerainty.

The Zamorin regained his strength by declaring Calicut a free trade port, which led several foreign powers to establish elaborate trade relations with him. He even offered special concessions to Arabs, and thereby increased his income through foreign trade. This economic prosperity stimulated campaigns against his neighboring kingdoms, all of which acknowledged his superiority, except the Cochin Raja whose opposition fueled the enmity between the two.

Around this time, a peculiar religious polity developed in the Devaswams or temples of the Hindus which held special position. Each important temple held jurisdiction over a well organized territory, "Sanketam" managed by the "Uralar". The "Sanketam" which held full sovereignty, was virtually a "state within the state" in which the dominant Namboodiri Brahmins held the power to even award capital punishment to their tenants.
Thus at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, Kerala was in a disturbed condition with a number of petty chieftains engaged in endless feuds and a curious religious polity. This atmosphere proved favorable to the Portuguese, helping them to establish their power in Kerala.

In conclusion, it can be said that Kerala's composite culture dates back to the megalithic period. Its consistent development and economic prosperity may be the result of vast trade relations with the outside world.

Till the end of 5th century A.D., few social evils prevailed in Kerala, with women enjoying high social status and attendant freedoms in education and occupation. Despite the presence of the four castes, there was no caste discrimination. Equality and dignity of labor were given more importance.

The advent of the Aryans meant a setback to the older culture and social practices. Hinduism emerged as the main religion. Slowly several forms of social evils began to crop up in the Brahmin-dominated society.

By the end of 12th century A.D. while the state disintegrated into political anarchy with a number of tiny kingdoms, on the social front, the establishment of the Janmi system contributed to the perversion of Kerala society which continued to the modern age.
Some major incidents of mass upsurge:

There is no historical record of any sort of mob uprising in Kerala until the advent of Portuguese. Although a number of wars took place due to the lack of powerful rulers, such forays did not affect the political, economic, religious and cultural sentiments of people at large.

The Portuguese era commenced from the 15th century A.D. They were followed by the Dutch, French and British. The conflict between the traditional culture and the Occidental cultures brought about clashes which were either religio-cultural or politico-economic. The first historical mob revolt, during the Portuguese regime, was because of religion, for the Portuguese have been infamous for their religious intolerance and bigotry.

Kerala had been renowned from ancient times for the religious tolerance practiced by her Hindu rulers towards the three major world religions on her soil, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The fanatical Portuguese launched a vigorous campaign for the Latinization of the Kerala Church founded by St Thomas. Baptism and other sacraments were administered in Latin. Churches, Monasteries and Seminaries were founded.

The Portuguese succeeded in their attempts towards the Latinization of the Kerala Church only to a certain extent. For when they attempted to impose Latin rites on the older Syrian churches, they inevitably wounded the religious senti-
ments of the Syrian Christians, whose discontent boiled over in 1653.

Revolt of the Cooman Cross (1653)

This was the first recorded mob uprising in Kerala. In June 1599, the Synod of Diamper was convened to put down what was called the "Nestorian Heresy" and to bring the Christian community of the land under the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Synod was presided over by the Archbishop of Goa Alexis De Menezes. The relation of the Kerala Church with the Patriarchate of Babylon was terminated and the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff established. But the success of the Synod did not last for long.

Those who were accustomed to Syrian rites, clung to the old Syrian Diocese of Anakameli and opposed the appointment of Latin European Bishops by the King of Portugal. Insisting on a Bishop of their own denomination, they requested the Jacobite Patriarch of Babylon to send them one.

In 1653, a Bishop called Ahatalla was sent, but he was detained at Mylapore by Portuguese who spread a rumor that Ahatalla had been drowned. This infuriated the already incensed Syrian Christians, who assembled in thousands in front of an ancient cross in Mattancherri.

A long rope was tied to it. Thousands held onto the rope...
and swore that they would never obey the Latin Archbishop or the Jesuits. They then went to Alangad and consecrated their leader, Archdeacon Thomas as their Metropolitan. This incident is known in history as the "Oath of the Coonan Cross".

The revolt of the Coonan Cross was followed by a turning point in the history of the Kerala Church, which now split into two, the Romo-Syrians, who owed allegiance to the Church of Rome and the Jacobite Syrians who denounced the authority of the Pope. Although this event affects only a minority community, it assumed great significance in the history of Kerala.

During the British period, first the ruling feudal classes, then the peasants and lower castes rose up in revolt several times. The former revoluted against the British rulers, when they realized that their assistance against the Portuguese, was being utilized to strengthen the British hold on the land. When they finally understood their new subservient status, they unfurled the banners of revolt. The most significant and long-lasting revolt of the ruling classes was that of Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja of the Kottayam royal family.

**Pazhassi Revolt I (1793-97)**

The revolt of Pazhassi Raja was in two phases. The first took place between 1793 and 1797 against the revenue policy of the British.

Earlier, the Mysoreans had collected revenue directly from cultivators, but the British changed this policy, asking the
Rajas to collect it from people. The leases were renewed in 1794 for a period of 5 years, but the mode of assessment was reckoned to be unduly harsh and the people found it difficult to pay.

The Kottayam ruler also had some other grievances. The British had leased Kottayam for one year to his uncle, the Kurumbranad Raja. This treachery by the British caused great resentment amongst the people of Kottayam.

Their Raja unfurled the banner of revolt against the British East India Company. He stopped all collection of revenue in Kottayam. The British and his uncle tried to suppress him but failed, thanks to the significant support from his people.

In 1795 he openly challenged British authority, giving asylum to one of the rebel Iruvazhinad Nambiar. This and other acts of the Raja infuriated the British who tried to besiege him, but he escaped to the mountains of Wynad and resorted to guerrilla warfare.

The revolt continued till 1797, when it came to a halt with the intervention of the Chirakkal Raja. The agreement awarded the Raja a pension of Rs.8,000 per annum against a assurance of living in peace with the Company.

But this did not last long. A fresh revolt, the second Pazhassi revolt broke out in 1800 when the British attempted to take over Wynad. It lasted for five years.

The Raja declared the district as his own and vehemently opposed the British. He got popular backing from inside and
outside the country. This time he trained his people in techniques of guerrilla warfare to oppose the British in the jungles of Wynad.

Taking up the challenge, the British attempted to suppress him with an iron hand. But the rebellion of the Raja lasted for a long time, since the heavily forested Kottayam-Wynad taluka, was ideally suited for the Raja’s guerrilla warfare. However, when the Raja was shot dead on the 30th November 1805, the revolt fizzled out.

The Pazhassi revolt failed. However, it was a popular revolt in the truest sense, since it was waged by all people irrespective of caste or religion. In spite of failing to achieve the objective of eliminating the British from the country, the Pazhassi Raja’s death made him a martyr to the cause of freedom and him won a place in the hearts of his countrymen.

**Revolt of Velu Thampi and Paliath Achan**

Velu Thampi of Travancore had originally been in favor of British and sided with them to erect the fort at Anjengo. But when the Resident Col. Macaulay started to interfere in internal administration and insisted on the prompt payment of arrears, an infuriated Velu Thampi protested vehemently and ultimately revolted against the British.

At Cochin, undue British interference in the internal matters of administration was opposed by Paliath Achan. When the British gave asylum to one of Achan’s enemies, the infuriated
Prime Minister asked the British to surrender the person, but the latter refused. This prompted Paliath Achan to join hands with Velu Thampi in revolt.

On January 11, 1809, Velu Thampi issued the Kundara Declaration from his headquarters at Kundara, proclaiming his revolt\(^\text{21}\). He mobilized a large number of people under his banner, but could not resist the powerful enemy and ultimately committed suicide. When Thampi was overpowered by the British, they tightened their grip in Travancore and Cochin. Paliath Achan was deported to Madras. After these three major revolts, the feudal classes as a whole became loyal supporters of British rule\(^\text{22}\).

For sometime no major revolt took place. While the memory of revolts of Velu Thampi and Pazhassi Raja subsided in the minds of feudal classes, the spirit remained fresh in the minds of peasants and common people.

**Mappila Riots (1821–1921)**

Controversy continues to surround the Mappila or Moplah rebellion, which has been characterized as anti-feudal, anti-Hindu and anti-British.

Initially, there was a series of peasant uprisings and the Mappilas murdered a number of Hindu Janmis\(^\text{23}\). The British tried to suppress the upsurge with an iron hand, but it continued unabated. In 1881, a special commission was appointed under Mr. Logan to find out the root cause of the riots.

The commission concluded that the Mappila unrest had been caused by a defective British revenue policy, recognizing the
Hindu Janmis as the owners of the land, thereby derecognising the rights of the Mappila ryots.

As a result of these findings, the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act was passed (Act I of 1900). Despite this, the riots continued, but situation changed gradually with the spread of liberal education among the affluent sections of Mappila community and the opening of new avenues of employment.

The prolonged Moplah revolt cannot be called as an exclusively agrarian movement, for it was the result of a combination of cultural oppression, political domination and economic exploitation of the peasantry.

A fresh movement emerged in Malabar as a part of the Khilafat movement in protest against the action of the British government in depriving Turkey of their home land. This was the Malabar rebellion of 1921.

Severe riots broke out in Eranad and Valluvanad talukas. British police let loose a reign of terror, which finally succeeded in suppressing the outbreak. The rebels were captured and shot. Hundreds were either imprisoned or deported. 10,000 people are believed to have lost their lives. That is why the 1921 Rebellion is considered a gigantic national upheaval against British authority. The end of the Moplah rebellion saw the end of all forms of revolts against the British.

By the end of the 18th century, the traditional social
structure had begun to show signs of tottering. Once the British took control of the administration of the state, they started to introduce a series of administrative and social reforms to modernize administration and society in Kerala. All these however served to improve the standards of the upper castes and to increase the chasm between upper castes and lower castes.

The introduction of western education acted as a catalytic agent. While the British did not accept any caste barriers in matters of recruitment, in Travancore and Cochin, upper castes dominated all posts. The period between 1888 and 1924 saw a phase in Travancore history which has been characterized as a cultural revolt against Hindu orthodoxy.

Although all the depressed castes were involved in this struggle, the Ezhavas were in the forefront. The lower castes embarked on a number of agitations against the practice of untouchability, seeking social status and equality viz a viz the upper castes.

Shanar Agitations

The Shanars of South Travancore revolted against the prevalent custom, baring their women folk from wearing jackets to cover the upper part of their body. The upper castes objected to the demand of Shanars, and in several places police find it difficult to maintain law and order.

The Resident, Col. Munro issued a proclamation, permitting Shanar women to wear jackets. But the proclamation did not
satisfy them and the Shanar women appeared in public wearing an additional scarf over their shoulders in the manner of upper caste Hindu women. This infuriated the upper castes, who attacked the Shanar women.

The continued conflict led to another Royal proclamation of July 26, 1859, abolishing all restrictions on the covering of their torsos by Shanar women. Hence the agitation was a success.

Another struggle to eradicate untouchability was spearheaded by social reformers like Chattampi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru, Kumaran Asan and social organizations like the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P.) and Nair Service Society (N.S.S.). The movement got full support from the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Two leaders, C.Krishnan, the editor of Mitavadi, Calicut, and T.K.Madhavan, an advocate, were in the forefront of the campaign against untouchability and the opening of the temple roads to the Ezhavas and other lower castes. This movement culminated in major two satyagrahas, Vaikam and Guruvayur.

**Vaikam Satyagraha (1924-25):**

Vaikam was a small town in north Travancore surrounding a temple. Half a dozen Namboodiris shared most of the land and the temple, whose approach roads were banned to the lower castes.

C.Krishnan and T.K.Madhavan initiated satyagraha against
the ban. Support came from leaders like K.P. Kesava Menon, Mannath Padmanabhan, Chenganacherry Parameswaran Pillai, C.V. Kunhiraman, and K.Kelappan. The satyagraha helped to mobilize public support in favor of the issue.

Under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan, a Savarna jatha (upper caste march) was organized. The jatha reached Trivandrum and submitted their memorandum before the Regent Setu Lakshmi Bai. The satyagrahis were arrested and harassed, but the agitation continued for 20 months. Ultimately, it came to an end in 1925 with the intervention of Mahatma Gandhi. Although the satyagraha could not claim immediate success, it paved the way for the 1936 Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation.

**Guruvayur Satyagraha:**

The Kerala Provincial Congress staged a similar satyagraha in 1931 for the opening of the Guruvayur temple to all Hindus. Satyagraha was started on 1st November under the leadership of K.Kelappan and A.K. Gopalan. Once again, there was nationwide support, but the Zamorin was adamant on not conceding the demand.

The assault of A.K. Gopalan provoked an attempt to force entry into the temple. The temple was closed for a whole month. On September 21, 1932, ten months after the satyagraha started, K.Kelappan commenced an indefinite fast in front of the temple. On October 2, 1932, he gave up the fast on Gandhiji's advice. However, as a follow-up of the satyagraha, a
referendum was held. Nearly, 70% of the people were found to be in favor of temple entry. Although no immediate result was not achieved by this satyagraha, it helped to build up public opinion in favor of the eradication of untouchability.

Malayali and Ezhava Memorials

By the end of 19th century, western education had awakened the middle class to the deprivation of their political rights, especially their share in government jobs and other spoils of office.

During the early stages of the British presence, attempts were made to check the British interference in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, but later all agitations in all the three regions of Kerala aimed at winning some political rights, i.e. representation in administration.

In Travancore, Tamil Brahmins held a monopoly on all top government posts, even though locals also possessed equal qualifications. The influx of Tamil Brahmins into the Travancore civil services started at the time of Ramayyan Dalawa and continued throughout the 19th century.

Resentment against this policy was evident from the "Malayali Memorial\(^2\)\), submitted to the Maharaja in 1894. It was signed by more than 10,000 persons from all castes and creeds. The petition sought to focus the attention of Maharaja on the exclusion of educated locals and the offering of extra-ordinary opportunities to outsiders in the civil service.

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This was followed by the "Ezhava Memorial", signed by 13,176 members of Ezhava community under the leadership of Dr. Palpu, submitted to the Maharaja on September 3, 1896. Ventilating their grievance against the denial of admission to government schools and entry to public services for Ezhavas, they demanded rights for Ezhavas similar to those enjoyed by the converted Christians.

**Nivarthana agitation**

This took place in the early thirties in Travancore when the constitutional reforms of 1932 was declared. The Ezhavas, the Muslims and a section of Christian community, who, between them, constitute 70% of the population, started the Nivarthana (abstention) movement. Fearing that the new scheme will curtail their seats in the state legislature, they demanded representation on par with Nairs, who had been allotted more seats because they were the largest body of tax payers.

When no immediate result emerged, they formed the Samyukta Rashtriya Samiti (Joint Political Congress) and incited the people to abstain from voting. The organization was led by C.Kesava and N.V.Joseph. The Nivarthta movement spread to all parts of the state. C.Kesavan was arrested in June 1935 and sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment for giving an instigating speech at Kozhancheri.

The government appointed a Public Service Commissioner to ensure due representation for the backward communities in the
Public Services and extended voting rights by reducing property qualification with effect from August 1986, making the agitation an absolute success.

In the 1930s, Kerala witnessed dramatic socio-political changes with the emergence of new political forces including students, youth, factory workers, laborers etc. This was the result of the spread of vague ideas of Socialism and Communism. Unions of tappers, tree climbers, coir workers and fishermen were formed.

Consequently, during this period the unions emerged as an important force in organizing the downtrodden people of Kerala, along with the traditional caste organizations. The Alleppey district with its appalling agrarian and industrial scenario proved to a fertile hunting ground for the Communists.

The revolt against British imperialism, the Dewan and the King of Travancore by workers in the coir industry, agriculture and fishermen as a prominent mass upheaval during the pre-Independence period.

**Punnapra-Vayalar Upheaval (1946)**

Punnapra and Vayalar were two small coastal villages in Alleppey district. In Punnapra, all the land was controlled by a few Jammies, the biggest of which was the Church.

Exploited by both the Church and the landlords, the condition of the tenants and workers was pathetic. They had no right to their produce, the lion's share of which was taken by the
Church, the landlords and their intermediaries. It was in this context that the Communists stepped in to mobilize the oppressed masses for whom communist ideology offered an enticing escape route from their socio-economic shackles.

In Vayalar, the Janmis were Nairs and Syrian Christians while the coir workers were mainly Ezhavas. These workers were mobilized by stalwarts of the Communist party, C.G. Sadasivan and C.Karunakara Panikkar, to fight against "feudal oppression and capitalist exploitation". Despite the obvious fury of the high caste Nairs and the Church, the unions became powerful enough to become the sole authority in labor recruitment.

On July 22, 1946, workers, from Paravur to Alleppey, struck work against government's Food and Industrial policy. Hunger marches were organized in Vaikom, Alleppey, and Trivandrum, demanding bonus. This was finally conceded by the Dewan after a tripartite conference.

In the Ambalapuzha and Shertalai talukas, the condition of workers was even more pathetic but they could not organize themselves because of the all-powerful Janmis.

A reign of terror was let loose. The Dewan declared a state of emergency on October 1, 1946. The Communist Party and all union activities were banned and many prominent personalities were arrested.

At a meeting between representatives of government and the union, several demands were raised, including the termination of
the rule by the King and the Dewan. Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyer granted all economic demands, except the political one. Meanwhile, in Punnapra and Vayalar, camps were held to train volunteers in self defence. When the camp closed on October 17, the coir workers called for strike. Nearly 50,000 persons participated.

On October 20, a huge demonstration was held and the next day, the All Kerala Trade Union Congress gave a call for general strike, demanding the end of Dewan’s rule. The strike was supported by the naval workers, bringing the entire water transport to a standstill. Workers of the coir, rubber, and cloth industries joined the strike.

Life in the Ambalapuzha – Shertalai talukas came to a grinding halt, with the proclamation of martial law by Sir C P Ramaswamy Aiyer who ordered the workers to withdraw the strike. He assumed charge as commander-in-chief and directed the whole operation.

Taking the offensive, the workers in volunteer camps attacked the Punnapra police camp with knives, sharpened sticks and arms. More than 200 workers were killed in this confrontation. In Vayalar, hundreds of workers moved into the camps to escape the repression of the police. On October 27, the military opened fire on Vayalar civil camps, both from the land and the lake side, without any warning. The volunteers retaliated against the bullets with their meager weapons for three and a half hours. Various writers have given differing estimates of
the casualties of Punnapra-Vayalar revolt. Hundreds are believed to have been killed and maimed in this battle, more were arrested.

Despite the setback to leftist forces, this revolt has been considered the most intense struggle piloted by the Communist Party of India in pre-Independence Travancore.

The tug-of-war between different political parties and castes contributed to the general political instability in Kerala in the post-Independent period, which has seen the rise and fall of several governments, none of which have completed their full year term in office, except the Achutha Menon who had the advantage of the political stagnation during the Emergency in the 1970s. The state now boasts of perhaps the largest number of small parties, thanks to frequent splitting.

Education and land reform has accorded equal status to all the castes, whose respective vested interests now maneuver constantly, festering a new kind of political volatility, along communal and parochial lines.

Notes

1. Refer "Communism in Kerala: A study in Political Adaptation" (Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1982) P.1
   By T J Nossiter.

2. Refer "Census of India 1991 Series 1" (Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi)

   By P M Mammen.
5. Refer "Ibid" P. 43
6. Refer "Ibid" P. 45
7. Refer "Ibid" P. 45
   By T J Nossiter.
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10. Refer "Social and Cultural History Of India : Kerala" (Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1979)
    PP. 162-183
    By Sreedhara Menon.
11. Refer "Ibid" PP. 184-185
12. Refer "Ibid" PP. 281-285
    By P M Mammen.
    By A Sreedhara Menon.
15. Refer "Ibid" P. 64
16. Refer "Ibid" PP. 123-149
17. Refer "Ibid" PP. 123-149
18. Refer "Ibid" PP. 230-231
19. Refer "Ibid" PP. 319-322
    PP. 86-89
    By E M S Namboodiripad.
21. Refer "Ibid" PP. 86-90
    By A Sreedhara Menon.
23. Refer "From Mobilisation to Industrialisation - The Dynamics of Agrarian Movement in 20th Century
    Kerala" (Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1985)
    PP. 36-45
    By T K Oommen.
    By E M S Namboodiripad
    By A Sreedhara Menon
26. Refer "Ibid" PP. 384-385
27. Refer "Ibid" PP. 388-385
28. Refer "Ibid" PP. 355-356
29. Refer "Ibid" PP. 357-358
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