The period under study was an age of re-discovery of the past. In one way or another, most of the communities showed this tendency. This in turn paved the way for a re-thinking of their altered condition. From the point of view of social movement Abraham Malpan who gave birth to the Mar Thoma Church was the first to do it. He tried to remove most of the unChristian and meaningless practices. Nair under Chattampiswamikal, Eravas under Sree Narayana Guru and the Muslims under Vackam Abdul Khadir Maulavi did the same thing. Even some of the depressed classes claimed a glorious past. The re-discovery of the past is well reflected in some of the contemporary literary works. Thus it was the people who took the lead.

The period under study clearly shows that the Government did not follow a steady and progressive policy in social matters. The Dewans who actually steered the ship of state brought individual inclinations to bear upon their handling of social problems. Some of them pursued sternly a policy of conservatism; some adopted a neutral position leaving the matters to take a natural course of progress, and some others did not mind following policies detrimental to the interests of the underprivileged sections. The policy was more or less one of armed neutrality stepping only when excessive privileges of the dominant minority were challenged and for the other section it was mere inactivity. The whole Government machinery including the administration was meant for or few, otherwise it would
not have been possible for the location of a large number of welfare systems in the so-called objectionable places. It clearly shows that the state was oblivious of the socially underprivileged. Whether it was the question of civic rights or the rights of Nair women to maintenance and inheritance of her children the scale of justice held by the Governmental always weighed in favour of the Brahmin community, under the pretext of maintaining natural justice. This is amply proved by the defeat of civic rights resolution, controversy over the section 22 of the Draft Nair Regulation of 1925. Thus the Government was more conservative than the people. Even when the orthodox sections showed willingness to change the Government wished to retain the status quo and changed only under the extreme pessure of expediency. So like public interest charity covered a multitude of sins. However, during 1940’s from the social point of view their position was changed from a feudalistic theocracy to a welfare state.

It was the Brahmins, especially the Nambudiris who became the most undefended community in the State. They were protected in the past by the Government and revered by the society. When other sections became conscious of their rights and privileges, there remained none to protect them. Offence mounted from the Nairs, Christians, and the socially underprivileged communities. They were untrained to defend. The century of transition questioned their positions as a religious, bureaucratic, (Tamil Brahmins) social and intellectual aristocracy.
The Brahminical domination was based on religious, social, economic and political foundations. All of them equally contributed to their superiority, working in a manner that was both complimentary and contributory. Tippu Sultan questioned the temporal superiority, the Christian Missionaries questioned the social superiority, the new legal system introduced on the lines of the British Indian Law took away many of their legal immunity and done away with the moral and legal overlordship as the pontifical aristocracy. Moreover the presence of the British Political Agent always remained that there was an important power above the Maharaja. It was well proved by the fact that people often represented their grievances to him. Besides that the new economic system threatened feudalistic predominance by introducing cash economy and mobility. Sri Narayana Guru cut the top-root of religions superiority by the consecration of an 'Ezhava Siva', C. Sankaran Nair questioned the social privileges by the introduction of Malebar Marriage Bill, to be closely followed by Thamdu Pillai in Travancore. Their intellectual superiority was placed under competition by English education which unquestionably proved socially under privileged were in no less degree below the Savarnas in intellectual calibre. Thus, it was against the monopoly of Brahmins that Malayali Memorial aimed at Brahmins became an object of ridicule even by the last decade of the 19th Century—a contemporary characterisation was 'Soori Nambudiri' of 'Indaekha' It is to be remembered that a few decades back they were Gods on earth. This trend was followed in subsequent years also.

Nairs could almost retain their position by changing their role and they had not been unwilling to rise against the
administration when pushed back. In the modern history of Travancore they stood against the administration on three occasions. From the social point of view the first was led by Velu Tampi, 'the scion of an aristocratic Nair family in South Travancore'. He with his associates besieged the fort, demanding the dismissal of Jayantan Sankaran Nambudiri, a Nambudiri Brahmin, Tatchil Nathu Tharakun, a Syrian Christian business magnate and Thackalai Sankara Narayanan Chettu, a Tamil immigrant. Allegations raised were vexation, oppression, corruption and inefficiency. They were removed from palace influence and disgraced. The Nairs dominated, Velu Tampi became the Dalwa in 1801. Subsequently, in 1890's they again revolted against the administration of Dewan S. Rama Rao (14-1-1887 to 14-2-1892), a missionary prodigee and a pro-Christian Dewan. Meanwhile, the Palace was also dominated by the Tamil Brahmins. They submitted the Malayali Memorial. A recent research study says "only the names and occupation of its first 250 signatures were printed and have thereby survived. They indicate Nayar predominance in the memorial and the attempt of the Malayali Sabha to act as spokesmen for, and educator of, the large member of conservative Nayar landlords —— Fourty four Christians were among the 250, while the remaining of the signature was made up of Nambudiris, Ambalavasis, Irvases, Eurasian and Hindus whose caste is not apparent", and "towards the end of the memorial Syrian Christians and Irvases disappeared altogether". Submission of other memorials is the best documentary evidence that other communities felt neglected. The impact of the memorial was that Nair slowly became the bureaucratic aristocracy of the land from the position of landed aristocracy. Leaders of the Nairs
community like C.V. Raman Pillai etc. hailed the administration of Shungara Soobyer (17-8-1892 to 11-4-1898) while the Christians and other sections described it as having gone from bad to worse. The third occasion on which the community became alert was during the Regency—a period when the community was placed on the opposition bench. Cry of 'inefficiency' and 'rightful claims' were raised in the memorials to the Viceroy requesting to terminate the Regency. Though they could not succeed, allegations continued till the end of the Regency. An important feature of all the upraising was that inefficiency, corruption and failure of administration were projected and the uprise was made against the administration and not against the Ruler. Then came the young Maharaja. When the community found that their position as bureaucratic aristocracy was under constant bombardment by their competitors they became the political aristocracy through the constitutional reform announced on 23 October 1932, born out of the brain of Sri C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar and G. Parmeswaran Pillai, the Political Secretary. A contemporary opinion shows the importance of political status. Dr. K. Madhavan Pillai, in his Presidential Address as the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the All Travancore United Nair Conference emphasised the importance of political status as a pre-condition for general and economic development of the community. The political reform was closely followed by political agitation from other dissatisfied sections. Though non-Hindu Dewans like T. Austin (19.2.1932 - 19.2.1934) and Sir Mohammad Habibulla (5.3.1934 to 1.10.1936) were there they need played only a second fiddle to 'Sir C.P's' orchestra as the Constitutional Adviser to the Maharaja. There was a
change in political aristocracy. The Nair community generally remained with the state administration, with the exemption of a few leaders like Pattam Tham Tham Pillai, and others who found new scope and significance in the cry for responsible Government. But the N.S.S. under the leadership of Mannath Padmanabhan supported the administration on the basis of some mutual understanding which considerably strengthened the N.S.S. organisation. This continued till 1945-46. Thereafter the wind began to blow in a different direction when the State Congress became an formidable power and the sun of Imperialism was about to set they strait away jumped into the State Congress bandwagon opposing "Sir C.P.S" 'American Model'.

Thus the Nair community changed their track in the competition from military and feudalistic aristocracy to feudalistic aristocracy, when the former was taken away by the British domination and defeat of Velu Tampi, and from feudalistic aristocracy to bureaucratic aristocracy, when feudalism began to waver, and from bureaucratic aristocracy to political aristocracy, and from political aristocracy to pampered children and from there as the State Congress leaders and managed to produce Pattam Tham Tham Pillai as the first Prime Minister of Travancore. The Nair community as a whole never declined but had to shift their track for the purpose of domination.

In the struggle of social adjustment the Nairs had to lose as well as gain- sometimes they opposed it sometimes they supported. For instance, in the temple entry and civic issues
many Savarnas except Brahmins joined. Nairs know well that by temple entry there was nothing for them to lose but for the Brahmins. But, however, a peep into their fortress had been sufficient to provoke them.

Side by side with the attempt for domination, Nairs undertook measures for reconstruction. Remodelling of the family system became inevitable. It was the result of the changed condition of personal relations which were once considered as distant became intimate and close, and those which were once considered close became distant. Thus, in the past when the needs of the people were limited defects of the joint families were not noticed. But where the social and personal relations became complex they felt more the glaringness of the defects and restrictions which failed to adopt itself to the changing and altered conditions. Legislation was felt necessary.

Though legislative effort was first made by the Nairs it came as a chain reaction. The first of such rule was the Nair Regulation of 1913. The only provision which affected the sister communities was the registration of Sambandham but the new Regulation of 1925 upheld the rights of the Nair women and claimed maintenance and inheritance from the non-Nair husbands. Nambudiris felt their position insecure. They responded with a Regulation. It even attempted to bypass the Nair Regulation. When the Nambudiris passed their Regulation, position of Kshatriyas became insecure because the Brahmins were unwilling to accept the claims of non-Nambudiri women. Kshatriyas responded with another Regulation. Thus sectarian legislation were mainly the attempts of each community to
insulate them from the inroads of the other. These legislations were brought to a success by the economic stress. Economic, educational and social factors were valued much in the selection of spouse than caste status. Once hypergamy was preferred but later a well placed caste groom was preferred to an impoverished hypergamy.

Social changes among the backward communities was the result of the continued efforts of a number of closely interconnected factors. It may be traced back to the emergence of Ezhuthachan, a poet of the backward community.

In the modern period it was through the European Missionaries that the backward communities were able to cast a scornful eye to the caste superiors. The Missionary encounters with caste Hindus taught them how to tackle the situation. Journalistic propaganda was another important factor. They gave importance to modern scientific developments besides other columns. Journalism as a mass media considerably helped the subsequent developments. With the development of journalism an important change was the development of Malayalam. It became the language of the people. English that of educated and 'modernized' replacing Sanskrit — an unquestionable dominance of the Savarnas. The technique of memorialising and petitioning was introduced by them. The importance is that when the underprivileged were kept away for pollution they could directly represent their grievances to the Maharaja or the Dewan for redressal. Alliance of the missionaries with the under privileged had the effect of equalising the social balance. When they came in for evangelism, caste was a resource entirely at the
disposal of the exploiting minority. It influenced all walks of life. This was compensated to the under privileged by the weight of missionary influence. Whatever introduced by them were also made available to the under privileged. The patronage was maintained till the under privileged themselves were able to bear their responsibility on their shoulders. They sowed the seeds of many subsequent reformation.

Another important cause of the sudden leap of the backward communities was that they had not been a part of the establishment, hence they had nothing to lose but only to gain. Acceptance of the right to possess property was the first step in the process of emancipation, and later the right to claim and demand a price for their labour. In the feudalistic society both were overlooked and the Government remained oblivious. Thus the tremendous change was the result of a free interaction of the stagnated forces — land, labour and capitals and a reallocation of its values under the impact of western capitalism. This in turn accelerated the process of social dissociation of untouchability from religion, untouchability and religion from feudalism, and both from social privileges, and all of them from administration and politics. All these became more logical when claims were raised on the basis of abstract numerical strength. At any cost this dissociation was not peaceful.

There was no communal ill-feeling so long as the society remained stagnant and mobility of any kind was nil and each followed its traditional social orbit. In other words each
stayed where they were supposed to be by the socially privileged. Communal ill-feeling and riots had never born out of religious ideology but on social economic and political issues. They were only the sound and fury of a society where the process of levelling up and down was in offing or the anxiety for domination and claims of equality. This is absolutely proved by the striking similarities of the details of the riots—tearing away of women's upper cloth, folding of umbrella, objection to the removal of crude ornaments and a lot. Assuming or conferring the freedom was objected by the socially privileged.

In their enquiry to the social condition of the slave castes, R. Rama Rao the Dewan Peishkar of Quilon reported, "The below thus given to the oppressive and arbitrary proceedings of the higher castes has given rise to a complaint. On the part of the latter to the effect that the Sirkar, by giving so much freedom to the slaves has created difficulties and increased the charges of cultivation and thereby cause injury to agricultural interests because in their opinion the agricultural property is associated with the perpetual subordination of slave caste".

Coupled with the economic freedom, representation of the socially under privileged classes in the political bodies of the State gave them a direct chance to ventilate their grievances, and the nature of oppression and even to have a say in the formation of rules and regulations of the State. To be more precise, his vote as a member of the law making body was equally valued in making a decision whether the Nair tarwads should have pre-capita partition or a Tamil Brahmin should get
his daughter married at the prepubescent age or a Nambudiri
widow could claim the right to remarry or not.

Social changes were more visible among those under
privileged classes who were only socially and religiously
backward. So, Ezhavas who were economically better off than
other sections took the leadership. One of the major factors for
the sudden and quick progress was the magnetic personality of
'the Guru' and the willingness of the community to accept his
singular leadership. However, that was not so with any other
community. Plural leadership dragged them in diverse directions,
and the progressive sections had to fight for every inch. Among
the Ezhavas the conservative section could not raise their heads
much. From interdining to introduction of a marriage system,
from the consecration of a temple to partition of joint families,
and from temperance to abstract Advaita philosophy Ezhavas sought
his guidance and drew inspiration from his wisdom. Under his
leadership none could deny their claim for temple entry.

Temple entry was granted by the Government more as a matter
of political expediency, to check conversion and being 'profoundly
convincing of the truth and validity' of their personal glorification
than the acceptance of a just and legitimate right of the backward
communities. This was proved by the fact that even after temple
entry the Government was unwilling to accept the social equality,—
it is to be remembered that temple entry was argued by the
contemporary Ezhava leaders as a social question that as a
religious one.
The contemporary social history of Kerala was considerably by Sri Narayana Guru though it had less influence on other communities. As the society at large differed, his ideas can not be said to have been wholly influential. Nor can they be said to have completely failed either.

Whatever might have been the changes noticed among the economically well-placed sections of the backward communities like Ezhavas, one can easily say that depressed classes could not keep pace with the social progress of the society. The policy of neglect pursued in the past continued. To the Malayali Memorial the Government positively responded, the Ezhava Memorial they endorsed and asked them to be contented with what they had. But immediately after the Malayali Memorial, Ancient Dravidian castes people residing in South Travancore submitted a Memorial, more advanced and self-assertive than any other contemporary Memorials. When taken into account the social position of the communities concerned. It appears that the Government remained oblivious of the memorial. Even after temple entry, more or less the same policy was followed. Amelioration works were more of the nature of anti-conversion than social elivation. Instead of organising them into a strong union the Government had been lavishly spending grants and financial assistance to a number of organisations. During the post-temple entry period there came up a number of mushroom organisations claiming assistance but in most cases the work was improperly done or money was misappropriated. Thus, economically their condition remained far from satisfactory. There was only horizontal mobility of occupation and economic status, except for a few. Horizontal
and vertical mobility of occupation and economic status occurred more in the higher income group of the backward communities. In this context it is to be remembered that attempt of the Government for vocational education like basket making, mat making, carpentry etc. in the schools came under criticism from those communities themselves. Such vocations were in one way or another associated with certain particular castes. It was alleged as a veiled attempt on the part of the Government to continue the old condition as it could help only for horizontal mobility. But there was social change. It must be admitted. A minor instance can be pointed out. A generation back they could use only crude, strange and demeaning names like Thavan, Velumban, Daivathan, Thali, Kurumbi, Mala, Ketha, Kunjila etc. but they changed to Kochukunju, Gopalan, Kavavan, Madhavan, Naryanan, Padmanabhan, Ponnamma and Thankamma etc. Social customs once disallowed such advanced names. Though economically their position remains unenviable, from the theoretical point of view of interpersonal relationship a change could be said to have taken place.

The most tremendous change was visible among the women, except Muslims. Among the Hindus it was mainly due to the matriarchal system, among the Christians as there was no exclusion. Except from the hygienic point of view of none of them observe birth or menstrual pollution. With increased mobility, public opinion, cultural contact, education and improved economic condition many of the evils associated with marriage gradually disappeared.
Taking into account the past social condition and difference of opinion on various social issues including temple entry, and though temple entry removed a number of the heart-burning questions of civic rights it was largely opened to the socially privileged classes whether to worship or not in the temple with avarnas. If at all their concept was favourable, it affected them the least in their personal life. But placing the Travancore Special Marriage and Succession Act in the Statute Book on 13 Chingam 1119/29 August 1943 under section 23 of Act 1108 was far more revolutionary step than the temple entry. A few decades back a poetic narration of Kumaran Asan of the association of 'Savithri', Nambudiri Brahmin girl and 'Chathan' a Pulaya in 'Duravastha' was sufficient for many to raise their brow. What was once considered impossible was sanctioned by the state. Under this Act, the state was liable to protect those who invoked its provisions — whether the marriage was between a Nambudiri woman and a Pulaya or Pulaya women with a Nambudiri Brahmin. The Act virtually affected the personal relation, life and interpersonal relationship. It is a different matter how many invoked the provision. But the Government did not feel it necessary to issue any confidential circular — after temple-entry Proclamation the Government had to issue confidential circular to its officers to attend the temples regularly. The Act is more important when taken into consideration of the fact that it was opposed by none but a section of the Muslims when recommitted to the consideration of the House. The measure was widely acclaimed by the House. One member even said 'blood should mix with blood' and it could be done only through such a piece of legislation — the creation of a new generation. Its scope, implications, public
approval, lack of any ulterior motives proves that the Special Marriage and Succession Act is more important from the point of view of social development than the profound and sudden conviction of the Maharaja of the 'truth and validity' of the temple entry.

Generally speaking, the period under study was a long but steady journey of an Ezhava from the status of a toddy tapper to that of the 'uncrowned king' of Travancore, a Nair from the 'useless legal factor' to a responsible partner, a Nambudiri from the position of God on earth to 'a human' and the Government from the feudalistic theocracy to a semi-welfare state, and a society where the cry of arrogance and superiority of pollution echoed a generation back was replaced by the reverberations of "Inquilab Zindabad", irrespective of the generation gap, caste, communal, religious or regional differences.

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Notes and References - Conclusion


2. Ibid., p. 170.

3. Ibid., p. 178.


5. Cover File No. 286, D.O. from T. Rama Rao, Dewan Paishkar, Quilon Division to the Dewan of Travancore, No. 914, dated Quilon 30 September 1869.


7. Cover File No. 11208, Memorial Submitted by the Ancient Dravidian Caste People residing in South Travancore to H.H. the Maharaja of Travancore dated 31 Auvany 1068/14 September 1892.

8. There was dislike but the oppositionists found it futile to oppose the steamroller policy of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. The Census Commissioner of 1941 also repeats the same views about the attitude of the oppositionists. His remarks came up for an assembly adjournment motion.

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