CHAPTER —III

POLITICAL MOVEMENTS AND THE SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE PRINCELY STATES OF KERALA: 1891-1947
POLITICAL MOVEMENTS AND THE SYRIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE PRINCELY STATES OF KERALA: 1891 – 1947

This chapter focuses on the political movements that took place in Kerala before the independence of India. Indian states were re-organized on linguistic basis after independence in 1947. The present state of Kerala came into existence after the amalgamation of the princely states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar region, which was part of the Madras presidency under the British.

The Political situation that existed in Kerala was shaped by a series of political movements involving a high degree of participation by the people of Kerala at various levels. These movements are of great interest to the historians as well to the political scientists, whether viewed from the national or regional perspective. Many political agitations aimed at achieving basic political and social objectives have had decisive role in shaping the socio-political character of modern Kerala. It should not be assumed that such agitations were a phenomenon, peculiar to the modern age in its history. Even in the medieval and modern periods the three regions of Kerala (Travancore, Cochin and Malabar) exhibited a high degree of political and social consciousness by

actively involving in mass agitations against social and political issues. The former princely states of Travancore and Cochin witnessed several struggles and agitations of a political character even from the beginning of British rule. One of the main reasons for political struggle was the structure of the society and religious polity in Travancore and Cochin. Politically Kerala was divided into small principalities. The very fact that there were Rajas and Chiefs, who had often, rights and prerogatives in one another’s territory, helped the growth of an extra political -social unity. This peculiar socio-political phenomenon was one of the main reasons for the growth of political movements in Kerala. From this perspective it is essential to delve into the origin of political movement in Kerala.

**The Geographical Background of Kerala**

Kerala has been through ages an integral part of Indian sub-continent. Its history is the General History of India, and it is one of the major streams, that have enriched the composite culture of the country. At the same time Kerala has had the same distinction of being an independent Geographical and political entity from very early days. Its unique Geographical position and peculiar physical features have invested Kerala with a distinct individuality. The land

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2 A. Sreedhara, Menon, op.cit., P.5.

of Kerala comprises the narrow coastal strip bounded by the Western Ghats on the East and Arabian Sea on the West in the Southern part of the Indian Peninsula. This geographical position has helped to ensure, to some extent, its political and cultural isolation from the rest of the country and also facilitated its extensive and active contacts with the country of the outside world. Before the independence of India there was no state known as Kerala. But there were three political entities popularly known as Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. In short the Geographical position of these three regions played a remarkable role in the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political formation of modern Kerala.

A Brief History of the Princely state of Travancore

The Indian state of Travancore was a small kingdom—a narrow strip of land with about 75 miles at its greater width and 174 mile along the Arabian Sea coast at the South-West edge of the peninsula, with an area of 7,091 square miles. In the year 1900, G. Parameswarn Pillai wrote in the Universal magazine, London, "Travancore was well known to the Romans, it was known to the Portuguese long before the English dreamed of an empire in India, and was known to the Dutch. But it is not merely on the strength of

4 A. Sreedhara, Menon, op.cit. p.23.
its hoary past that Travancore claims our attention. It is still one of the most interesting parts of India, interesting like in its natural features and in the peculiar manners and the customs of its people". Travancore came into existence in the middle of the 18th century, when the king Marthanda Varma defeated and annexed seven small states. Marthanda Varma the Maharaja of Travancore died in 1758 and by then the borders of Travancore extended from Cochin in the north to Kanyakumari (Cape Comerin) in the South. This was a district till the time of independence of India.

For almost a century Travancore witnessed a social process in which religious communities were involved. The term community is used here to denote a group distinguished by its religious identity and not by its locality of residence. Thus if a certain number of people belonging to different religious pursuits or its subscriptions live in a particular area, according to our operational definition area has several communities. Thus the Ezhava community, the Nair community or Christian community could be seen in a village in Kerala. Conceptually, it is different from the meaning of community.

in the west where it has an ecological reference. All these communities were competing each other to dominate over the other and to establish their superiority in Kerala society. Interestingly they used for their ends and their traditional loyalties articulated in terms of religious sentiment. This fascinating social process with all its sociological facets is the focal theme of this study in the glimpses of political movement's right from the year 1891 till 1947.

**Political Movements in Travancore**

The first popular rising was witnessed under the leadership of Velu Thampi Dalava from the princely family of Travancore in 1799. Followed by the Travancore Memorial popularly known as (Malayan Memorial) in 1891 and the Ezhava Memorial of 1896. These two movements were sponsored by the leading communities of Travancore such as Nairs, Ezhavas and the Christians in view of getting a free share in the government and the administration of the state. The struggle for responsible government was pioneered by Swadeshabimani Ramakrishna Pillai in 1910. He was a patriot and freedom fighter. The activities of the Indian National Congress (1919 – 1931) added further momentum to the cause of responsible government. A further fillip was given to it through the Abstention

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movement in 1935. This was followed up by the activities of the Travancore State Congress, which was organized in 1938. The year 1946 witnessed the mass upheaval at Vayalar and Punnapra. The Punnapara Vayalar movement was a popular upraising of the labouring class against the land lords sponsored by the Communist party. This movement was suppressed with an iron hand by Sir C.P.R. Ram Swami Aiyar the Dewan of Travancore is ultimately culminated in the resignation of the Dewan, which gave way for the establishment of responsible government in 1947.

The Socio Political and religious situation and its influence in the Administrative system of Travancore

The social movements were the outcome of various socio political and religious communitarian problems. To get an overall view of these factors it is better to know the administration of Travancore. From the very beginning of Christianity in India the Syrian Christians enjoyed a privileged position. There was no organized political group that might have provided church leadership with opportunities to exercise a decisive role in public affairs. But in early stages, the influence of religious and communal forces in the political sphere had remained subtle and vague rather than bold and pronounced. The gradual shift of Maharaja from the position of an autocrat to a head also paved the way for his involvement in the
administration of the state. The Maharaja of Travanacore was not averse to the idea of popular participation in the governance of the state. Thus popular participation in the administration originated in the governance of the state. The Maharaja controlled the administration through his Dewan. The position of Dewan was equal to that of a Chief Minister in the present context of Indian states. The popular participation in the administration formally started in the year 1888 when for the first time in Travancore a legislative council was constituted consisting of eight members, all were nominated by the government M.E. 1063 (1888) sections- 2, 3.9 It may be rightly said that the foundation of a democratic process was laid by the Dewan Rama Rao during the reign of Rama Varam Vth of Travancore in the year 1888 A.D. It marked a remarkable improvement in the political organization of Travancore. The creation of the Sree Moolam Prajasabha (Popular Assembly) by Dewan V.P. Madava Rao in 1904 may be considered another important milestone in Travancore.10 The aim of the Maharaja was to get the support and co-operation of the people in the matters of administration. Followed by Dewan Rama Rao, P. Rajagopalachari became the Dewan of Travancore. He was also instrumental in establishing high traditions in legislative deliberations.

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The political process enunciated by Sree Moolam Thirunnal, the Maharaja of Travancore through the creation of popular assembly was a landmark in the history of Kerala. It was an occasion for the people of Travancore to become members in the Sree Moolam Praja Assembly. In fact it was a privilege for the various religious communities to be involved directly in the administration of the state. It was indeed a blessing for all the major communities of the Princely state of Travancore to involve in the democratic process of the state which was predominantly dominated by a monarchical system of government. The social and communal background was one of the major reasons to begin such political movements in Kerala. Hindus, Christians and Muslims were the three major religious communities in Travancore at the turn of the 20th century. Among the Hindus, the Nairs and the Ezhavas came to be identified as two distinct communities with in the Hindu fold having their own distinct features and characteristics. According to the 1891 census, Christians in Travancore numbered 5,26,911 (20.60) percent. More than half of the Christians population in Travancore was Syrian Christian.

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11 Dr. George, Mathew, Communal Roads to A Secular Kerala, New Delhi, Concept Company, 1989, p.24.
Table: *Caste/Community population of Travancore: 1891*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non- Malayali Brahmins</td>
<td>28,100</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambalvasis, Namboodiris, Pottis</td>
<td>14,154</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairs</td>
<td>4,83,725</td>
<td>23.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>1,58,823</td>
<td>7.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>5,26,911</td>
<td>25.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezhavas including Shanars</td>
<td>5,50,825</td>
<td>27.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulayas, Parayas</td>
<td>2,74,402</td>
<td>13.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,369,40</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total population of Travancore: 20,369,40.

Sources: Travancore Census Report, National Archives, Delhi. 1891.

Note: Shanaras also come under the Ezhava category.

The census report of various religious communities is shown above indicates the strength of various religious communities. The Maharaja of Travancore gave representation in his Praja Sabha to various communities. But they were not given a fare share in the administration of the state. This is why religious communities joined together and started agitation clamouring for their demand in political as well as administrative fields. The administrative system was under the control of Tamil Brahmins and was not from the state. The Tamil Brahmins were 2.10 percent of the total population of the princely state of Travancore. However, the natives had no say in the administration. So all religious communities, the Hindus, Christians...
and Muslims joined hands, and they protested against the partisan attitude of the Maharaja of Travancore. They had decided to give a mass petition to the Maharaja demanding a fare share in the administration of the state. With this intention all communities joined together and presented a petition and it is popularly known as the Malayali Memorial.

**The Travancore Memorial (Malayali Memorial)**

Following is the text of The Travancore Memorial:

To

His Highness the Maharajah of Travancore, G.C. S.T.  
&c. &c. &c. &c.  
TRIVANDRUM.

May it Please Your Highness,

I beg to forward for your Highness 'favourable and sympathetic consideration a memorial signed by more than ten thousand of your Highness' subjects of different castes, creeds and calling. Nambudris, Nairs and Tiers, Syrian and Native Christians and East. Indians or Eurasians, Landlords, Merchants and Officials. In the printed list of important signature appended to the Memorial, Your Highness will find the names of several leading members of the bar at Trivandrum, Alleppey, Quilon and Parur, of some of the richest landlords belonging to such communities as the Nair, the Nanjinad Sudra and the Syrian, of representatives of several well-
known houses, of many Christian kathanars and Purohitars and of about fifty graduates.

The Memorial was printed both in English and Malayalam towards the close of February last and is therefore subject to a few alterations of not very material character, which subsequent official changes in Travancore and the publication of University results have necessitated. I am sorry that though it was ready for presentation in June last, the Memorial was unavoidably detained at Trivandrum so long.

I beg to subscribe myself
Your Highness Most obedient
And loyal subject
K.P. Sankara Menon B.A. & B.L.
Vaqkil, High Court, Madras.

The Luz, Mylapore,
11th January 1891.
Source:- Travancore State Manual.

Based on this Memorial in January, 1891, persons belonging to all castes, creeds and communities presented a memorandum signed by 10,028 persons to Maharaja Sree Mulam Thirunnal demanding a fare share in the administration of the state for the people of Travancore. They wanted repressed of grievances of Malayalis in the matter of recruitment in the government service.¹²

The decision to submit this petition which came to be known as Travancore Memorial (Malayali Memorial) was taken at a public meeting on the initiative of leaders like Kandathil Varghese Mappilla and G.P. Pillai at Kottayam.\(^{13}\) It was submitted by six men delegation consisting of Parameswara Pillai, K.P. Padmanabha Menon, M.K. Padmanabha Pillai, Cyriac Nidhiri, K.N. Pillai and Sivan Pillai.\(^{14}\)

Memorial was to: "The denial to the Travancoreans of a fair share in the government of their country and their systematic exclusion from the higher grades of service." See the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Brahmin Domination in Travancore services 1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malayali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Travancore Memorial.

\(^{13}\) A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit, pp.5-6.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, p.6.
The submission of this Memorial was an epoch making event in the history of Travancore and this won for him (G.P. Pillai), the title the Father of Political Agitation in Travancore. His attempt was to urge upon the government the inherent right of the Travancoreans to a due share in the service of the state. The Malayali Memorial agitation against the Raja of Travancore for preferring outsiders for jobs was a distinct landmark in the political history of Kerala inspite of the association of a few Christian leaders like Kandathil Varghese Mappila and Nidirickal Manikathanar who were actively involved in the historic Malayali Memorial Agitation. However it cannot be denied that it was predominantly a Nair sponsored affair.

Undoubtedly, this was the first sign of political awakening in Travancore. There were a number of political meetings in this connection at Parur, Kottaym, Alleppey, Quilon, Trivandrum and Nagercoil. It is said that the government in Travancore realized for the first time that the voice of the people was a force to reckon with.

On a plane wider than religious community, it was whipping up sentiments of local citizens, against outsiders. Here, in one sense, narrow communal feelings had not been awakened although within

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16 A. Sreedhara, Menon, op.cit, P.7.
the broad framework; narrow communal loyalties were the effective factor in mobilizing the people.

Travancore Malayali Memorial 1882 was an organized political movement. The Malayali Memorial presented its memorandum to government in the year 1889. Most of the government posts were held by Tamil Brahmins. Though the Nair, the Syrian Christian and the Latin Catholics and the Muslim communities had their own meager share in the public service, the Ezhavas were completely excluded from the administrative cadres both higher and lower. The Malayali Memorial may justly be characterized as a joint movement of all communities in Travancore against alien predominance in the civil service.

Malayali Memorial achieved its aim, but equal justices to all communities remain unrealized. The various religious communities joined hands together and continued their fight for securing justice from the part of government led by the Maharaja of Travancore. According to the Malayali Memorial petition, the Christian community was consisting of the Syrian Jacobites, Marthomites, Protestants, Syrian and Latin Catholics.

17 The Hindu, Madras: January, 20, 1898.
They number 498,542 forming 20.76 percent of the population and were composed of 287,409 Syrian and 153,815 Catholics and 57,318 Protestants respectively.\(^{19}\) The Travancore Memorial agitation led to the formation of caste organizations in Travancore.\(^{20}\)

**Nazrani Jathyikya Sangham**

Christian had organized a platform to express their grievances much before the Malayal Memorial agitation. At Mannanam, near Kottayam, in 1866, Nazrani Jathyikya Sangham was formed for the social uplift of Syrian Christians with special emphasis on their education, civil duties and share in government. Its origin is recorded in the following words: “Christians, as a result of the division have not only women weak like a disjuncted body, but also they lack in education, civic consciousness and sirkar jobs resulting inadequate social development. In all these they could have progressed if only they were united. Therefore, to eradicate this serious drawback many great men from the Syrian community resolved to form an organization called Nazrani Jathyikya Sangham. All Marthoma


\(^{20}\) E.M.S. Namputhiripad, “Caste class and parties in modern political development with special reference to Kerala.” First world conference on Malayalam and Kerala culture, (FWCMKC), History Section, P.P 18-35.
Nazrains may be included in it. Among the various denominations of Syrian Christians, the Marthomites and Jacobites were advanced in position because there were supported by the British government. So they got English education and secured lucrative job; so they were in advantageous position. The most aggrieved section within the Christian community was the Roman Catholics. When the Syrian Christians of the protestant denominations such as Marthmoities and Jacobities had freer access to the British rulers and thus to the Travancore government, the Roman Catholics went without their share of influence in the government. It was therefore that the first stirrings among the Christians aimed at securing their due share in government took place within the Syrian Roman Catholic community. To fulfill this aim they decided to start a newspaper named Deepika to speak for the community as well as to create awareness among the Syrian Catholic community to fight for the well being of the community in the socio political realm. In 1887 the newspaper Nazrani Deepika came out as its official organ. The editor was Nidhirical Mani Kathanar (Priest), who played an important and dynamic role for the community’s agitation to get a due share in the government. The paper had a communal title, Nazrani, meaning thereby followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Malayali Memorial Agitation and the Nazarni Jathyikya Sangham gave an impetus to the Christian community that if they organized, then only they can achieve their urgent needs from the government. These two movements gave a fillip to the Christians to organize themselves coherently under the umbrella of their community. This led to the formation of the all Kerala Catholic Mahajana Sabha (KCMS).22

Kerala Catholic Mahajana Sabha (KCMS)

In May 1905, the Catholics of Travancore and Cochin held a public meeting at Mannanam which gave way for the rise of Catholic Mahajana Sabha.23 A prominent Syrian catholic priest popularly known as Nidihirickal Mani Kathanar was one of the founders of the Catholic Mahajana Sabha. Since 1907, the meetings were known as Samoohya Sammelanam.24 Its aim was to fight for the demands of the Syrian community and to get preferential treatment for their community in the socio political fields and also to avail more opportunities to get job for the members of the Christian community in government services.

22 Dr. George Mathew, op.cit, P39.
23 Cochin Dewan’s Letter No. 2205 Dated 25th February 1921.
The All Kerala Catholic Congress (AKCC)

In course of time the Kerala Catholic Mahajana Sabha (KCMS) was changed to All Kerala Catholic Congress (AKCC). This name was adopted at the Shertali Congress in 1930. It began to pioneer in politics the rights of Roman Catholic Christians in Travancore. For a long time their demands were advanced through resolutions for the proportional representation of Catholics in government services, the state legislature, the right to build churches and have cemeteries. This organization had a religious character because the church led it and it had a communal spirit because its aim was only to benefit the Christian community.

The AKCC was the mouthpiece of the Catholic Community in public affairs. Therefore AKCC was considered as a support and a shade for the strong catholic community. The Roman Catholics especially the Syrian Catholics believed that behind all their achievements for about half a century after i.e. before independence AKCC played a crucial role.

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25 John Pellissery, op.cit, P.218
The role played by the Newspapers Deepika and Malayala Manorama

Apart from AKCC, the Christian community's voice was heard through the newspapers the Nazrani Deepika, which was started in the year 1887 and Malayala Manorama which was started in the year 1888. Both of them were from Kottayam, a town in Central Kerala. The Deepika was started by a religious order among Syrian Catholics known as Carmelite fathers, while Malayala Manorama was started by a Syrian Jacobite family known as Kandathil family. The Deepika wrote uprightly for the Catholic Community while Manorama wrote for all communities and spoke for all communities particularly for the depressed classes. Deepika and Manorama supported Malayali Memorial. This movement was sponsored by Nair community. However, it is true that these Syrian Christian papers never said or wrote anything, which would hurt the communal rights of the Christians or harm the communal harmony. These two papers were powerful instruments for stating the needs for the Christian community. In an editorial supporting the Malayali Memorial, Deepika wrote in 1891: These days, we wonder whether there is anybody among the Syrians who have no complaints about their exclusion from government service.\textsuperscript{27} As late as 1927 Deepika

\textsuperscript{27} Nazarani Deepika (Malayalam Daily), Kottayam: 1891, July 1.
exhorted the Catholics to wake up and establish organizations powerful enough to achieve their legitimate rights. Some other editorials of Deepika in this direction were: Christians and rights of citizens, "May 28, 1918;" "Equality for citizens-1", "November 12, 1918;" "Equality for citizens – 11 January 16, 1919;" "The present condition of the equality to citizens November 11, 1919;" "Where is the principle of communal representation February 11, 1926;" "The Travancore government's policy of recruitment February 18, 1926;" "Catholic Memorial to her Highness the Maharani Regent, March 9, 1926;" "The sorrow of Catholics on discrimination and the sympathy of other communities March 23, 1926." 28

Compared to Deepika, Manorama did not give a communal color in their writings. Even though it was started by a Syrian Christian family, they were very mild in their approach. They were aiming at the progress of all community as a whole by not giving a Syrian Christian community colour. The editorial in Manorama about the Malayali Memorial strongly pushed the case for representation in government jobs for each community according to its numerical strength. 29 When the Sree Mulam Legislative Assembly was constituted, immediately occurred a strong protest from Manorama that a community (Syrian Christians) which had its

29 Dr. George Mathew, op.cit, p.61.
stakes in agriculture and trade rather than government jobs was totally excluded from membership of the assembly.\(^3\)

**Pourasamatiwavada Prakshobhanam (Civil Rights Movement)**

AKCC could help the Christian community to demand for their rights from the government. But they could not get their due share in the government and in the administrative matters. This led to civil rights movement. This political movement was popularly known as Pourasamatiwavda Prakshobhanam. Its objective was equality in respect of Civic Rights. The movement was sponsored by the backward communities among the Hindus with the backing of the Christian and Muslim communities and was led by leaders like E.J. John and T.K. Madhavan. The representatives of the various communities joined together and formed the Civic rights movement in 1919. In April 1922 by a Royal Proclamation, equality of opportunities in respect of government jobs for all communities was extended without any discrimination.

**“Triple Alliance” Nivarthana Movement (Nivathanaprastanam)**

*1932-38: Toward the First Political Party*

The agitation was a regional movement sponsored by a Travancore based local political party known as Travancore

\(^3\) Malayala Manoronna (Malayalam Daily), editorial May 23, 1894, quoted by Murkot Kunhappa, Kottayam: P. 295.
Congress with the aim of getting the political grievances of certain castes and communities duly redressed at the hands of the government. The term “abstention” was first used by a Syrian Christian scholar, I.C. Chacko. In Malayalam it was translated as Nivarthana Prasthanam. In essence, it meant keeping away from the bodies, which make administrative reform. The important resolution of abstention was that the members of the various political organization of the Christians, (AKCC) Ezhavas and Muslims should abstain from taking part either or candidates in elections or by accepting nomination to the reformed legislative bodies so long as the government non providing for the representation in the legislature by election for all communities, proportionate to their population. The ultimate aim of the abstentionists was to secure places in all the representative institutions and public services in proportion to the population of the respective communities.

It had the active backing mainly of the aggrieved castes and communities concerned. The Nivarthana agitation furnishes the concrete example of a movement where in one finds the interaction between caste, religious and politics. This is because the membership in the legislative assembly of Travancore was restricted

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31 Dr. George Mathew, op.cit, P. 93.
32 Ibid, p.93
only to upper classes (Savarna) like Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Nairs. The Ezhavas, the Harijans etc, who really constitute the majority among the Hindus, were almost excluded from membership in the legislature and public services. The Christians and the Muslims too were subjected to the same handicap.^[33] The number of members elected to the Travancore legislature from among such communities as the Ezhavas, the Muslims, the Christians etc., since its inception was negligible. This was mainly due to the fact that qualification for vote was based on the payment of an annual tax on property. Those who paid less than Rs:5/- a year as land tax were permitted to vote. The right of voting was conferred upon women as well. The Maharaja of Travancore Sree Chitra Thirunnal, made legislative reforms in 1932, a bicameral legislature was introduced without either changing the franchise or making the administration responsible to the legislature. Subsequently election was held for the Legislative Assembly in the year 1931.

The particular of the strength of the electorate in 1931 and the number of seats in the Sree Mulam Assembly by each community at each of the elections held between 1922 and 1931 is given below. It shows the nature of legislative representation in Travancore during this period.

Population and Voters (Communitywise) in Travancore in 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population In 1931</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>31,37,795</td>
<td>96,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairs</td>
<td>8,68,411</td>
<td>52,936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezhavas</td>
<td>8,69,863</td>
<td>12,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>16,04,475</td>
<td>40,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>3,53,274</td>
<td>8,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68,33,758</td>
<td>2,10,645</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on 1931 Census figures. SNDP Yogam Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1953, p.27

Elected Members in the Travancore Assembly 1922-31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Community wise)</th>
<th>1922</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1931</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seats in the Assembly</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezhavas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other caste Hindus</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other backward communities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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35 K. Bhanu, op.cit, p.28.
Formation of the Travancore State Congress: Toward “Grand Alliance”

The Nivarthana Prasthanam was of course a communal movement sponsored by the Syrian Christians to attain socio-political mileage. It was a movement of various backward Hindu communities, Muslims and Christians. It was a triple alliance. At the same time, the High caste Nair community could not gain from the government. This is the reason why Nair community decided to join the Nivarthanaprasthanam. When the Nair community joined hands the Nivarthana leaders decided to use the occasion to forge a new alliance. Pattom, Paravoor, T.K. Thomas. E. John Philipose and A. J. John (all Christians) met in February, 1938, at the office of A. Narayana Pillai under the presidentship of C.V. Kunjuraman from the Ezhava community and formed a new alliance of the Nairs and the Nivarthana leaders. This “mini-front” formed a new political party called Travancore State Congress.

The “Grand Alliance” for “Responsible Government”

The aim of “Grand Alliance” was to constitute a “Responsible Government.” They started agitation and conducted demonstrations.


But the Maharaja of Travancore did not allow agitations and demonstrations. Maharaja banned the Travancore State Congress (T.S.C.) and arrested its leaders. Following their arrest, the students protested against the actions of the Dewan of Travancore. The prominent newspapers such as Kerala Khowmudhi (an Ezhava daily), Malayali (a Nair daily) and Malayala Manorama (a Syrian Christian Daily), which were not only giving full publicity to the congress movement but also supporting their respective communities. At this time, in order to suppress the Syrian community, who took active part in the Nivarthana movement finally leading to the formation of ‘Grand Alliance’ consisting of all the other religious communities. Meanwhile, the Dewan of Travancore liquidated the National Quilon Bank (of the Syrian Christians), one of the most outstanding banks in India, and imprisoned its directors, K.C. Mammen Mappila (who was also the editor of the Malayala Manorama), C.P. Mathew and K.C. Eapen.  

During this time, the Dewan favoured the Nair community and its leader Mannathu Padmanabhan. He depicted the Travancore State Congress as a “Christian Congress.” The aim of Dewan was to abstract the Nair and Ezhava community from the “Grand alliance.” Whatever be the adverse stand taken by the Dewan of

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38 R. Ramakrishnan Nair, op.cit, p.36.
39 P.A. Mamman, op.cit, P.62.
Travancore, the Travancore State Congress (T.S.C.) was firm in its stand for the formation of responsible government. In the meantime Gandhi launched Quit India movement in the year 1942. The Travancore State Congress joined the Quit India movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. All the leaders who participated with in the Quit India movement were arrested and detained.

1944 Election: Communal Association in Contest

The Travancore government decided to conduct election for both legislative houses in 1944. T.S.C. was permitted to contest, but all its leaders who had been arrested and imprisoned before were disqualified for contesting. Moreover, the Congress party had to face stiff opposition from several quarters. Under the instigation of the Dewan of Travancore, the N.S.S. Unit, an organ of Nair community and S.N.D.P. Unit, an organ of Ezhava community, decided to contest in the election. The aim of the Dewan was to weaken the Syrian Christian community who were the vote bank of the Travancore State Congress (T.S.C.). Despite all these governmental efforts sponsored by the Dewan of Travancore, the T.S.C. won 14 seats in the elections. Out of these, 8 seats were won by Christians, 4 seats by Nairs, and 2 seats by Ezhavas. This election result manifested to what extent the grand manipulations

\[^{40}\text{Nair Ramakrishna op.cit, P.258.}\]
during the interim. Because of the political maneuvering of the Dewan of Travancore the T.S.C. had been reduced to a "Christian congress" which received only nominal support from certain sections of the Nair and Ezhava communities and practically no support at all from the Muslim community. The 1944 election was an achievement for the Congress. The force behind the electoral success was mainly due to the support of the Syrian Christian community. It also proved that Christians were a formidable force in Travancore even before the formation of Kerala state, could take place.

The “Grand Alliance” Recreated

The 1944 election was a clear indication of the democratic process that was taking place in Kerala before independence. This political movement was under T.S.C. All the communities were involved in this movement. So it had a communal colour. This political movement was mainly dominated by the Syrian Christian community. In India political winds were sweeping through the length and breadth of India and were soon felt in Kerala. The need for a broad-based communal alliance became imperative for the political survival of all communal leaders. So the major communities in Kerala besides Christians the N.S.S. led by the Nairs community and the S.N.D.P. soon came to adopt a pro-congress
attitude. The Dewan of Travancore made a constitutional proposal for a stronger executive government, which later came to be called the "American Model". But the Congress Party and the C.P.I. (Communist Party of India) rejected this movement. All the communities as well as the congress party vehemently rejected this move of the Dewan. Finally he conceded his stand for an independent state of Travancore by accepting a presidential system of government that exists in America. He finally decided to merge his princely state Travancore to the Indian Union. It was a chance for all the communities to come forward to participate actively in the political affairs of Kerala. So the communalist leaders of the N.S.S. and S.N.D.P. entered the Travancore State Congress (T.S.C.). With the advent of the independence of India all the communities supported the Congress party and congress fell under the influence of communal forces. The Syrian Christian community which was not an exception to the emerging political scenario however was always with the congress party compared to other religious communities. This was the political scenario that existed in the princely state of Kerala before the eve of the Independence of India.

41 P.A. Mamman, op.cit, p.67.
A Brief History of Cochin

Cochin, a former princely state with an area of 170 miles (274 kilometers); population (1941 Census), 1,422,875,\(^{42}\) of Southern India, which joined Travancore on July 1, 1949, to form the state of Travancore cochin, which was reconstituted with the state of Kerala after independence. The princely state of Cochin occupied the Center of Kerala and Ernakulam was the principal city. The rulers of Cochin were the Perumals belonging to the Chera kingdom, which was one of the oldest kingdoms in South India. The ruler of Calicut was Zamorin. The Zamorin and the Raja of Cochin were waging wars and fighting among themselves for political power. Meanwhile, the Portuguese settled in Cochin and established trade with the King of Cochin. The Portuguese supported the King of Cochin against the Zamorin of Calicut. By the end of the 16\(^{th}\) century the Portuguese influence has firmly established in Cochin. The Dutch captured Cochin in 1663 and held it for nearly a century. In 1776 Hyder Ali of Mysore invaded Cochin and forced the Raja of Cochin to pay him tribute. In 1791, the Raja of Cochin entered into a subsidiary alliance with the English East India Company, thus placing himself under the English protection.

\(^{42}\) Census Report of Cochin Princely State. 1941.

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Political Movements and Development in Cochin

The political movements in Cochin offer a situation almost a contrast to those of Travancore in respect of their origin, character and course of events. There is no such phase in the modern history of Cochin as the one marked by the memorials in the politics of Travancore. The fact is that the princes of the large-sized Cochin Royal family entered into matrimonial relations with Nair families, ensuring for the Nair community a privileged position in the civil services and there was no need for them to petition for jobs as in the princely state of Travancore. The communal overtones associated with the movements in Travancore were also by and large absent in Cochin. The Maharaja of Cochin made a proclamation, created first time a Legislative council there, but once created; the growth of democratic institutions in Cochin had been positive and dynamic.\footnote{Report on the Administration of Cochin for the year, Cochin: August 24, 1925, Chapter VI, P.44.}

The first election was conducted in 1937. Two powerful political parties emerged. They were the Congress and the State Congress. The Cochin Congress won an absolute majority in the 1937 elections and they were privileged to induct a ministry from the elected representatives. The Maharaja was more democratic. Communal jealousy and caste rivalry was less noticeable, because
almost all communities stood for communal justice. As a result communal and religious influences were not visible in the political and administrative affairs of the state. Like Travancore there was no communal discontent from the part of the various communities due to their partisan attitude of the King of Cochin. The ruling princely family did not degrade various communities. All the religious communities were treated equally. Therefore no community dared to make any protest against the rulers of Cochin. In the princely state of Cochin, the Syrian Christian community was a strong community, numerically and educationally comparing to other religious communities. The Rajas of Cochin did not make any discrimination towards the Syrian Christians in the socio-political field. The Syrians were happy with the Maharaja of Cochin. And therefore no political movement took place in Cochin before or during the eve of independence.

A Brief History of Malabar

Malabar was a district of Madras Presidency during the time of British rule in India. Geographically the name is sometimes extended to the entire western coast of the peninsula. The district of Malabar extends for 145 miles along the seacoast, running inland to the ghats with a breadth varying from 25 to 70 miles. The administrative headquarters was at Calicut. Like Travancore and
Cochin, Malabar was also a princely state. The King Zamorin ruled it. It was known as the former kingdom of Zamorin of Calicut. He was a staunch patriot and he fought against the British like Tippu Sultan of Mysore. The political situation in Malabar was totally different from that of Travancore and Cochin. The major communities in Malabar were Nairs, Ezhavas and Muslims. There was no Syrian Christian community. Muslims were the strongest community numerically.

**Political Movements in Malabar**

Indian National Congress was the political party. They were fighting for the freedom of the country just like Congress in the rest of India. However the Congress in Travancore and Cochin were not directly involved in the freedom struggle against the British. They were mainly fighting against their own kings for greater autonomy and freedom for their princely states. Therefore in Malabar there was no struggle between communities for political power and community superiority as in Travancore and Cochin.

District Board elections were conducted by the Madras government in Malabar. In the election, Congress got absolute majority and came to power. The Muslim League was also in the election field. They secured seven seats. To become the opposition
party they need to get the support of one M.L.A. K.O.K. Nambiar supported the Muslim League. He was elected under the Socialist party banner.

The Syrian Christian and the freedom struggle

The Syrian Christian was mostly concentrated in the former native states of Travancore and Cochin. Partly because of this, the community did not (with a few exceptions) provide national leadership in the freedom movement. But in the states of Travancore and Cochin they were among the foremost leaders of the freedom movement to achieve social justice and self rule. The nationalist agitation for responsible government and political freedom became active in Travancore and Cochin only in the late thirties and early forties of this century. In the joint political congress that was formed around 1932 and in the state Congress (affiliated with the Indian National Congress), into which the former merged, Syrian Christians were among the foremost leaders. T.M. Varghese, A.J. John, Vayala Idiculla, and other Syrian leaders took

an active part in the struggle against the repressive rule of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer (Dewan or P.M of Travancore) and for self-rule. The Syrian Christian community played an important part in achieving responsible government for the states of Travancore and Cochin within the framework of Indian union. Before independence through the Indian National Congress Syrian Christians in Kerala were actively involved in the freedom struggle for attaining the freedom of India. Soon after getting independence on August 15, 1947, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin merged into one state and the name Tirukochi was given to it. And they made Trivandrum the capital of the newly formed Tirukochi State. These states were reorganized on the basis of language Malabar was added to Kerala while Kanyakumari was detached. Thus Kerala became one of the states of modern India.

Conclusion

The Syrian Christian Community in Kerala is conscious about their minority status. They were always playing a safe game in community politics. They were associated with other communities and sought their help for their political advantage. Though they were a middle class farming community they attained dominance along

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48 Donald, Eugenie Smith, ed., op.cit, P.187.
with the advanced Nair community through various confrontational tactics.

The Ezhavas are numerically a large community and have been subjected to social reform movements under their spiritual leader Sri. Narayana Guru. This community lacked political strategy. Therefore they failed to attain dominance in Kerala’s political sphere even after independence. The Syrian Christian Community attained educational, occupational and economic vertical mobility at a time when democracy was introduced in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin before independence. This helped them to enter into politics with great confidence and attain social status equal to that of the High Caste Hindu community in Kerala. They continue to maintain this position even today in Kerala.