CHAPTER I

COLONIALISM AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN MALABAR

Malabar had come into the hands of the English East India Company under the terms of the treaties signed with Tippu Sultan at Seringapattanam in 1792. On the north it was bounded by the South Canara District, on the south by the Princely state of Cochin, and on the east by the Western Ghats. The area was at first administered by the commissioners and supervisors of the Bombay Presidency. In 1800 Malabar was handed over to the Madras Presidency. The Malabar district of the Madras Presidency covers an area of 5794 square miles. Malabar in this study means the British Malabar, one of the districts in the Madras Presidency, directly under the rule of the British.

Ecologically and geographically Malabar (the entire Malabar coast including South Canara) occupies a unique position in the sub continent. Ecological and geographical factors greatly influenced the pattern of settlement. Because of the undulating nature of the terrain, the paddy fields are scattered among hills and hillocks with the result that small holdings of paddy fields and garden lands with houses (purayidams) came into existence. The availability of water in almost all fields irrespective of the nature of the land helped the development of individual occupation.

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Under colonial rule Malabar society slowly and steadily underwent a transformation parallel to that of the Indian Society. The economic, political and ideological interventions of the colonial agent radically altered the caste based social ensemble of Malabar from early 19th century onwards. The overt as well as covert incursions of the coloniser into the caste domain from 1800 onwards were, by and large, a direct fall out of their economic, political and cultural designs in the region. The changes that were ushered in thus, drastically altered the living conditions of almost all social groups and classes. Thus Malabar was also brought under the orbit of colonialism in which the basic control of the economy and society were in the hands of the colonial masters. The emergence of a national market attuned to colonial trade had, by and large, a calamitous effect on the artisans and peasantry while a tiny middle class consisting of the colonial salariat and professionals along with the commercial and trading elites experienced considerable upward mobility. To evaluate the transformation and the forces that worked behind it and to assess the impact of it, an understanding of the transition from pre-colonial society to the colonial society is imperative.

24 Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1979, p. 26. Prof. Bipan Chandra made an indepth study on the subordination of Indian Economy to the world capitalist economy under colonial rule.
Pre-Colonial Social Landscape of Malabar

Pre-colonial Malabar society was a caste dominated society, where the Brahmins, Kshatriyas or ruling chieftains, the Ambalavasis or intermediary castes and the Nairs constituted the political and social elites. They had religious, political, military and judicial responsibilities. The predominance of the Brahmin community over the rest of the society in Malabar, to a great extent, originated with their ownership of land. The traditional Brahmanical literature - Keralolpathy - expounded the theory that all land belonged to the Brahmins and they obtained it from Lord Parasurama. The Brahmanical prose narratives also have references about Brahmins settling sudras, maryada (customary laws), janmamaryada, janmam and the transaction of adiyar. 'Kerala Jatinirnayam', another work of the Brahmanic tradition also refers to the formation of caste, system of landgrants and Brahmin ownership of land. Though these claims are legendary, facts are available in support of

25 It is to be noted that the Brahmins of Kerala, as elsewhere in India, prepared the geneology of chieftains and attributed Kshatriya status to them. For details see Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, Kerala Charithram, Mal., Vallathol Vidyapeetam, 1991, pp. 225-256. M.N. Sreenivas also highlights the process of some Nairs "ripened" into Samanthas and Kshatriyas. For details see M.N. Sreenivas, Social Change in Modern India, New Delhi, Reprint, 2005, pp. 37-39.
29 Ibid., p. 10.
30 Ibid., p. 57.

\textit{Brahmins} distributed the land among Nairs under the tenure known as Kanam. Parasurama brought sudras (Nairs) from outside and instructed them to follow the matrilineal system and protect the interest of the Brahmanas.\footnote{M.R. Raghava Varier, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 31.}

To live for Brahmanas and cow and bringing the barren soil under cultivation were attributed as the duties of the Sudras.\footnote{K.S. Madhavan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 31.} Acquisition of economic power by becoming the owners of the chief means of production (land) and ‘the ritualistic subordination of lower castes through the practice of jatimaryada (caste duties)\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 3.} elevated the Brahmins to the position almost of Gods in the society. Any legislation of British government in Malabar to deprive them of the janmam right over landed property was resented by the Brahmins. They claimed and established that Devaswam properties were set apart for the maintenance of their temples and they were the proprietors of these landed property.\footnote{O.M. Narayanan Nambudiripad, Welcome Speech, Twentieth Annual Conference of Nambudiri Yogakshema Sabha, Angadipuram, Quoted in \textit{Mathrubhumi}, December 27, 1928.}
Brahmins followed the makkathayam system of inheritance. Since the partition of the property among the family members would lead to the fragmentation of the holdings, the law of primogeniture was strictly followed by them. Only the eldest son was allowed to marry within the caste. Others were allowed only to have concubinary relations with Nair women without any cares and obligations of matrimony.

Brahmins were also the custodians of the Dharmasastras. They were the law givers and interpreters. In all important civil and criminal cases they were at liberty to give judgements as Vaidikars. In spiritual matters including the methods of worship they were the masters. They enjoyed the monopoly of scriptural knowledge. The dominance of the Brahmins over the castes inferior to them was extended to the claim that Nair women should put off the cloth covering the upper part of the body while offering prayers at the Brahmanical temples.

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41 *Mathrubhumi*, April 12, 1924.
The fourfold varna system\textsuperscript{42} in its entirety never existed in Malabar. The Vaisyas or their counterparts were non-existent in the social scale of Kerala.\textsuperscript{43} The Sudras were the Nairs distinguished into higher and lower sections. The Brahmins, the intermediary castes and the Nairs constitute the caste Hindus - Savarnas - in the Malabar society. They account for 24.3 percentage of the Hindu population of Malabar in 1871.\textsuperscript{44}

The Nambudiris designated the Nairs as Sudras. Logan says that the Nairs were treated as Kshatriyas in the traditional society.\textsuperscript{45} The Nairs were the traditional militia and they awarded capital punishments for the violation of caste rules.\textsuperscript{46} They became the tenants of the Nambudiris and used to sublet their holdings to the Ezhavas or to employ the Pulayas as serf labourers.\textsuperscript{47} The alliance with the Brahmins did not deliver the Nairs from all their disabilities. The sambandam relation of the Brahmin with the Nair women did not bring them the benefits of a proper marriage and instead, they

\textsuperscript{42} The Varna System or model has been studied from different angles by historians and sociologists. For details see Suvira Jaiswal, "Varna Ideology and Social Change", Social Scientist, Vol. 19, March-April 1991. M.N. Sreenivas, Caste in Modern India, Bombay, 1962, pp. 63-69.

\textsuperscript{43} M.S.A. Rao, Tradition, Rationality and Change, Bombay, 1972, p. 118.

\textsuperscript{44} Census of the Madras Presidency, 1871, Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 346


along with their children became unprotected and desolate. Almost all sections of the *Nair* community followed the matrilineal descent system.

Below the *Nairs* in the social hierarchy were the *Tiyas*. Since the *Nairs* were recognised as the 'Sudra' caste, the *Tiyas* accordingly belonged to the 'avarna', that is, outside the varna system.\(^{48}\) The *Tiyas* were heterogeneous in economic as well as in social status.\(^{49}\) Most of them were subtenants or landless labourers - usually working under the high caste landlords belonging to the *Brahmin* and *Nair* communities. Yet, there were wealthy landowners among them. In Calicut the *Tiya* family of Kallingal Madam were big landlords second only to *Zamorins*. They owned ships and were engaged in foreign trade with countries like China.\(^{50}\) They were given the title of 'Moopan' by the Zamorin.\(^{51}\) Similarly the royal family of Kadathanad used to appoint members of the *Tiya* family as masters in their courts.\(^{52}\) The *Tiyas* also specialised in traditional Ayurvedic medicine and Astrology and were conversant in Sanskrit literature, which was normally regarded as the purview of the higher castes.\(^{53}\) Concerning the social hiatus, it should be mentioned

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\(^{48}\) The upper castes from *Nambudiris* to *Nairs* were referred to as 'savarna'.

\(^{49}\) For details see P. Bhaskaranunni, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-377.

*Tiyas, Billavas* and *Ezhavas* belong to the same category. They were referred to as *Ezhavas* in south and central Kerala including Palghat district and Valluvanad region and *Tiyas* in north Malabar.


that *Ezhavas* in the Palghat were considered lower than other *Tiyas*. This type of differentiation within the community made C. Krishnan, the *Tiya* leader of Calicut, to be doubtful about the success of the idea of organising the *Tiya/Ezhava* community in the entire west coast. C. Krishnan also pointed out that the north Malabar *Tiyas* looked down upon those from the south.\(^5^4\)

Though such differentiation existed, in the caste ensemble of Malabar the *Tiya* community as a whole had only a low occupational and ritual status.

Below the *Tiyas* and other similar castes came those who were without land, who had to toil to make both ends meet. They deserved to be called the depressed classes in every sense. They include people like *Cherumas*, *Pulayas*, *Parayas*, *Nayadis*, etc. The *Cherumas* or *Pulayas* were the agrestic slaves who were maintained by their masters on a Spartan fare for centuries to keep them subsisting with body and soul together.\(^5^5\) Logan reported that the population of *Cherumar* as per the census taken in 1857 was 187,812.\(^5^6\) “The caste is very scantly clad; in many places the men do not wear cloth at all round their waists, but substitute for it a fringe of green leaves. Their women used at one time to go similarly clad, but this practice has fallen into disuse in Malabar”.\(^5^7\) The house of the agrestic slave - the *Cheruman* - is *Chala*.\(^5^8\)

Being attached to the soil they were in bondage like the cattle and greatly

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\(^5^5\) Logan, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.
\(^5^7\) *Ibid*.
below them in estimation. Left to the care of nature they got no sympathy from sickness or in old age or redemption from poverty. Francis Buchanan noticed that "the greater part of the labour in the field is performed by the slaves, or Cherumar. They are the absolute property of their Devarus, or Lords, and may be employed in any work that their masters please. They may be sold, or transferred in any manner that their master thinks fit".\textsuperscript{59} Edgar Thurston also noticed that the Cherumar were "with their full consent, bought and sold and hired out …".\textsuperscript{60} The Cherumar had no right to reach near the places where the caste Hindus move. Nor did they have the right to worship the Gods whom the caste Hindus worship.\textsuperscript{61}

Another section of the depressed class was the Parayas. They also were bound to the soil as the serfs and agricultural labourers. The manufacture of wicker, bamboo mats and cadjan umbrellas were their occupations. Their houses were situated away from the residential quarters outside the ordinary village limits, and were called Cheries.\textsuperscript{62} They were everywhere the menial servants of the country, and whenever they reside they have allotted to them a separate place on the outskirts of the village, called Pariacheri, or paraya village, as their near presence would be pollution to the Hindus .... The poor Paraya has met with nothing but scorn and contumely

\textsuperscript{59} Francis Buchanan, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 370.
\textsuperscript{60} Edgar Thurston, \textit{Ethenographic Notes in Southern India}, Reprint, Madras, 1989, p. 446.
\textsuperscript{61} Francis Buchanan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 493.
\textsuperscript{62} Logan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 85.
at the hands of Hindu castes in no way more entitled to consideration than himself". In most cases they were denied the right to cultivate the soil for their own benefit and were destined to do any menial labour of hardest nature for other castes for a minimum wage. They were always ill treated and beaten up at pleasure by their masters. They also have only scarcest means to have food and clothing. They went about almost naked or at best clothed in the most hideous rags.

The most revolting thing about the Parayas was the nature of their food. As Abbe Dubois put it, "they contested with jackels, dogs and crows for carrions, and took away the semi-putrid flesh to their home to share among themselves without any rice or anything else". The French missionary also brought the meditation of Christian morality coupled with Eurocentric historical perception when he says that 'even the helots of Sparta were a better placed community in society when compared to the ill fated, despised creatures known as Parayas". Like Cherumas and other depressed classes, the Parayas also had no access to the deities of caste Hindus or even to the shrines of lower castes like Tiyas. They were also denied entry into the residential areas of upper sections or even the public places.

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64 Abbe Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, Oxford, 1897, p. 56.
65 Ibid., p. 8.
The Nayadis were another group of outcastes in Malabar. In the scale of pollution the Nayadi holds the lowest position.\(^{66}\) Logan found the prescribed pollution distance attributed to Nayadi as 72 feet,\(^{67}\) the maximum of the distance of atmospheric pollution. Francis Buchanan also noticed that even the Cherumans did not touch them.\(^{68}\) But they were a tiny population as far as Malabar was concerned. According to the census report of 1921 there were only 417 Nayadies of whom 200 were males and 217 females.\(^{69}\)

The foregoing description reveals the overall nature of the Malabar society at the time of British colonial intervention. It is clear that the Malabar society was hierarchical in nature. The Brahmanas occupied the summit of the hierarchy. The communities below them were in servitude to them with variation in degree and enjoyed concessions and disabilities corresponding to it. All were attached to the soil in different capacities; as Janmis, Kanakkar, Pattakkar, Verumpattakkar, Adiyar, etc. In this scenario the Brahmanas and the Brahmanic upper castes (savarnas) were the surplus earners and the polluting and depressed classes were the labourers and bonded slaves.

Slavery was an elemental institution of that society. Colonial administrators and ethnographers pointed out that in Malabar the communities

\(^{66}\) Edgar Thurston, Note No. 39, p. 447.
\(^{67}\) Logan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 118.
\(^{68}\) Buchanan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 413-414.
of Cherumas and Parayas were condemned to perpetual slavery.\textsuperscript{70} The colonial discourse on slavery was contested by the indigenous scholars. But they also brought to light the presence of large mass of agrestic bonded men called adiyar at the bottom, who remained as bonded untouchable labour force.\textsuperscript{71} The adiyars were attached to the soil as permanent slaves by birth. They formed an integral part of the landed property and the owner was vested with the power to sell them in any manner that the master think fit. Such a condition prevailed in Malabar upto the end of the colonial rule.\textsuperscript{72} Usually a husband and wife were not sold separately, but children may be separated from their parents, and brothers from their sisters.\textsuperscript{73} The price of slave varied from place to place with the change in the crop pattern of different regions. Though the right to kill a slave had ceased to exist by the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the deed of transfer clearly stipulated that "you may sell or kill him or her". In Malabar the adiyar were not employed as domestic servants or personal attendants. This was because of the notion of theendal and thodil (unapproachability and untouchability).

\textsuperscript{70} Logan, op. cit., p. 176, Buchanan, op. cit., p. 493, Thurston, No. 39, p. 441-453.

\textsuperscript{71} Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, op. cit., also see Raghava Varier, Madhyakala Keralam, Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, pp. 23-32.


\textsuperscript{73} Buchanan, op. cit., p. 370.
Pollution by touch, approach or sight was practiced by the Malabar society. The concept of pollution and purity were the central features of the caste system in India right from its inception and Malabar practiced the most virulent form of untouchability.

Pollution was practiced to preserve the exclusiveness of a community from that below it. The Brahmins being the 'pure race' could not pollute others but could only be polluted by others for above them there was no community. All other communities save the one at the bottom were capable of being polluted and polluting at once. The memorial submitted by the Brahmin inhabitants of Palghat in the course of Kalpathy agitations is a clear testimony to the Brahmanic perception of pollution by touch or approach. It says: "In Malabar except for high caste Hindus distance pollution is observed, the distance varying in proportion to the class to which the individual belongs. This social custom is not confined to the Brahmin or even the high caste Hindus but is observed even by a low class man against an individual of still lower class. This distance pollution is not only confined to men but applied...

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74 Theendal was a peculiar and notorious custom prevailed in Kerala. Gundert's Malayalam Dictionary (1872) and Logans Malabar Manual defines it as atmospheric pollution. (Nayadi at 72 feet, Pulayan at 64, Kanisan 36, Mukkuvan 24 ...). Thurston also gives us valuable information about it. Distance pollution, to which it is usually referred, means that a low caste person pollutes a higher caste not only by touch but by approaching him within a specific distance. Indigenous literature and foreign notices have detailed description on theendal and thodil.

75 The vast historical, sociological and anthropological scholarship on the origin and evolution of caste system in India agrees to this point though they differ in the details.
with greater force to temples, tanks and even dwelling houses". Even towns and market places were considered to be defiled by the approach of certain communities like Cherumans and Nayadies. Logan also writes: "The Hindu malayalee is not a lower of towns and villages. His austere habits of caste purity and impurity made him in former days flee from places where pollution in the shape of men and women of low caste met him at every corner; and even now the feeling is strong upon him and he loves not to dwell in cities".

In Malabar unapproachability was so keenly observed that the common expression of spatial measurement were Thiyappad, Cherumappad, etc. indicating the distance equivalent to that within which a Tiyan or Cheruman was not allowed to approach a caste Hindu. Among the dominant castes, the approach by a Nair to a Brahmin was permissible but he must not touch the Brahmin. While a Tiya had to keep 36 paces off from both Nair and Brahmin, the same Tiya was polluted by the approach of a Pulayan. Foreign notices of late medieval Kerala and the colonial reports say that the pollution rule was so strictly observed that "anyone daring to pass on within pollution distance of a Nair would be cut down at once".

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76 L.S.G Department, 1925, Mis., Series GO.No. 206 L and M dated 20.01.1925, KRA, Kozhikode.
77 Logan, op. cit., p. 82.
78 Ibid., p. 82.
The concept of pollution by touch or approach was the chief source of almost all disabilities suffered by the depressed classes. As noted earlier, the caste Hindus imposed restrictions on the polluting and depressed classes not only in their houses and temples, but even public roads and other public places were closed to them. This has been attested by foreign notices and colonial ethnography. Alexander Hamilton writes: "If a poulia (Pulaya) or teyvee (Tiya) met a Nair on the road, he must go aside to let his worship pass by, left the air should be tainted …".\(^81\) Barbosa says that, "in the kingdom of Malabar there are 18 sects of Gentiles, each one of which is much distinguished from the others in so great a degree that the ones will not touch the others under pain of death or dishonour or loss of their property".\(^82\) Logan's description of the denial of public places to the untouchables gives us more insights into the problem. He says, "in passing from one part of the country to another, they (the Cherumans) tramp along through the marshes in mud, and wet often upto their waists, rather than risk the displeasure of their lords and masters by accidentally polluting them while using the public roads".\(^83\) The survey of the literature brings into our mind the strategy evolued by the savarna community to retain the producing adiyar class at the bottom of the social hierarchy and to distance them from the fruits of their labour.

\(^81\) Alexander Hamilton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 108.
\(^82\) Barbosa, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 103.
\(^83\) Logan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 148. Such a condition existed in Malabar even during the 20th century. \textit{See Mathrubhumi} December 16, 1924.
Pollution and purity percolated down to the worship pattern and the belief system also. Brahmins and other savarna classes controlled the temples and its immense property - Devaswam - for their own benefits. They worshipped deities like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Vigneswara, Subrahmanyan Sasta or Ayyappan, Hanuman, Bhagavathy, etc. and officiated as priests. The Ambalavasies or intermediary castes assisted the Brahmins in the performance of rituals. The Nairs also visited the temples and offered prayers. Though the Nairs had the right to worship the higher deities; they had no right to adore them by ringing the bell or to do homage to the deity from the Namaskaramandapam. This clearly reveals the intermediary position of the Nairs in the caste hierarchy.

The lower castes like Tiyas have their own religious institutions and practices. They were not allowed to worship in the temples of the savarnas. In the kavus (sacred grove) and kazhakams of the Tiyas, they performed pattu (song) festival, pooram festival, perumkaliyattam, etc. The Teyyam or Teyyattam was a popular cult especially among the lower castes of Malabar. It had incorporated different forms of worship like the cult of mother goddess spirit worship, serpant worship, hero worship, tree worship, animal worship.

\[84\] Enlightened Nairs all over Kerala began demanding equal treatment with Nambudiris in worshipping the temple deities in the 1930’s. Instances of brutal assault for ringing the bell and offering prayer at the Namaskaramandapam was reported from Guruvayur where P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan were the victims. Similar incidents took place at place like Pilicode, Taliparambu, Narath etc. For details see A.K. Gopalan, Ente Jeevitha Katha, Autobiography - Mal., Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p. 37. Also See Mathrubhumi, December 22, 27 and 31, 1931 and February 16, 1932.
ancestor worship and gramadevata worship. Besides, it also incorporated large number of Brahmanical Gods and Goddesses into it.\textsuperscript{85} The adoration with the sacrifice of cocks or fowls was a speciality of the Teyyam cult and kavu tradition. In the festivals and rituals of the lower castes like Tiyas, the consent of the savarnas was essential. For that they made traditional present of betel leaves and arecanuts with fanams (coins).\textsuperscript{86} Besides, they also have to present customary offerings to the Brahmanical temples at a distance without having the privilege of offering prayers in a decent manner.\textsuperscript{87} This infact reveal the degraded ritual status of the Tiyas in the caste hierarchy of Malabar.

The depressed classes like Pulayas, Parayas, Nayadis, etc. worshipped evil spirits like Pysachi, Paradevata and Malaidaivam.\textsuperscript{88} They were not permitted to reach the vicinity of either the savarna temples or the religious institutions of the avarnas. At the same time they have to offer fanams (coins) and other valuables to the temples and Tiya shrines. In many of the savarna temples and avarna institutions, stone slabs were placed at a

\textsuperscript{85} K.K.N. Kurup, \textit{The Cult of Teyyam and Hero worship}, Calcutta, 1975
\textsuperscript{86} K.K.N. Kurup, \textit{Aryan and Dravidian elements in Malabar Folklore}, Thiruvananthapuram, 1977, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{87} The Tiya newspaper Mitavadi published series of articles written by Tiya notable which exhorted the community to abstain from such temples which shut down its doors to Tiya pilgrims. The campaign for the boycott of Savarna temples was also part of the attempt to build up community solidarity against the dominant discourse. See various articles in Mitavadi 1913-1919.
\textsuperscript{88} Buchanan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 414-528.
distance (adimakkallu) to receive the valuable offerings of the depressed classes.\textsuperscript{89}

The *savarna* domination was not restricted to the practice of *theendal* and the ritualistic domination. On the other hand one can notice hierarchy and difference in food, drink, clothing and the like. Food and drink together with clothing and housing constitute the ground floor of material life, a level of history that changes only slowly overtime. This famous conclusion of Fernand Braudel, which lies at the very heart of his theory of the *longee duree*,\textsuperscript{90} is applicable to the traditional Malabar society also. Here the hegemony of the *Brahmanical* life world was clearly visible in customs, usages and the language. Logan says: "The home itself is called by different names according to the occupants caste. The house of a *Paraya* is *cheri*, while the agrestic slave - the *cheruman* lives in a *chala*. The blacksmith, the goldsmith, the carpenter, the weaver, etc. and the toddy drawer (*Tiyan*) inhabit in homes styled *pura* or *kudi*, the temple servant resides in a *variyan* or *pisharam* or *pumatham*, the ordinary *Nair* in a *vidu* or *bhavanam* while the

\textsuperscript{89} For details see *Mathrubhumi* Nov. 1, 1932; April 11, 1933; October 29, 1933. Large number of reports highlighting the resistance of depressed classes to pay ‘*adimakasu*’ has been reported in the subsequent issues of *Mathrubhumi* daily. The procedure of offering ‘*adimakasu*’ has been described by host of modern writers. In fact one of the agenda of the reformist movement in Malabar was empowering the underlings in the society against paying their money to those institutions whose doors were closed to them. For detailed description of this see A.M. Abraham Ayirukuzhil, *Swami Anand Thirthi: Untouchability Gandhian solution on Trial*, Translated by K.C. Varghese, Taliparamba, 1986, pp. 110-112.

man in authority of his caste dwells in an idam, the Raja lives in a kovilakam, the indigenous Brahmin (Nambudiri) in an illam, while his fellow of higher ranks calls his house mana or manakkal.\footnote{Logan, op. cit., p. 85.} Logan continues, "that all the excellences are the birthright of the Nambudiris, and that whatever is low and mean is the portion of the lower orders of the society. A Nair speaking to a Nambudiri must not call his own food "rice" but "stony or gritty rice", his money he must call his "copper cash" and so on.\footnote{Ibid., p. 127.} Similar usages were customary in the case of polluting and depressed classes when speaking to higher ups in the jati hierarchy.\footnote{Barbosa, op. cit., p. 135.} Likewise lower orders were not allowed to use quality wood or tiles for covering the houses; nor even "permitted to build houses or huts on the ground nor to inhabit the plains where there is corn ground but must dwell in woods and build on the hights of trees like birds, with grass and straw".\footnote{Alexander Hamilton, op. cit., p. 108.} The clothing of the depressed classes was "only little straw made fast before their privities".\footnote{Ibid., p. 108.} Logan also reports: "The caste (cheruma) is very scantly clad; in many places men do not wear cloth at all round their waists, but substitute for it a fringe of green leaves".\footnote{Logan, op. cit., p. 148.} As K.N. Panikkar put it, these distinctions in dress, language and even food fostered sectoral identities based on caste, serving as channels for conveying ideas of
mutual exclusiveness. The administrative ideology of the colonial state and the missionary discourse of the 19th century interacted with this Brahmanical perception of society and the untouchable life world. This interaction contributed substantially to the emergence of a new social milieu which was based on social equality and justice.

**Colonial intervention in the Traditional Malabar Society**

The administrative measures and economic policy of the British reacted with the traditional Malabar society. After initial experiments, the British had eliminated the native chieftains from their political responsibility. They also had created a new bureaucracy that would work well to serve their interests. What they achieved through this system was supreme political dominance over the landlords and caste Hindus who had hitherto exercised a decisive control over the administration of the territory. At the same time the British were particularly cautious not to interfere with the social customs of the people. This was in conformity with the British policy of neutrality in caste affairs that they followed throughout the Indian empire. Yet the administrative measures of the British sowed the seeds of change in the socio-economic and cultural topography of Malabar.

**Land Revenue Administration**

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From the very beginning extraction of agriculture surplus was the primary administrative concern of the colonial regime in Malabar. To achieve this, they devised a land revenue policy that would have a favourable balance with the administrators after meeting the expenses. While effecting land revenue settlement, they retained a good part of the old order with the aim of minimising the administrative expenses through utilisation of the traditional institutions of society.\(^ {99}\) As T.C. Varghese has put it, the British were interested to create and recognise a few customary superior right holders on land.\(^ {100}\) They also treated the *janmam* as absolute property right.\(^ {101}\) To ensure more revenue and to commercialise the agriculture, the British had to introduce western modes of revenue and tenurial system. By the commercialisation of agriculture they meant the conversion of land and the people tied up with land as commodity. At the same time the colonial authorities refused to bring about basic changes that would adversely affect the position of *janmies*. This was because of the British desire to base their power in an authority structure of native origin.\(^ {102}\) In actual practice there was not only the *janmi* or landlord between the cultivator and the state; but the whole pattern of tenurial relations, involving the sharing of products of the

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\(^{102}\) A. Gangadhara Menon, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
land between the members of a hierarchy according to customary regulations, was retained by the British, adding to it the share of the state.\textsuperscript{103} The imposition of enhanced claims to the produce of the land\textsuperscript{104} without affecting the \textit{janmies} eventually turned out to be a powerful destabilising factor in the functioning of the traditional society. It also led to intense struggle on the part of peasants.

The peasants (\textit{kanakkar}) started submitting petitions to the authorities demanding stoppage of \textit{melcharth} and other arbitrary rights of the \textit{Janmies}. Consequently the colonial Government was forced to issue the Madras Act No. 1 of 1887 which provided compensation for improvements made by tenants on leased lands. Similarly, the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 incorporated provisions for fair rent and fixity of tenure to the tenants. The failure of the colonial government to acknowledge the demands of the peasants resulted in the peasant mobilisations of the 1930’s and 1940’s cutting across caste and community lines. This mobilisation provided the food and fodder to those who struggled for the transformation of the society.

\textbf{Trade, Industrial and Investment Policies}

\textsuperscript{103} T.C. Varghese, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 12-29.
\textsuperscript{104} T.M. Thomas Isaac has calculated that in Malabar around 60 percent of the net agricultural income was paid out as rent or tax. See T.M. Thomas Isaac, "Some Aspects of Industrial development of Kerala", paper presented at the seminar, \textit{Kerala: A Quarter Century After}, A.K.G. Centre for Research and Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1982.
Besides land revenue policy, the trade, industrial and investment policies of the colonial masters also affected the traditional fabric of the Malabar society. In Malabar, the company and some private individuals started plantations during the early decades of colonial rule itself using both 'free' and 'unfree' labour. Though the growth of plantations and industries in Malabar was slow compared to the princely states, it resulted in the growth of a new economic order based on cash economy in the rural areas. The plantations attracted labourers belonging to different castes and communities. They not only worked together but also dined and lived together. This is testified by the report of the joint magistrate, Tellichery, which says that low caste people including Tiya, Cherum, Kanakkans and Mappilas live together in the coolie lines. In such cases there was no room for caste discrimination or untouchability.

The industrial development of Malabar also was a slow process. The few industries that sprang up in Malabar during the 19th century were owned

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by the Basel Evangelical Mission. The mission started industries mainly to provide employment to the converts who have no other source of livelihood. In these industries the workers, mostly Christians converted from different castes worked together. Along with them, people belonging to different religious and social backgrounds not only worked together but also mingled with each other. Thus a new social space was created at the bottom level. The public and secular space created in the factories, and also in the plantations contributed to the social mobility of the people.

The commercial policy of the British contributed to the increase in the volume of trade both external and internal. The growth of trade and commerce and the gradual growth of industries resulted in the growth of urban centres. In these urban centres the savarnas—because of their caste inhibition as noticed by Logan—were not at all active. This gave fresh opportunities for lower caste like Tiyas to accumulate profit. Jeffrey’s study on Travencore pointed out that the trade in coconut products and liquor trade added to the prosperity of the Ezhavas. The same picture can be applied to Malabar Tiyas also where Murkoth Ramunni, father of Murkoth Kumaran, was an influential figure in the toddy trade of North Malabar. Some of the

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108 Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
109 Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, New Delhi, 1976, pp. 139-141.
Tiyas became wealthy by the supply of provisions, vegetables, toddy, etc. to the Europeans in their centres like Kannur, Thalassery, Kozhikode and Palakkad. Some of them also accumulated wealth through banking and money lending business. The prosperity acquired through these economic activities enabled the Tiya middleclass to fight against defilement practices like untouchability and unapproachability.

But the impact of the colonial economic policy on the depressed classes of Malabar was not as bright as that of the Tiyas of the colonial urban centres. As noted earlier the company and the European planters employed slave labour in their plantations from the very beginning. But the Janmam Kanom Pattom mode of agrestic slavery with its specific cultural world was an obstacle to the free movement of agrestic slaves to the centres of new economic activities. So it was essential for the colonial system to detach the agrestic bonded labourers from the traditional agrarian relations. The ideology of utilitarianism and nascent capitalism also influenced the colonial masters. Christian missionaries also propagated the idea of liberation of slaves for their own evangelical motives. Compelled by these factors the Government of India abolished slavery in 1843. But this act had precious little impact until the opening up of large scale plantations in the second half of the 19th century. Inspite of the abolition of slavery in 1843, the practice of using slave labour

continued in Malabar upto the middle of the 20th century. But the cash wages paid to workers (exslaves) in the plantations helped them to shrug off the ties binding them to the traditional masters.

The transport and communication facilities introduced by the colonial regime also had tremendous impact on the society. The introduction of railway and the construction of roads, though began as an attempt to suck out the resources of the peripheral areas to the industrial needs of the metropolis, had facilitated social, administrative and economic unification of the country. It also delivered a mortal blow to Hindu social order by rendering impossible the observance of the rules of caste and untouchability.

Colonial administrators and ethnographers of the 19th century like E.B. Thomas, William Logan, Edgar Thurston and others reported the existence of slavery even after the promulgation of the act of 1843. Logan says, “in 1852 and 1855 the traffic in slaves continued … there is reason to think that they are still, even now, 1880, with their full consent, bought and sold, and hired out, although the transaction must be kept secret for fear of penalties of sections 370, 371, etc. of IPC …”. Logan op. cit., p. 152.

The Report of the District Collector of Malabar regarding military recruitment during 1917-1918 also testify the practical existence of slavery, Recruitment File 1917-1918, KRA, Kozhikode. During the 20th century political activists like K. Kelappan, Keraleeyam and many others published articles on the practice of agrestic slavery. For details See Mathrubhumi May 20, June 17, 1933; April 22, 1938, June 4, 1938, August 5, 1939; Keraleeyam's article in Prabhatam August 29, 1938. The memorandums submitted by the depressed classes also highlighted the issue of slavery. See Law, General, Department, 1924, GO. No. 3543 dated, 13.12.1924, KRA, Kozhikode.

Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India": in Karl Marx on India, Aligarh Historians Society, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 48-49. Marx writes: "I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other row materials for their manufacturers".

A.R Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Bombay, 1976, p. 132.
The impact of modern transport and communication facilities - as harbinger of modernity has been well articulated by the Malayalam Press. *Malayala Manorama* of July 1, 1922 expect that "within ten years trains and motors will frequently pass through the heart of this land. Along with it took place the growth of cities and trade. … The newly emerged hotels will attract the moneyed people irrespective of caste. This inturn will contribute to the decline of the practice of *theendal*".¹¹⁵

The construction of railway lines and roads had thrown open plenty of job opportunities. Here, the bulk of the labour force was supplied by the untouchable communities.¹¹⁶ The cash wages given to them contributed to their social mobility. It also freed atleast a section of the people from the clutches of *savarna* landlords. The interaction with the white masters was a new experience to them. They found that the Europeans were not keen to observe the rules of pollution and purity. This new awareness strengthened their position vis a vis the upper caste people.

The growth of transport and communication facilities and the growth of trade and commerce resulted in the rise of towns. These modern facilities and institutions changed the immobile character of the society. The towns also necessitated the growth of tea shops and hotels. The depressed classes

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¹¹⁵ *Malayala Manorama*, July 1, 1922.
¹¹⁶ The existence of depressed class colonies in the railway purampoke confirm this. While interview the Dalits living in the railway land confirmed that their grandparents came and settled in these regions while they were employed in the railway construction work.
were not admitted to these places in the early years. But the struggle organised by them with the support of reformers and political activists yielded the result.

**Colonial Judiciary and the Depressed Classes**

Dispensing justice to the conquered was another area which attracted the attention of the colonial masters. In pre-British days administration of justice was based on the *maryada* or custom of the land and *Brahmins* were the interpreters and law givers.\(^{117}\) The British took over the responsibility of administration of justice from their hands and entrusted it with the civil and criminal courts established by the company. Each and every custom and practices of the people were examined in the new dispensation. Thus Malabar happened to be one of the largest inheritors of the grand system of British judicature based on the rule of law and strict sense of justice.\(^ {118}\) At the same time it should be born in mind that the colonial judiciary did not take a sympathetic approach to the cause of the depressed classes, to slavery, caste inequality, untouchability, poverty of the tiller of the soil, extremities of the caste tribunal etc. Even in judiciary the lower courts were controlled by the caste elites who were deaf to the most genuine grievances of the depressed classes. This is clear from the complaint raised by the enlightened sections of

\(^ {117}\) P. Bhaskaranunni, *op.cit.*, pp. 725-802.

the depressed classes. They complained that "they did not get a fair hearing in courts except from European judges". It was also pointed out that the 'litigants belonging to the depressed classes are not allowed to enter the courts and that they are examined while standing outside". Though the complaint was related to the courts in the (Madras) presidency, the situation in Malabar was worse as evidenced in the reports of the Malayalam newspapers like *Mathrubhumi*. Inspite of such genuine complaints, the introduction of uniform criminal procedure code applicable to all natives irrespective of caste status "happened to be good beginning to instil caste equality consciousness in radical minds in the succeeding years". Though the immediate effect of the colonial system of judicature, which has "high sounding, complicated etiquettes and mannerisms" was marginal; the avowed principles of the rule of law and strict sense of justice in the long run had the net effect of undermining the tyranny of *Brahmins* and other *savarnas* as interpreters and enforcing agency of law.

**Colonial Salariat**

The gradual growth of colonial salariat was another factor in the social transformation of Malabar. In the pre-colonial Malabar polity, military and

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121 *Mathrubhumi*, November 1, 1927, The failure to ensure justice to the depressed classes has been highlighted in the subsequent issues also.
administrative functions were performed by the Nairs. The British, on the otherhand, recruited separate groups of soldiers from Tiyas, Mappilas and Mukkuvans and maintained them on regular payments. The general policy of the British was to appoint natives from all castes and communities. They had declared in 1833 that no person would be disabled from holding any office or employment on account of his "religion, place of birth, descent or colour".

Further, the Board of Revenue's proceedings of 1854 stated that "the collectors should be able to see that the subordinate appointments in the districts are not monopolised by the members of few influential families. Endeavour should always be made to divide the principal appointments in each district among several castes … and it should be a standing rule that the two chief revenue servants in the collectors office should be of different castes".

The same has been endorsed in 1922 and fresh instructions were issued which clearly stated that appointments are to be divided among the several communities. Inspite of such directives from the policy makers, the lower ranks of colonial bureaucracy in Malabar was drawn chiefly from the Nair community. This was chiefly because the Nairs were the first to get the benefits of colonial education which was the basic requirement for appointment in the colonial salariat. The Nair domination in the colonial

126 MLC Debates, Vol. XXII, 3.2.1925.
127 G.O. No. 658, Public dated, 15.08.1922, KRA, Kozhikode.
bureaucracy was one of the sensitive issue taken up by the Tiya and other backward class elites in their campaign for building up caste solidarity.\textsuperscript{128} Series of memorandums submitted by the Tiyas and other backward communities of Malabar demanding due share in the bureaucracy and the deliberations in the Madras legislature regarding the statistical data of different castes and communities in Government jobs\textsuperscript{129} gives us information about the upward mobility of avarnas excluding the depressed classes.

Though the polluting castes like Tiyas advanced substantially in acquiring modern education and Government jobs, the progress of the depressed classes was abysmally low. The very few who got education were not considered for appointments on flimsy grounds. Inspite of different standing orders, appointments were given to unpassed Nair candidates ignoring the qualified depressed class candidate.\textsuperscript{130} In such discriminations, the answer given by the authorities was that "educational qualifications are not the sole text in making these appointments".\textsuperscript{131} It was also stated that "the qualifications of the unpassed candidates (caste Hindu) were superior to those of the others (depressed class)".\textsuperscript{132} The consideration given to the "nominations made by his (appointing authority) assistants", "local influence" of the person appointed etc. were also highlighted.\textsuperscript{133} These self explanatory

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} MLC Debates, Vol. XX, pp. 734-735.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
arguments clearly reveal the strategy of the upper class to exclude the untouchable communities from the domains of power. It also remind us the fact that inspite of wild pronouncements, the colonial bureaucracy drawn chiefly from the indigenous caste elites; blocked the entry of the depressed classes in the government service in one way or the other. But the severe threat posed by the world wars on the survival of the British Empire forced the authorities to overlook at least partially the caste taboos in appointing the sepoys. This situation enabled the depressed classes to get appointment in the military service. Later, some of the ex-service depressed class got appointment in the Government service also.¹³⁴ But their number was small.

Though the polluting castes and depressed classes suffered great hardships in enrolling the government service, the very idea of appointing government officers from different castes and groups affected the hegemonic position of the savarnas. Those who got jobs in the Government service became a distinct class. Though they were placed at the bottom layer of the colonial power structure; they were able to demonstrate the immense possibility of this newly acquired power. It also enabled them to articulate new social values as exemplified in the Saraswathivijayam of Potheri Kunhambu.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Interview with P. Gopalan, a depressed class leader of Kannur on 24.12.2007.
¹³⁵ Saraswathivijayam of Potheri Kunhambu - a Tiyya vakil of Kannur, graphically describe the liberative ideology of colonial modernity with sharp criticism on savarna caste practices, See Potheri Kunhambu, Saraswathivijayam, Mal., Reprint, Kottayam, 2004.
Education and Social Change

Modern education also played an important role in the transformation of the Malabar society. It gave a severe jolt to the traditional system by unyoking occupation from caste. Outside the caste framework it contributed to the upward mobility of individuals and groups in the process of westernisation, which permitted a chance for the lower castes to move up in the modern society.\textsuperscript{136} In Malabar the dissemination of western ideas came through the English education initiated by the missionaries. Here the Basel Mission assumed the leading role in the spread of English education.\textsuperscript{137} It began with the establishment of Basel Mission Schools at Tellicherry and at Barnasseri near Kannur. The Mission had an anti-caste ideology and it attracted lower caste people like \textit{Tiyas} to its educational institutions. As a result, by 1914, more than half of the students of the Missions College - The Malabar Christian College - belonged to the \textit{Tiya} Community.\textsuperscript{138} The mission also opened schools for depressed classes like \textit{Cherumas}, \textit{Nayadies}, etc. in different parts of Malabar.\textsuperscript{139} But their effort was only partially successful as evidenced in the reports.

\textsuperscript{137} Basel German Evangelical Mission, hereafter \textit{BGEM, Reports} 1846, KTC Archives, Mangalore. Subsequent issues of \textit{BGEM Reports} also highlight the educational efforts of the missionaries.
\textsuperscript{138} Mitavadi, March 1914, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{BGEM Reports}, 1850, 1895, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1910.
The educational activities initiated by the Basel Mission were further promoted by the colonial government mainly through the local bodies. Later on, the socio-religious reform movements, the nationalist movement in Malabar, voluntary organisations and individuals like Devadhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust and Swami Ananda Thirth, the Chirakkal Mission of the Jesuit missionaries, etc. also contributed substantially to the growth of modern education. As a result of the activities of various organisations and agencies, more and more children were enrolled in the schools. Caste-wise, the Nambudiri *Brahmins* were late in receiving the benefits of modern education; whereas the *Nairs* and other intermediary castes took the lead. Among the *theendal* castes, the *Tiya* took the lead in education.\textsuperscript{140} They had no caste inhibitions in undertaking this new venture and were culturally oriented for English education. As a result a good number of matriculates in the region came from the *Tiya* community. They were recruited in the Government service on the basis of merit and this job opportunity gradually led to the emergence of a group of salaried persons from the community. A job in the Government service removed the caste grievances of an individual who belonged to an inferior community. So the members of the *Tiya* community tried their level best to liberate themselves from the hold of caste through English education and employment in the Government service.\textsuperscript{141}


\textsuperscript{141} K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*, New Delhi, 1988, p. 86.
Though *Tiyas* achieved some success in acquiring modern education, the condition of the depressed classes like *Pulayas, Parayas* and *Nayadies* was pitiable. Even the missionaries failed to enrol them in the schools partly because of the opposition of the higher ups in the society and partly because of the pitiable backwardness of these sections. The educational and social backwardness of these sections forced Mr. M. Krishnan Nayar, the MLC form Malabar to state that "there was not even a single educated person from the Nayadi community". It is also worthwhile to note that these untouchable communities did not have any landed property nor do they have any accessibility to modern education. They were not even culturally oriented nor were they economically in a sound position to imbibe English education. Regarding their educational conditions Cecil M. Barrow, Principal of Kerala Vidyasala (Zamorins College), Calicut, made the following observation before the education commission of 1882: "The low caste being very low in the social scale hesitate to send their children to mix with *Brahmins* and Nairs, who would scout them …. Where a *Cheruma* to be found seen with a book in hand it would probably be seized and torn up by some passerby. This was actually occurred. A *Cheruma* school was tried at Calicut, but the *Nairs* and *Tiyas* used to way lay the boys as they were going to school and snatch to their books out of their hands". This type of threatening and manhandling

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of depressed class children continued even to the 20th century. The local newspapers published series of reports of physical assaults, destroying books and slates and ill treatment of depressed class children in the schools".\textsuperscript{144} Parallel to such incidents we also have reports of benevolence shown by the enlightened Hindus towards the education of the depressed classes.\textsuperscript{145}

Though the educational achievement of the depressed classes was marginal when compared to other sections of the Hindu Community, the spread of education brought new ideas and practices in the society. In the Missionary institutions students belonging to different castes studied their lessons in the same class room. They also lived in the same hostel, though the dining arrangement was separate.\textsuperscript{146} The feeling of equality cultivated in the Mission schools forced the Tiya students to demand for common hostel and dining facilities along with Savarna students not only for them but even for the depressed class students.\textsuperscript{147} Thus it is clear that the gradual growth of co-education contributed immensely to the growth of common public space.

The spread of English Education brought new ideas and institutions. This was accelerated by the socio-economic changes that took place during the 19th century. English educated people, though a tiny section, began to

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Mathrubhumi}, April 19, 1924, July 1, 1924, December 6, 1924. The subsequent issues also have such reports.
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Ibid.}, \textit{BGEM Report} 1905, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{BGEM Report}, 1910, p. 48.
question the value systems and practices of the traditional society. They placed individual liberty and the conscience of the individual as the prime mover of their activities. The educated elites began questioning the rationale of tarawad system and the unquestionable position of the karanavar, the practice of polyandry, polygamy and sambandam relations. These people started to bequeath self acquired property to their wife and children. The earliest expression of the changing perception towards self acquired property, karnavar's rights and privileges, sambandam relations, attitude towards English education and the cultural world opened by it, freedom of the individual to select his life partner, his career etc. can be noticed in the novel written in the second half of the 19th century by O. Chandumenon. The novel portrays a young English educated Nair woman who successfully challenged the hallowed right of a Nambudiri landlord to have sexual relations with any woman of the Nair caste. It also reflects the first ideological stirrings against caste system.

If 'Indulekha' reflects the perception of the savarna elites to traditional values and practices in the contested terrain of modernity, 'Saraswathi Vijayam' of Potheri Kunhambu interrogates the same from the perception of avarna elites. The novel visualise the acquisition of English education as the means to escape from the degraded position of polluting castes. The author

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has no hesitation to question the values upheld by the Brahmanic lifeworld. The traditional customs, practices and value systems were dissected from the perspective of modernity, avarna/subaltern point of view.\textsuperscript{150} This was made possible through the acquisition of liberal ideas and values. Thus the liberative potential of English education with its emphasis on humanitarianism\textsuperscript{151} enabled those who acquired it to organise movements for achieving social justice.

Thus the colonial hegemony brought immense changes to the structure and form of the Malabar society. The administrative measures of the British along with their economic policies made many of the traditional practices obsolete. The colonial modernity enabled the people to acquire modern ideas and institutions like individualism, liberty, equality and the rule of law, capitalist enterprise, money economy and the cash wages to labourers and factory workers, benefits of modern transport and communication facilities like railways and public buses and the like. It also took them to new market centres and colonial urban centres, hotels and teashops, newspapers, journals and new generation literary works. Their outlook, attire, language, attitude to family and society all underwent changes in the course of time. The value system cherished by the educated intelligencia and the colonial salariat was

\textsuperscript{150} Potheri Kunhambu, \textit{op. cit.}, The author redicules the savarna practice of Mungikuli, concept of polluting distance, Nambudiris opposition to Nairs using decent names instead of base names etc.

\textsuperscript{151} M.N. Srinivas defined humanitarianism as "an active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex". M.N. Srinivas, Note No. 5, p. 51.
much different from the traditional belief systems. They also assumed leadership in changing many of the traditional practices and customs out of the sheer necessity of their own class interest. Parallel to this, in the factories and plantations, the subaltern sections mingled with each other irrespective of caste and religion. The culture thus evolved in the factories and plantations was a composite culture. These two streams - the elite culture of the western educated and the subaltern culture of the workers and coolies in the factories and plantations - worked in the direction of achieving social equality. Both of them had grievances against the exploitative mechanism of the colonial regime and the value system based on caste hierarchy. Colonialism also brought to the surface contradictions like colonial masters verses the colonised; the indigenous culture verses the western culture, etc. The educated people also came into contact with socio-religious reform movements and the gradually developing ideology of Indian nationalism. The contradiction between the coloniser/colonized, traditional/modern forced the people of Malabar to search for an alternative culture embracing the entire society in the place of the compartmentalised pre-colonial Malabar society. Thus the stage was set for the struggle for achieving social justice and equality. The missionary work in Malabar opened new challenges to them. Through the work of socio-religious reform movements and the nationalist political activity, the missionary work was countered without compromising the issue of social justice.