Two features can be said to determine the participation of Scheduled Castes in panchayats in Kerala. The first is structural that is, the provision of democratic decentralisation and reservation for lower castes within the panchayat institutions to ensure their participation. As the previous chapter has shown this has been put into place after a long process of experimentation by governments at the centre and the state. However, equally important is a second and normative feature: social and political awareness among Scheduled Castes which helps them to participate in grassroots institutions. In Kerala, unlike many other states, social reform movements against the inequitable caste structure took place during the colonial period, which had made an impact upon the consciousness of the depressed castes creating a desire for uplift and progress. In the post independence period mobilisation by political parties has taken this further creating high levels of politicisation among the Scheduled Castes. It is here that the greatest change has taken place among the Scheduled Castes. However, it is important to underline that these changes have taken place and impacted upon only some parts of the state. Second, while it has created new identities and awareness among the Scheduled Castes, caste oppression and exploitation continues. The lower castes remain poor and backward. This chapter explores how far social reform movements during the colonial period led to the construction of new identities. The next
chapter will then examine how far these are of consequence for participation at the grassroots by these backward communities.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part provides an historical overview of the experiences of the depressed castes and their struggles during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The second part deals with the early social reform movements in this period, giving emphasis on the movements among the depressed castes. The third part analyses the impact of these developments on the level of consciousness within this community.

**Socio-Economic Conditions of the Depressed Castes**

During the colonial period, Kerala was divided into three areas; Travancore and Cochin were princely states while Malabar was part of the Madras Presidency under colonial rule. Though administrative and economic situations in these regions were different, the social conditions of the lower castes were similar in these areas. The caste system created a hierarchical order and divided society into a number of groups based upon ascription within which mobility was impossible.\(^1\) The status of the individual in society was determined by the norms of caste? However there was no strict *Varna* system with its fourfold system as in north India. In the traditional hierarchy the 'Malayalee Brahmin' known as *Namboodiri* occupied a foremost place in the social system.\(^3\) *Nairs* also had a high status in the social structure. The matrilineal castes of *Nairs* along with

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Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Samanthas constituted the major land owning groups of pre-colonial and early colonial Kerala. Other castes including Ezhavas/Tiyyas and out castes like Pulayas, Parayas etc. were in the periphery of the mainstream caste order. As a result a rigid and feudal order existed, marked with caste atrocities and several institutional mechanisms were codified and established. In spite of the administrative reforms undertaken by the Kings of Travancore and Cochin, and the administration of Malabar under the influence of the East India Company, the upper caste- the Brahmins and the Nairs- continued to enjoy their privileges and immunities. As mentioned earlier the upper castes controlled the major portion of the land. During the British era, the Janmis (landlords) became more powerful, as the Britishers’ wanted their active support and co-operation in sustaining their own authority.

The depressed castes received inhuman treatment at the hands of the upper castes, as the law was not egalitarian. Aggressive slavery in the primitive form prevailed even in the beginning of the 19th century. Though every caste had its own caste rules, the society was controlled by the upper caste Brahmin hegemony. The groups belonging to the lower strata of the society especially, the outcastes had to undergo numerous tribulations because of the caste structure prevalent in the society. Kerala society before the 19th century accepted inequality, discrimination, and caste oppression. The impact of this oppression and deprivation was heaviest on castes like the Pulayas. These agrestic slaves were the real tillers of the soil. Labourers

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2 See A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit; and also see K. Saradamoni, Emergence of A Slave Caste, Pulayas of Kerala, New Delhi, 1980

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were attached to the land and its owners could buy and sell these labourers like chattels. Women of lower castes including Ezhavas were prevented from covering the upper part of the body. Slaves were denied social privileges like wearing clothes, using public roads, using metallic utensils etc. Even Nairs were denied some privileges like wearing gold ornaments, using certain types of clothes etc. on the ceremonial occasions and on the death of a person; customary payments to Naduvazhi's or landlords were also prevalent at that time. Inequitable taxes were imposed on the underprivileged sections making their life worse. Collecting taxes on the occasion of marriages and housing taxes etc were usual. Holding of umbrella was prohibited to all castes except Brahmins. Backward castes were denied entry to schools, temple and other public services. Untouchability and unapproachability were common practices. All these restricted social mobility including inter-caste marriages and inter-dining between various sub castes.\(^6\)

A number of institutions and customs were attached to the day to day life of the people of different castes. Talikettukalyanam (the ceremony of tying an ornament around the neck as a badge of marriage), Tirandukuli (the ceremony performed when a girl attained puberty) etc. are some examples. Child marriage and polygamy were institutionalised. All castes were grouped under two systems of inheritance - matrilineal (Nairs and Samanthams) and Patrilineal (Namboodiries and Pattars). For instance, the Tiyya families in north Malabar were Matrilineal, whereas in Cochin and

\(^{6}\) See A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit; and also see A. Ayyappan, Social Revolution in a Kerala Village: A Study in Cultural Change, Bombay, 1965.
Travancore, they followed Patrilineal system of inheritance. Marumakkathayam (Matrilineal system of inheritance) which was observed among some Hindu communities had caused various problems among the Nairs and Ezhavas. Moreover, the agrarian relations between tenants and land lords was conflict-ridden as structures like arbitrary eviction from land, rack-renting, social tyranny etc. were prevalent. There existed three methods of transferring the slaves-Janmum or sale, Kanam or mortgage and Pattom or lease. In places like Thittuvilai, about fifteen kilometers west of Nagercoil they had worst treatment at the hands of their caste masters. They even put them under yoke in the place of animals to plough the fields and thrashed them until they met death.

In some parts of Malabar the term Cherumar was applied to slaves in general, whereas in other parts it was a synonym for Pulayas. These Cherumar were agricultural serfs attached to the soil. According to Logan, the Cherumar were divided into two sections of which one was the Iraya Cherumar, who had a higher social status than the Pulayas. They were employed in agricultural operations and their services were repaid in grains. They were the pillars, which supported the agricultural economy. At the same time, a slave had to appear before his master when he was summoned and if failed to do so, he was given due punishment. The caste Hindus realised that if a Pulaya received education he would become aware

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1 M.S.A. Rao, Tradition Rationality and Change, Bombay, 1979, p.119.
2 Francis Buchanan, A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, London, 1807, p.492.
of his rights and as a result nobody would be there to toil in the fields, which would break the agricultural economy of Kerala.\textsuperscript{11}

Traditionally cultivation or manual labour was regarded as a degraded occupation by the upper castes. *Pulayas* traditionally associated with land, their caste status, social position, and economic disabilities made them more dependent on the landlords. As a result, some lands were leased out to tenants and sub-tenants by the landlord like *Varumpattam* and *Kuzhikkanam*. Most of the time the tenants were unable to give lease to the *Janmi's*, which resulted the eviction of tenants from the land. The tenants addressed their lords in honorable terms such as *Tampuran* or *Tampurati* and referred themselves as *Adiyan*.\textsuperscript{12} The Britishers did not alter the existing unequal system but gave more powers to the feudal lords. Next to *Pulaya* were the *Parayas* (slave population) or agricultural workers. A group called *Kanakkas* was also agricultural slaves. They were the hired men of *Nairs* and *Mappilas*. But they had the liberty to free themselves from their masters and seek a job elsewhere, if they were devoid of any liability to their respective masters.\textsuperscript{13} The *savarna* castes thus dominated by appropriating the agricultural surplus produced by the *avarana* castes who remained marginalised as a result.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}N.K. Jose, *Pulaya Lahala* (Malayalam), Kottayam, 1982, pp.5-6.
\textsuperscript{13}Francis Buchanna, op. cit., p. 562.
Strong notions of purity and pollution existed with accepted codes of behaviour for each caste. The polluting distance fixed by custom had more force than law\textsuperscript{15}. The practice of unseeability and unapproachability prevailed along with untouchability. A Namboothiri who happened to be seen by a Nayadi or Pulaya considered himself to have been polluted\textsuperscript{6}. Their huts were situated far from the way of the high castes. These huts were called \textit{chala} or hut and were also known as \textit{Madams}.\textsuperscript{17} The caste rules prevented them from using public roads or public wells. They could not come to the vicinity of the caste Hindus\textsuperscript{18}. Hence the life of the lower castes, in pre-colonial and colonial Kerala was deplorable.

Due to these miserable conditions several low caste groups were attracted towards Islam and Christianity. Their degraded condition also invited the attention of missionaries who came to work among them. The East India Company with the help of the missionaries established schools in different parts of Malabar and admitted students regardless of castes and creed. Many untouchables therefore came to regard conversion as one of the ways of achieving liberation from the existing social bondage and conversions took place in many parts of Malabar. The social outcastes of Kerala, who were the victims of exploitation and ill treatment became

\textsuperscript{15} K.Saradamoni, op.cit., p.33.
\textsuperscript{16} A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit., p.227.
\textsuperscript{17} Edger Thurston, \textit{Castes and Tribes of Southern India}, Delhi, 1993, p.61.
converts to Christianity\textsuperscript{19}. Tiyyas were the first to convert among the lower castes.

Economic factors also introduced change in the lives of the lower castes. Plantation and cash crops were introduced in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which required agricultural labour. This resulted in the abolition of slavery in the middle of 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The political and administrative policies of the colonial authorities on land and other areas also helped in introducing change in the rigid caste structure. Along with missionary activities, the new nationalist movements aroused in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, fresh kinds of thinking among the educated lower castes and even among some higher castes.

\section*{II}

\textbf{SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS IN KERALA}

The closing years of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the first decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century witnessed the growth of powerful social reformation movements in almost all communities in Kerala. They could be considered as a cultural and ideological struggle against the retrogressive elements of traditional culture and against the ideological hegemony of Brahmins. In this section an attempt is made to understand the nature of the socioreligious movements in colonial Kerala, emphasising the consequent developments in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Due importance is also given to the

various struggles and reforms among the depressed classes which contributed to the development of consciousness among them.

A number of developments combined to make social reform movements possible in Kerala. The reform movements were due to structural changes in the society. Education led to the emergence of a new middle class under the influence of both traditional and Western ideas, which directly influenced social change. Significant changes in the administrative and economic structure and land relations contributed to the emergence of social reforms in Kerala. Employment opportunities in the public works department and plantation industries were given to the backward communities. The abolition of slavery and the initial attempts for land reforms also helped in changing the outlook of the people.

A second factor was the contribution of missionaries towards social reform movements. In the early decades of the 19th century itself, several Protestant Missionaries started Western education under the guidance of the local rulers. In South Travancore i.e. in Nagercoil, they established many schools between 1806 and 1816 under the London Mission Society (LMS). The Church Mission Society (CMS) missionaries were active since 1813 when the Syrian Christians set up colleges and monasteries, a Grammar school at Kottayam in 1821, a school for girls at Alleppy, an English school at Mattancherry in 1818 with financial aid from then Cochin government. In Malabar area, the Basel German Evangelical Mission in 1848 started a primary school at Kallayi and in 1856 an English school

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in Tellicherry. In Malabar, Dr. Herman Gundert and in Kottayam, Bailey were the prominent names in connection with these efforts. These efforts particularly helped Christians and *Nairs* to became eligible for recruitment in government services. Western education brought about a radical social change in Kerala due to social attention bestowed by the Missionaries on evangelical work among backward classes of Hindu community. The Large number of conversions to Christianity highlighted the evil practices in the existing social order. These events also created an atmosphere in favour of radical religious change and social reforms. The expansion of the communication system and installation of new factories in urban areas also helped to usher in an era of social mobility and slowly furthered the eradication of social evils in the traditional society. 21

**Social Movements in Travancore and Cochin**

The reformers of Kerala belonged to two broad categories. The first group believed that changes in beliefs and behaviour were to be effected through the influence of religion. The second group organised themselves under non-religious leadership and gained their ends through constitutional means.22 However, analysis shows that most of the reform movements were centered on different castes and the aim of these movements were concentrated *within* the castes and not in the society as a whole. Another notable feature was that the emergence of the communal organisation based on castes caused the evolution of caste consciousness among the different sections of the society. However, it seems that

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constitutional agitation also to a certain extent paved the way for
democratic thinking among the people.

The religious reforms led by the Ramakrishna Mission, the
Theosophical society and the Arya Samaj in various parts of the country
helped in creating awareness in the minds of the people about the evils of
the caste system. Influence of these movements initiated some sections of
the upper caste Hindus into the radical movement in Kerala. The service of
Swami Agamananda (1896-1961) of the Ramakrishna Advaitha Ashram,
Kaladi is praiseworthy. His works for the eradication of caste barriers and
the upliftment of the downtrodden might have been influenced by the early
efforts of the people, government, Christian missionaries etc. But the
reform movements, which had the greatest impact on the public life of
Kerala, were of local origin. Chattampi Swamikal (1853-1941), Sree
Narayana Guru (1856-1928) Ayyankali (1866-1941) and Vakkam Abdul
Khadar Maulavi (1873-1932) were prominent among the reformers in
Kerala society.

The socio-religious reformers in Kerala realised that religious reform
was an instrument through which changes could be introduced in society,
for religious beliefs and social practices were closely interlinked. Chattampi Swamikal, who was a Nair reformist, revolted against the
existing social order, and wanted Hindu communities like the Nairs and the
Ezhavas to attain a status equal to that of Brahmans in the society. He
worked among his community, and believed that this would inspire non

24 P. Chandra Mohan, op.cit., p.460.
Brahmins to set an example which would introduce social change. He had a
close relationship with Sree Narayana Guru as they stood for the common
cause of Hindu religious regeneration. He attained Samdhi (death) at
Panmana in 1924. Sree Narayana Guru was an Ezhava Saint who gave a
concrete shape and solid foundation to social change in Kerala, and like
Chattampi Swamikal, he also revolted against Brahminism and hierarchy
in the Hindu society. He established temples in several parts of Kerala for
Ezhavas and he permitted entry to the Pulayas and other lower castes,
considered inferior to the Ezhavas in the social hierarchy, which was
achieved after overcoming considerable amount of struggle and resistance
from the Ezhavas. Those who questioned the action of consecrating a
temple, Narayana Guru gave a challenging reply that he was consecrating
‘the Ezhava Shiva and not the Brahmin Shiva’. The Ezhavas themselves
were appointed priests in those temples founded by him. He campaigned
against the primitive practices of ‘Talikettukalyanam’ and ‘Tirandukuli’
among Ezhavas and achieved great victory over them. His social vision is
envisaged in his saying ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God for man’. He
attained Samadhi at Varkala in 1928, and that place has become an
important centre of pilgrimage. The work of both leaders gave a new shape
to Hindu religion and its reform movements.25

The Muslim community also suffered from backwardness, especially
in the field of education. Reform movements took place in the Muslim
Community under the strong leadership of Vakkam Abdul Khadar Maulavi

25 For details see Balakrishnan, P.K. (ed.) Narayana Guru, Samoharga Grandham (Malayalam), Kottayam, 1954,
also see M.K. Sanoo, Narayanaguruswamiji (Malayalam), Kottayam, 1986, and also see C.R. Mitra, Sree
(1873-1932). He was a scholar in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Malayalam. He worked hard for the social upliftment and the moral regeneration of his community. He worked to discard all un-Islamic practices and to push Muslims towards English education so that they could play an active part in modern progressive movements. His contribution to Islamic literature through periodicals like 'Muslim' and 'Deepika' which initiated translation of few words from the Koran, was a break through in the history of Islam in Kerala. The 'Swadesabhimani' edited by K. Ramakrishna Pillai was founded by him. He popularised Arabic-Malayalam by publishing Arabic-Malayalam monthly journal called Al Islam. He founded the Travancore Muslim Mahajana Sabha and Chirayankil Taluk Muslim Samajam on the lines of the SNDP, for the social progress and dissemination of liberal ideas among the Muslim community. His dedicated work among his community resulted in their progress in the fields of education and other areas of Kerala society at large.

**Contribution of Caste Organisations to Social Reforms**

A number of caste organisations particularly among the lower castes, contributed to social awakening. The establishment of Sree Narayana Darma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) on May 15, 1903 by Sree Narayana Guru and the Nair Service Society (NSS) on October 31, 1914 by Mannath Padmanabhan facilitated to some extent the activities of social reform in Kerala. The SNDP grew to prominence with the inspiration from Narayan Guru and its first annual session was held at Aruvippuram in 1904 under his guidance. The basic aim of the Yogam was to popularise the message of Sree Narayana Guru and bring about the social and spiritual regeneration
of the Ezhavas and other backward communities. This was furthered by eminent personalities like Dr. Palpu and Kumaran Asan. The organisation started a newspaper ‘Sujana nandini’ under the initiative of Kesan Asan from Paravur in 1911, which helped in spreading the Guru’s message among their communities and others. The contribution of ‘Sahodara Sangham’ founded by noted Ezhava leader K. Ayyappan at Cherai in 1917 with the objective of eradicating the caste evils and popularising the ideas of ‘misrabhojanam’ (inter dining) among Ezhavas and other inferior castes, also helped in generating a general awareness about the need for unity among the people of the lower caste by shedding their caste inhibition.

Gradually SNDP developed a considerable influence on the Kerala society and remained highly influential.

The Nair Service Society (NSS) was organised on the pattern of the Servants of India Society of G.K. Gokhale and its motto was service to the society in general and Nairs in particular. In the early years it provided an effective leadership to eradicate the barriers of sub caste, the abolition of old decadent and wasteful practices like Talikettukalyanam; ‘Tirandukuli’ etc and the mitigation of the evils of the joint family system among the Nairs. They worked against untouchability and for the removal of disruptive social tendencies in society. Not only the Ezhava and Nair communities, but Namboodhiris were also in the field of social reforms. The Yogakshema movement was started among them in 1908 in order to agitate for the marriage of all young Namboothiri men within the community itself, to popularise English education and to abolish the system of ‘purdah’ from

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
among the Namboothiri women. This contributed to the upliftment of the communities in the early 20th century and the development of social and political consciousness among them.

**Major Anti-Caste Struggles**

A number of struggles took place against the inequities of the caste system during the colonial period, which helped the lower castes improve their social status. The first major struggle for temple entry was the famous Vaikam Satyagraha (1924-25). The sathyagrahis at Vaikam were arrested and harassed in many ways during the twenty months long struggle, which encouraged Gandhiji also to intervene. After the prolonged struggle the approach roads to the temple were formally opened to all Hindus, irrespective of caste. Along with this movement Mannath Padamnahan organised ‘Savarna Jatha’ (procession of upper caste people) to demand the support of Vaikam Sathyagraha before the Regent Setu Lakshmi Bai. However, its concern was restricted to Trivandrum and was not extended to other temples of Travancore. The Avarnas organised agitations in Ambalapuzha, Trivandrum, Suchindrum etc. during this period. By 1928 approach road to all temples were thrown open to all Hindus, irrespective of caste, in the whole of Travancore.27

Another major event during this period was the Guruvayur Satyagraha which was under the leadership of Kerala Provincial Congress. The Satyagraha started on 1st November 1931 to gain entry for all Hindus.

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to the temple. Led by K. Kelappan and A.K Gopalan, it attracted countrywide attention, people from all parts of India came to Guruvayur in support of the satyagrahis. The Zamorin, who was the trustee, adopted an uncompromising attitude towards the demands for temple entry. The opponents assaulted A.K Gopalan, as the satyagrahis attempted a forced entry into the temple by removing barricades, which resulted in the closing of the temple for ten months. K. Kelappan entered into an indefinite hunger strike, but he gave it up on Gandhiji’s advice. A limited referendum was held among Hindus of Ponnani. About 70% of the people supported the temple entry for Avarnas, which facilitated the creation of a climate favourable for the eradication of untouchability.

The movement for temple entry resulted in the overwhelming victory of the reform movement in the history of Kerala when Sri Chitita Tirunnal Balarama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore, issued his famous Temple Entry Proclamation on November 12, 1936. This silent, bloodless revolution in Kerala society sowed warm hopes in the hearts of the downtrodden. In Cochin it took one more decade to bring out the Temple Entry Authorisation Proclamation by the Maharaja of Cochin (194748) and Madras Temple Entry of 1947 extended this reform to the Malabar area. Untouchability was abolished through legislation after the Independence. The long agitation and struggle against untouchability in the Kerala society, opened new vistas to the down-trodden with the help of the government, reformists, the Congress etc.
Social Reform Acts

Due to the changes in society a number of social reforms Acts were also passed which had a direct impact on the consciousness and position of the lower castes. The system of Marumakkathayam (Matrilineal system of inheritance) led to the revolt of the younger generation as all the powers were exercised by the 'Karnavas' (the senior male member of a matriarchal family) in fact, the joint family system had failed to work harmoniously. The First 'Nair Act' passed in 1912, did not fulfill their demands, which led to a movement by NSS and other progressive sections of society for the abolition of this system. The law sanctioned half of the self-acquired property of a male to his children and the other to his nephews. The Second Nair Act was passed in 1925, which provided for individual partition and deprived the nephews of all claims to the properties of their uncle. The Act also made polygamy illegal\(^2\). The Ezhava Act (1925) and the Nanjanad Vellala Act (1926) followed, providing similar changes in the law of inheritance and polygamy. The Cochin Nair Act of 1937-38 also brought about the complete disruption of the institution of 'Marumakkathayam'. It laid down that the wife and children were legal heirs of a man and as such were entitled to his properties. The Act also prohibited the marriage of girls under 16 years of age or of a man below 21 years of age in addition to the prohibition of polygamy by the earlier act.

In Malabar, the Madras Marumakkathayam Act (1933) allowed partition of tarawad (the family) property and legalised inheritance from

\(^2\) For details see Robin Jeffrey, Decline of Nair Dominance, Sussex, 1976.
father to son. According to the Mappila Marumakkathayam Act of 1939, the Mappila tarawad and property was thereafter to be governed by the 'Shariat' Law. Further, in 1949 the Madras Legislature passed an Act expanding the provisions of the Shariat Act passed by the Central Legislature in 1937 introduced in Patrilieal law of inheritance observed by Muslims everywhere. Madras Namboothri Act of 1933 made the change that every member of an 'Illam' (House of a Namboothri) whether male or female had an equal share in the family property. The junior Namboothri's wives and their children were recognised as members of an Illam and were made the legal heirs to the property of the Illam. Thus progressive legislation brought in significant changes in the laws of inheritance, succession and marriage in Kerala.

Changes on land also took place, which were beneficial to lower caste tenants. One of the earlier sections of land legislation in Travancore was the Pattam Proclamation of 1040 Kollam Era (June 1865). It conferred property rights on the holder of Pandravaka (Sirkat) land and protected the tenants against arbitrary eviction. Then came the Royal Proclamation of 1042 Kollam Era (1867) which defined the right and obligation of tenants and landlords. Then Janmi-kudian Regularities of 1071 K.E. (1896) later amended by the Regulation XII of 1108 K.E. (1932) conferred full property rights on the kudian subject to the payment of Janmi Karam i.e. rent due to the landlord from the tenants. In Cochin also various acts were passed in 1863 and 1915 though they were temporary. The Cochin Tenancy Act of 1113 K.E (1938) which superceded the above acts imposed further restrictions on the eviction of tenants. The Cochin Verumpattamdar Act
(1943) protected the interests of the tenants at will and granted security of tenure to lessees and sub-lessees respect to their holdings. In Malabar, the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvements Act of 1887 was passed to prevent the growing practice of eviction. The Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 contained provision to confer security of tenure on several categories of tenants. The Act was amended in 1945, 1951, and 1954 in order to prevent eviction and safeguard the interests of the tenants more effectively.29

The Travancore-Cochin government passed the Stay of Eviction Proceeding Act (1950) to give protection to the tenants from arbitrary eviction. On the formation of Kerala, the Kerala Stay of Eviction Proceeding Act (1957) was passed to prevent the eviction of tenants, Kudikidappukar and certain other classes of cultivating tenants. The Kerala Agriculturist Debt Relief Act (1958) and the Kerala Compensation for Tenants Improvement Act (1958) were also important enactments intended for the benefit of the agriculturist. The Kerala Agrarian Relation Act (1960) was revolutionary, in that the tenants were also given fixity of tenure, freedom from eviction and benefit of fair rent to be fixed by Land Tribunals. The Kerala Land Reforms Act of 1963, then amended in 1969, abolished the Janmi System in Kerala and conferred full right of ownership on the tillers of the soil. The series of Acts in the latter half the century helped lower castes tenants.

29 For more details see T.C.Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequence, Bombay, 1970. and also see A.Sreedhara Menon, op. cit.
Major Developments in Malabar During the Colonial Period

The District of Malabar became a part of the Malabar Presidency on May 21, 1800 and Major Maclord took charge as the first Principal Collector of Malabar on October 1st 1801. Many social, economic and political changes took place in this region which helped in upliftment of the lower castes. Traditionally schools and martial art institutions existed in different parts of Malabar, but the outcastes were excluded from these institutions. It was the missionaries who began schools for the lower castes. The Basel Missionaries were pioneers in the field of education in Malabar. Dr. Herman Gundert, founder of Basel Mission Church in Malabar, started work in Anjarakandi among the plantation labourers, especially among the Pulayas and other downtrodden. He established the first vernacular school in Malabar and pioneered the system of modern education. During this period the Mission opened a primary school at Kallayai [Calicut] in 1848, and it later developed into Malabar Christian College, likewise in Tellichery, Brennen School was started in 1862, later it developed into the Government Brennon College. The Victoria College of Palaghat began as a school in 1866. The Basel Mission's work expanded to health, industry and other areas which introduced major changes in the social structure of the society. Malabar also made some progress in 19th century in the field of local self-government. The municipalities of Calicut, Tellicherry, Canannore and Palaghat were established during the period of 1866 and 1867 under the provision of Madras Town Improvement Act of 1865. The local bodies
also provided assistance to the people by running educational institutions and dispensaries30.

The region experienced a number of revolts against social and economic inequalities prevailing in society. These revolts raised consciousness and led to social change, which was beneficial to the lower castes. During the period 1836-1856, there were more than 20 such revolts, which happened in various places in Malabar. The most important was the *Mappila* revolt. Malabar Special Police were organised in 1854 to deal with it. In spite of that H.V. Connoly, the District Magistrate of Malabar, was murdered by four *Mappilas*. All these out breaks were part of the reaction against agrarian depression and severe poverty. In 1881, on the recommendations of the Logan Commission, the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvement Act of 1900 was passed to protect tenants against arbitrary eviction by landlords. The Act however, failed to meet its basic demands and the outbreaks continued. In fact, factors such as poverty, unequal agrarian relations and religious intolerance helped to keep alive the spirit of discontent and defiance31.

Among political movements in Malabar, the Malabar Rebellion is one of the most important. The taluk of Eranad and Valluvanad was put under Section 144, because of the massive impact of Khilafat Movement. The attempted arrest of Vadakke Veettil Muhammad, the secretary of local Khilafat Committee at Pukottur in Eranad taluk, led to a series of violent outbreaks.

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30 See William Logan, op. cit.
clashes between the police and *Mappilas* in Eranad and Valluvanad taluks. *Mappilas* attacked police station, looted government treasuries and destroyed government offices. Leaders such as Varian Kunnath Kunjahammad Haji, Sithi Koya Thangal of Kumaranputur and Ali Musaliyar led the rebellion. The rebellion achieved large measures of success in shaking the British authority in their strongholds like Malappuram, Tirurangadi, Manjeri and Perintalmanna and establishing their own government in these places. Martial law was declared and repressive measures were adopted. One of the tragic episodes of the rebellion was the ‘Wagon Tragedy’, in which 61 of the 90 *Mappilas* who were carried as prisoners in closed railway goods wagon from Tirur to Coimbatore on November 10, 1921, died due to suffocation.32

Many prominent leaders made efforts to control these rebellions, but ultimately the British government suppressed them with an iron hand. The estimates show that 10,000 people lost their lives in the rebellions considered as gigantic national upheavals against British authority. Many of these rebellions and particularly the *Mappila* revolt was not a mere riot as British writers have claimed. It has been described as an expression of the suppressed emotions of the people, against various kinds of injustice.

Many efforts were made to remove untouchability in Malabar. The campaign by C. Krishnan editor of *Mitavadi* in Calicut against untouchability, through the columns of his paper, was an important contribution. In November 1917, Krishnan openly defied the order of the

32 For details see E.M.S. Namboordripad *A Short History of Peasant Movement in Kerala*, Bombay, 1943.
Malabar Collector, which denied freedom to the Tiyyas and other backward classes to use approach roads to the Thali temple in Calicut. Another reformer was T.K. Madhavan (1886-1930), who stood for social justice and wrote columns against untouchability in Desabhimani, which he edited. He tried to gain entry to the approach road for avarnas or untouchables as a prelude to the bigger campaign for temple entry itself. All these efforts got public attention, as they were associated with the eradication of untouchability from Kerala society.

A number of political developments helped in raising consciousness and bringing the people including the lower castes into the national movement. During the colonial period, two newspapers - 'Mathrubhumi' by Kesava Menon and 'Al Amin' by Muhammed Abdul Rahman - were started with the aim of fostering the spirit of nationalism among Congressmen and Muslim community. Under the leadership of Mannath Krishnan Nair, K.P.Raman Menon, G.Sankaran Nair and others, a tenancy movement began during the late 1920s. As a result, the government passed the Malabar Tenancy Act in 1930.

After the foundation of Indian National Congress in 1886 it played a vital role in Malabar. The district committee of Malabar was formed in 1908 with K.P. Kesava Menon as the secretary, along with the Home Rule League of Dr. Annie Beasant. From 1916 onwards, the movement against the British Raj became stronger in those areas. The First World War (1914-1918) ended with the announcement of Montague Chelmsford Reforms in 1919. The fifth Malabar District Political Conference held at Manjeri on
April 28, 1920, in the presence of Dr. Annie Beasant passed a resolution declaring the Reforms as unsatisfactory and disappointing. Altogether 1309 delegates attended it from all parts of the district. In 1921, at the all Kerala Political Conference held at Ottappalam, many leaders who attended from various part of Kerala were manhandled by police. The Payyannur all Kerala Conference in May 1928 under Nehru’s presidency, called for the boycott of Simon Commission (1928). A resolution was passed in the conference declaring Complete Independence [Purna Swaraj] as the goal of the National movement. This resolution and Nehru’s speech, which called for establishment of socialism, gave a fresh stimulus to the political activities in Malabar. During salt Satyagraha in the nation wide agitation in 1930, Payyannur was the venue in Malabar. The Satyagraha went on peacefully, but the arrest of Gandhi on May 5, gave the struggle a new turn. On 12th May the satyagrahis assembled at Calicut beach to break the salt laws and were attacked by the police. More than 30 people were injured. P.Krishnapillai’s heroic activity of defending the national flag from forcible seizure by the police took place on this occasion. The Payyannur camp was raided, and prominent leaders like K.Kelappan, Muhammad Abdur Rahman and K.Madhavan Nair were arrested and sent to jail. Finally the Civil Disobedience Movement ended with Gandhiji’s release. The withdrawal of the movement disappointed the younger elements in the Congress. At Badagara, the 5th All Kerala Political Conference on May 1931 passed a resolution under J.M.Sen Gupta’s presidency, which urged for temple entry that resulted in the Guruvayoor Satyagraha of 1931-1932. At the 6th All Kerala Political Conference at Calicut on September 1932, during the
second Civil-Disobedience Movement, Congress was declared as an unlawful organisation by the British government and the participants of the conference were arrested. The large-scale participation of women was significant in the conference. On May 1935, civil disobedience was withdrawn formally.

An important political event was the split in the Congress in 1920 between the Right and the Left wing as a reaction to the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience movement by the Congress leaders. It eventually led to the formation of the Communist party in Kerala. The Leftists within the Congress formed the Kerala unit of the All India Congress Socialist Party in 1934 and functioned under the guidance of EMS Namboothiripad and P. Krishnan Pillai. The landlords and better-off sections left the Congress and its leadership passed into the hands of extremists who championed for the cause of the peasants, the workers and the middle class. In October 1934, Kerala Provincial Congress Committee at Shornur, expressed lack of faith in the Gandhian principles of truth and non-violence as a weapon in the fight for 'Swaraj' and denounced it. The Congress Socialist Party emerged as the Communist Party in Malabar in 1939. During the Second World War, Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (K.P.C.C.), under Communist leadership, took an unequivocal stand in favour of a mass movement to overthrow British rule. In the violent clash between peasants and police in Kayyur, Mattannur, Morazha and Tellicherry, precious lives were lost. Four peasants were sentenced to death in connection with the outbreak.

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33 Ibid. also see K.K.N. Kurup, op.cit.
The development in Malabar led to the suspension of K.P.C.C and an ad hoc-committee was constituted to re-organise the Congress activities in Malabar. The Leftists now left the Congress enbloc and joined the Communist Party. What is important for our purposes is that it strengthened the communist party which after independence mobilised the people of Kerala for land reform and education, which helped the lower castes.

**Struggles and Movements Among the Depressed Castes**

The socio-religious reform movements described above could not directly address the problems of the depressed sections of the society. While they did help in improving the position of the lower castes their main aim was transformation of the existing evils within their own caste group and community. They attempted to obtain a better position for their own communities rather than aiming at structural change in the society as a whole. Hence it is necessary to look at the movements among the lower castes and the impact they had on their social status, economic position and self identity.

**Shanar Agitation**

The agitation by the lower caste Shanars, an untouchable community inhabiting mainly the southern district of Travancore, for the right to dress like the upper castes was an important movement in the late 1800s. In 1829 a Royal Proclamation was issued prohibiting all backward

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communities from wearing upper garments and ornaments made of gold or silver.\textsuperscript{35} There were vehement protests from the Shanar community. After continuous agitation, the then Diwan, Colonel Munro issued an order permitting Shanar women who were converts to Christianity, to cover the upper part of the bodies with Jackets (Kuppayam). Not satisfied with this, they tried to use an additional scarf over their shoulders which again provoked the upper castes. The agitation of the Shanars eventually led to the Royal Proclamation on July 26, 1859, abolishing all restrictions in the matter of the covering of the upper parts of the body by Shanar women, though they were not still permitted to imitate the dress of the women of upper castes.\textsuperscript{36} This was an important victory for the lower castes as it provided them confidence and helped in their assertion against upper caste domination.

\textbf{Role of Ayyankali}

One of the early social reformers, who worked for social change in modern times, was Ayyankali (1866-1941) who fought against the social taboo of untouchability among the downtrodden especially among the untouchables. Born in Venganoor in the Pulaya community, he waged a lifelong crusade against the evils of caste system. He was denied the right to education and throughout his life he had to confront and fight with the existing social order. He gave leadership to the movement started by Pulayas and other oppressed classes for their social upliftment. The activities of Sri Narayana Guru and the organisation he started (SNDP)

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\item[36] see A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit.
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inspired Ayyankali to initiate an organisation among the untouchables and to agitate for the rights and privileges that had so far been denied to these communities because of rigid social hierarchy. In 1907, four years after the installation of SNDP (1903) he founded *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam* (SJPY) on the lines of SNDP. It established a wide network all over the state and with its initiative a campaign for the upliftment of the untouchables began. Before starting his social reform activities Ayyankali travelled over most parts of Kerala and arranged meetings and emphasised the need for unity and tried to articulate the feelings of untouchables as human being and not as an instrument or a chattel in the hands of an *savarna*.

As a challenge Ayyankali walked through the prohibited roads and even traveled through the public road in a bullock cart without any fear. In 1898, he along with a group of his followers walked on the common road to the Aralumoodu market. But before long, their journey was blocked at Balaramapuram near Chaliam street, by a group of men who clustered around, shouting that they would not let him and his followers proceed further. Soon after, these incident two castes riots took place and his name became familiar to all the lower caste communities. He gave instruction to his people to work six days in a week and to make Sunday as a holiday. This was indeed a revolutionary step in society where feudal relations continued to exist. On Sundays they conducted meetings and discussed

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their various problems and disabilities\textsuperscript{39}. He started a Malayalam monthly magazine, \textit{Sadhu Jana Paripalini}.\textsuperscript{40} It was as a result of constant struggle and agitation under his leadership that the \textit{Pulaya} community secured the right to walk free along public roads in Trivandrum and to enter schools.

Ayyankali made a substantial contribution to the educational betterment of the untouchable \textit{Pulayas}. He made them realise that education was the key to their emancipation as in the case of other backward communities like \textit{Ezhavas}. Ayyankali and his supporters revolted against the denial of education to the lower caste people. Their revolt for education is termed as \textit{Pulayalahala}\textsuperscript{41}. Due to his tireless work the \textit{Pulayas} got the right to enter the schools. In this he received help from the Christian Missionaries; \textit{Pulaya} leaders also opened separate schools for their community.\textsuperscript{42} Even after the abolition of slavery, indirect slavery continued in the state and the slaves were treated more cruelly than earlier. Owing to the immense public pressure government opened schools for \textit{Pulayas}, but these were burnt by caste Hindus. Most of the students discontinued their studies due to their poor economic conditions and joined their parents in daily labour in order to supplement their income for existence. However, Ayyankali and others could persuade the Travancore government to provide financial aid to poor students so that they could continue their education. This improved their attendance in the schools.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid p. 65.
\textsuperscript{40} K. Saradamani, \textit{op.cit.}, p.151.
\textsuperscript{41} For more details see N.K. Jose, \textit{Pulayalahala}, \textit{op.cit.},
In recognition of his outstanding service to society, especially for the welfare of the untouchables, the Travancore government nominated Ayyankali as member of the Sri. Mulam Praja Sabha. This provided him with a respectable position to carry on his fight for social equality and justice with the goodwill and co-operation of the leaders of other communities. The Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 thrilled the heart of this gallant fighter. A public meeting was held at Venganoor, to welcome Mahatma Gandhi who visited Travancore in the wake of this historical event. Gandhi praised Ayyankali's services to the society. The progress achieved by the untouchables in the late colonial period in Kerala was due to the untiring and selfless efforts of Ayyankali. He became the spokesman of the Pulayas, understood their sufferings and disabilities and was a passionate fighter for their elementary human rights.\textsuperscript{45} Apart from the work of leaders such as Ayyankali, a number of revolts took place during the colonial by the untouchables. Among them the notable revolts were Thonnuramandu lahala, Pullattu lahala, Perinattu lahala, and Munnooramvayal lahala.\textsuperscript{45} However, divisions arose within the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam among the various sub-castes of the untouchables. Therefore, the Pulayas converted it into the Pulaya Congress and as a result the Travancore Pulayar Mahasabha was formed in 1938.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{45} P. Chandra Mohan, op.cit., p.480.
\textsuperscript{44} N.K.Jose, \textit{Pulavalahala}, op. cit., p.7.
\textsuperscript{44} Vadayil Sadasivan, \textit{Anaswara Prathibhakal} (Malayalam), Trivandrum, 1975, p.75.
In Kerala caste movements and social reforms among the Ezhavas also contributed to the upward mobility of this community in social strata. However the nature of the struggles among the outcastes were neither organised nor massive. The movements among them were isolated and concentrated only in some pockets. It was due to their inaccessibility to education and their deplorable social situations. While in Tiruvitamkur, Ayyankli was their leader, in Kochi K.P.Karuppan and K.P.Vallon led them. However, in Malabar the Pulayas did not have such a popular leader as they had in Kochi and Tiruvitamkur.

Even though these movements were isolated in nature they paved the way for social change among the depressed castes. The works of Ayyankali and other leaders, the resistance among them, the missionary activities and national movements created a new spirit among them. Though they were alienated and marginalised from the mainstream society from time immemorial, this new spirit enabled them to create a new consciousness among them. This resurrection of the lower castes reflected in their social and political life. The next section tries to conceptualise the relationship between social reform and the formation of consciousness within this community.

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45 P.Chandra Mohan, op.cit., p.480.
III

Untouchables, Social Movements and Consciousness of Self

Against the background of the significant changes taking place in Kerala society during the colonial period, it is now possible to analyse the impact of the struggles, movements as well as caste organisations established by the untouchables for their upliftment. The main aim of this section is to understand the new consciousness of self and identity emerging among the lower castes during the colonial period, its forms and features. This ‘new self’ among untouchable groups developed, mostly, in the early decades of the 20th century as a result of the influence of colonial modern thinking and the major social movements it triggered. If we go through government reports and census of that time, attention was devoted to the conditions of groups like Pulayas, Parayas etc. However, there are few detailed studies of these groups or their movements.

A major problem in organising the lower castes in Kerala as in other parts of the country has always been the existence of numerous subcastes among them leading to divisions and differences. Though they were sometimes collectively referred to as AdiDravidas in the colonial period, there were substantial differences based on region and culture. Even among the same sub-castes there were different organisations in different regions of Kerala. The existing sub-castes kept their marital relationship and social interaction within a limited circle, thus maintaining very rigid
Caste boundaries. It is relevant to recall a news item in this context in the 'Malayala Manorama' (Malayalam daily). It said 'A monthly newspaper will soon be launched from Thiruvalla named Varnavar Mithram' for the upliftment of 'Varnavars' who are referred to as Pathian, Vannan, Ettali, Purothan, Velan, Nethwan, and Paravan due to regional differences' (Malayala Manorama 30, 1930).46 These differences existed despite the fact that their economic condition, outlook, relations with upper castes, and life-style were similar. These differences prevented them from coming together under a common banner to fight the oppression by the upper castes.

The idea of hierarchy among untouchable groups has been taken from higher caste Hindus especially Brahmins. Primarily they were concerned about 'cleanliness' as the major criteria for distinguishing those who are higher and lower. The contribution of missionaries had increased this notion. Those who were cleaner were thought to be in the higher rank of the hierarchy. Cleanliness means food habits, mode of dressing, the houses and their surroundings and above all, one's own body itself was taken into consideration for their imagined relative superiority of particular caste among similar social categories. This created a peculiar type of consciousness among them.

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In the early phase of reform movements, social activists made efforts to unite these sub-castes into one single caste. Different groups with hierarchical differences existed among them – Holayar, Pulayar, Pallar, Valluvars, Cheramans, Cherumar, Panchamar, Dravidar, Kanakkar, etc. All this made the task of organising them under one umbrella, a difficult one. The effectiveness of the ascriptive social order lies in its capacity to maintain rigid caste identities among the lower castes. And this kept them scattered and prevented them from coming together against the oppressive social order. For social development, therefore, the first step was that they realise their common position in the larger caste hierarchy and organise themselves. In this context formation of common organisation grew in importance under the influence of modernity.

However, this was not easy. In the process of reconceptualising history and identification of the causes of the present condition of all ‘jati’ identities they fall into the trap of upper caste historiography and aspirations, lineage to the holistic aristocracy. This has been seen in all parts of India. Instead of fighting the caste order, lower castes have preferred to rise within it and claim a higher status. This was the way in which they attempted upward mobility. The Pulayas claimed to be the descendents of the ancient Chera Kingdom and speculated the possibilities of a Pulaya Chieftain holding office at Pulayanarkotta in the suburbs of Trivandrum. The Pulayas of Central Travancore assumed their descent
from Cheras and called themselves Cheramas instead of Pulaya\textsuperscript{47}. In fact the activists of the Cheramar Mahasabha submitted a memorandum to the Maharaja of Travancore demanding that their caste title be changed into Cheraman instead of Pulayan. By a similar move Pariahas (Scheduled Caste) assumed the title Sambavar in 1918 and the government issued orders sanctioning both\textsuperscript{48}.

In 1919, under the leadership of Pazhoor Rama Channar the Sambhava Sangham was formed. The first organisation of the Pariah community in Travancore was Brahma Prathyaksha Sadhujana Paripalana Sangam under the leadership of Kandan Kumaran. A number of myths were built. Going by the tradition of lower caste, they argued, that their original superior position might have come down due to various reasons (alleged unclear practices) and reached current disabilities. For e.g. the toiling classes like the Panas, the Vetas, the Kusuvas etc. who had once occupied a high status in society in the early Sangam Age, came to be looked down as low castes. This was particularly true in the case of the 'Panas' who had once enjoyed the esteem of kings and chieftains. Nevertheless, those among the Panas who distinguished themselves by their intellectual abilities were absorbed within the Brahmins – who came during these periods – but the bulk of the Panas community came to be regarded as constituting the lowest caste called the Kizhor or the Harijans

\textsuperscript{47} of cit., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{48} Idem. and also see K. Saradamoni, op. cit.
of later days. The use of beef and liquor that was common among them later become a taboo. But those who continued it might have been restricted to the lowest position in the caste order and their occupation became the criteria for deciding the social hierarchy. This historic decline of social status in the society led to a particular kind of consciousness of acceptance that developed during their decline in the social order.

The second major influence on the lower castes in the colonial period was the influence of Western education and employment opportunities in Travancore, which led to the redefinition of cultural identities. But exploitation and marginalisation continued due to the prevalent social structure based on caste. Though there were various movements, there was no common political programme to contest the caste atrocities. The Hindu Pulaya Samajam of Kurumban Daivathan, emerged as another caste organisation within the community. However, none of the movements were effective in bringing about solidarity among the various lower castes since these organisations failed in countering caste atrocities. Though they fought against ‘Jati’ identities they failed to bring about and construct an effective identity based on an altogether new conception of society.

Apart from mobility within the Hindu caste hierarchy, another important stimulus for the conceptualisation of a new identity was the coming of a new religion, namely Christianity. The Christian religion influenced these communities, because in many ways it threatened the

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49 A. Sreedhara Menon, op.cit., pp. 82-83.
existing social order, and gave space to this downtrodden people. This led to an overwhelming number of conversions within these communities. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Central Travancore, the Protestant Missionaries since 1820’s, the Basel Missionaries in Malabar etc. contributed substantially to society by providing education to the lower castes. This also provided an atmosphere favourable for radical religious and social reforms.

The Resident, Col. Munro, was in favour of missionaries concentrating their efforts on Syrian Christians who formed part of the local elites rather than the untouchable groups. However, the Missionaries thought otherwise and decided to work for the uplift of the lower castes. This led as already said to conversions. The baptismation process, which started in Central Travancore from 1850 onwards, became a massive movement. Thousands of untouchables joined the congregation. By 1904 there were 30,000 Low Caste Christians in about 150 stations of the CMS. But this did not improve their status in society. Within the church they had to face the dominance of Syrian Christian. Even though they formed over three fifths of the church, they could not get a proper place in the church as the ‘original’ Syrians enjoyed. In the centenary celebrations of the Anglican Church in the early 20th century, the church felt that the new converts needed special consideration so as to elevate them to relatively equal positions within the church. The immediate measure was

50 Sanal Mohan, op.cit., p. 4.
51 Idem.
the decision of CMS Bishop that the church must spend a larger amount for the improvement of depressed classes among Christians in consultation with prominent elite Christians.

The Missionaries' effort to re-constitute the depressed caste in the 19th century is of great significance in the formation of new identities among the lower castes. Aware that the status of depressed castes was low the Missionaries worked hard so that these sections could acquire the qualities of upper status, cleanliness, and devotion. Their efforts made a significant political impact on society even before the advent of National Movement in Kerala. They tried to introduce new social upliftment programmes in different parts of Kerala. However, the Syrian Christian community upheld their symbolic upper status in the church. Not only were the new converts considered as field labourers but also treated as slaves. In churches they were made to sit in the back row and neither permitted to take bread directly from the saucer nor to drink holy wine directly from the crucible as practiced by high caste Christians. In fact, N. John Joseph, a prominent lower caste leader, submitted a memorandum stating these facts to the British Parliament on April 24, 1935. The Bishops of the Syrian Christian community took a stand against these unequal practices in the church but several methods of caste oppression continued to exist within the congregation and no effective steps were taken at that time. They were sometimes represented as 'Untouchable Christians', 'Slave Christians' and 'Poor Christians'.

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However, it must be underlined that by their acceptance of Christianity, their self-perception as a social group underwent some radical changes during that time. As against the worthlessness they used to feel as low caste Hindus, there came about a new sense of worthiness rooted in the love and care of the Lord that relieved them from many agonies of everyday life. But their socio-economic condition remained the same, they continued as labourers attached to their landlord. Yet over time changes did take place, which were important. Initially the lower castes thought of themselves as low caste Christians and never tried to assume the same status as the Syrian Christians. However in time this bred a rebellious consciousness. This process of making an identity distinct from that of the Syrian Christians within the CMS got further strengthened with the formation of a separate association for Depressed Caste Christians under the aegis of the Church, which was named a Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangam (Poor Christian Society). This association, corresponding to the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, which looked into the problems of the lower caste Hindus, was for representing the socio-political problems of lower caste Christians. Later on, one of their activists was nominated to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha.52

In fact an identity cutting across religious barriers – Hindu and Christian - developed among the lower castes. The formation of the Christiya Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham under the Hindu reform

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52 Ibid, pp. 9-10.
discourse provided a momentum to the social reformation within the untouchable community. The *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham* was open to all lower castes without any distinction or internal division, but the *Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangam* was strictly under the church guidance and gave prime importance to spiritual upliftment along with social upliftment. But in Kerala both contributed to encounter the social realities of the 20th century. The most forceful expression of this shared-self cutting across religious boundaries can be seen in the formation of the *Cheramar Mahajana Sabha* in 1921 by N. John Joseph. He came to the organisational field when the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam* was in the pinnacle of its activity. But the organisational programmes for social and political changes were incapable of inverting the dominant practices. John Joseph initiated a discourse on ethnicity, identifying *Pulaya* as the legitimate successors of ancient Chera population. He tried to provide legitimacy to this theory by resorting to historical reasoning. John Joseph, after the formation of *Cheramar Mahajana Sangham* imagined a glorious past for the *Cheramar*. The appellation *Pulaya* he argued was given to the *Cheramar*, after they were defeated and enslaved by the enemies who were foreigners or aliens and who became upper castes. In other words, the depressed Adi-Cheras were renamed *Pulayas*. After they identified their clan (kulam), they changed their name to *Cheramar*. This was a strategy in the long process of the making of an identity, and could draw adherents

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53 Ibid. p. 11 and also see *Soochakam* (Malayalam), February, 2002.
54 See Sana! Mohan, Ibid, pp.11-12. and also see A. Sreedharan Menon, op.cit.
even from the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham*. New meaning and interpretation of their identity and social status attracted the lower castes.

Another leaders Poikayil Johannan (later named as Kumara Guru Devan) started a movement in 1909, which later on came to be known as *Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha* (PRDS). It was a movement that tried to erase the previous ‘Jati’ identities and tried to create a new one. Johannan could not accept the Cheramar ideology of John Joseph, which he thought to be divisive. On the contrary he anchored an ideology for the unity of untouchables of various ‘Jati’. He was a *Paraihan* who converted to Christianity, left the CMS and later joined the Marthoma Syrian Church. He later abandoned that Church to become an independent preacher. His discourses were mainly addressed to the untouchables of all religions. The task of Christian identity was squarely faced by Poikayil Johannan and his followers, which led him to confrontation with the dominant discourse of missionary Christianity. At the same time he criticised the practice of Cheramar ideology. His adherents regarded Johannan as not just a recipient of divine revelations, but as a divine revelation. He preached his own vision of religion and it was social in character. He felt the necessity to start from the very beginning itself, from the imagining of a historical part to the construction of a new self, and emphasised on history. His proclamation of divine love for oppressed brought many people under his leadership. His new theological discourses were powerful enough to affect the erasure of the caste differences among them. This helped to constitute a

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55 For details see *Soochakam* (Malayalam) February, 2002 and also see Sanal Mohan, op.cit., p.14.
new identity in the place of previous caste based ones. However, despite the evolution of a new self and new identity, Kerala society still practiced caste system within churches. The salvation though divine revelation remained a myth in the church hierarchy to low caste Christians. But the practices, rituals and procedures practiced in the congregation of Johannan rendered a faith in salvation among all lower castes, who accepted him as God manifest, capable of rendering salvation. Thus a new social identity emerged, rejecting the earlier one.

A number of other organisations and movements by leaders within the Hindu fold were also established. A reformist named Sanyasi Sadananda Swami organised the *Brahma Nishta Matam* which was transferred into a new form by Ayyankali and his associates in his native village as *Chit Sabha* in 1905. The organisation was to remain mostly within Hindu moorings without any specific political programme. Ayyankali though illiterate started a school at Venganoor in 1904 and as already mentioned the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam* in 1907. Along with struggles he gave importance to cleanliness and discipline. Karamana P. K. Govinda Pillai who was the editor of ‘Subhashini’, was nominated to Sri Moolam Praja Sabha in 1911. He presented the problems of the *Pulayas* in the Assembly for the first time. On his request, government decided to nominate a person from among *Pulayas* to represent this community. Thus in 1912, Ayyankali was nominated, through an official advertisement in the Government Gazette, as a member of Sri Moolam Praja Sabha and was given the title Manya Raja Sri Ayyankali. His representation in the Sabha
helped in inculcating a new consciousness among the lower castes. The state's support and other external changes including the acts of dominant social groups gave an immense momentum to the formation of consciousness among them. The Pulayas changed their name to Cheramar on the basis of their inheritance from the Chera kingdom, which contributed towards their attempts to define their self identity. Thus Ayyankali occupies a pivotal place in the history of Kerala through his activities for the elevation of excluded communities. In 1932 Gandhiji described him as the king of the Pulaya’s. His anti-caste revolts did help in providing them a better position in society in the late 19th and early 20th century.

During the Diwanship of Madhava Rao, a number of measures were taken to introduce change in relations on land and to lessen the problems of the workers, especially bonded workers. Many of them had been shifted to the new plantation industries where they received wages, which improved their living conditions. The cultural contribution of the poets likes Pt. Karuppan who belongs to Deevara Community (OBC) and Kumaran Asan who belongs to Ezhava Community could also gave an impetus to the ongoing revolts against the caste atrocities. Their poetry portraits the caste atrocities during those periods, and called upon the need of reform for breakdown the caste hierarchy.

Conclusion

Thus, social reform movements introduced change in the position of lower castes in Kerala society. A modern outlook emerged among the lower castes in Kerala, marked not only by changes in the material realm of life but also the realm of self-perception of social groups that led to the construction of new identities. A number of factors had helped in this – the influence of the church, the attitude of the princely states, education, caste organisations as well as social reform activities of leaders. This did not liberate them from the caste order or from poverty and low positions in society, which continued into the post-independence period. But the developments in the late 19th and early 20th century did improve their material position and more important raised awareness and created new identities which demanded progress and upliftment in the new order which was emerging at independence. These changes were further developed by the democratic system established after independence. Equally important mobilisation by left political parties and their progressive policies helped in upliftment of these marginalised communities. There is a positive correlation between the social reforms and the level of consciousness among them. The next two chapters attempt a micro level study on the relation between the impact of social reforms and the level of participation in the political process of the excluded communities.